
WILDFLOWERS

The Bulletin of the Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania • September 1998

Next Meeting is September 14

Our season of monthly meetings returns this month. The next meeting will be Monday, September 14, at 8:00 p.m., at the Kresge Theater at Carlow College, 3333 Fifth Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA (Oakland).

Our president, **Dr. Mary Joy Haywood** will present "Interesting Facts of Kansas Including Wildflowers".

Hunt Institute Will Present "9th International Exhibition"

The Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation at Carnegie Mellon University will present its 9th International Exhibition of Botanical Art & Illustration from **October 12, 1998 to February 26, 1999**.

In preparation since 1995, when the Institute staged its last International, this show will contain 109 artworks by 76 artists from eleven countries, including Brazil, England, New Zealand, South Africa, and the United States, including loans from the Japan Association of Botanical Illustration.

A full-color, illustrated catalogue with reproductions of the artworks will be on sale at the Institute. Collectively, the catalogues from the earlier shows and the present one contain the most comprehensive record available of 20th-century botanical artists and illustrators — the number of individuals represented now totals about 816.

The works included in this exhibition prove that in the world of art the infinite variety of plant forms and colors still holds special fascination and offers undiminished challenge and delight.

Open to the public free of charge, the exhibition will be on display on the 5th floor of the Hunt Library building from 9 a.m. to noon, and 1 to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. For further information, contact the Institute at (412) 268-2434.

Who ever heard of a plant making its own flower pot?

There is a delicate and tender vine with big oval leaves hanging down from a tree in the jungle of South America. A storm comes along and breaks it all into pieces. How is a piece 30 foot long, broken loose, and hanging over a branch going to survive?

The bottom four leaves of the vine grow around in a circle. The ribs of the leaves become stiff side parts. Now it's a bucket four inches in diameter and six inches deep. The bucket makes the best smelling odor. Ants smell it, climb the tree, and climb down the vine to the bucket. The ants go back up and down the tree for hundreds of trips, collecting dirt, until the whole bucket is filled with dirt.

Now, they live in there. A big rain storm comes along, and fills the bucket. All the ants drown. That's all right for the vine. It has a flowerpot and dead ants for minerals it needs. It sends out adventitious roots and roots itself right in its own flowerpot.

Some of these vines have as many as twenty-five flowerpots on different branches of the tree

it lives on. How did the plant know that ants like this smell and will bring dirt all the way up a tree? You can go crazy trying to figure this out!

From "On Sabbatical Leave - Plants"

by Ranger T. Manka



Carnegie Botanist is the First Research Fellow at Kyoto University

Frederick Utech, curator of Botany at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, is in Japan this fall as a research fellow and visiting professor at the Kyoto University Museum.

While in Japan, Utech will give public lectures, visit other museums to examine their botanical research collections, and conduct field work in the southern mountains of Kyushu.

This prestigious appointment follows Utech's two decades of working in Japan and with Japanese scientists. He spent two years doing post-doctoral work in Japan, and has collaborated with Japanese botanists in writing about the connection between Asian and American plants.

Enjoy Your Wildflowers - Pokeweed

"The corn is as high as an elephant's eye".
Remember that lilting song from *Oklahoma*?

Well, corn is not the only herbaceous plant that can grow quite tall in one growing season. Another is Pokeweed or Pokeberry or Pokerooroot, a perennial of fields and roadsides. It not only may reach twelve feet, it does so with a weak, branching stem that breaks easily.

The chambered, succulent stem is green when it sprouts, but soon becomes pink. The color may intensify to bright red or rich purple as the plant

matures. The reddishness may extend into the leaf veins. With its colorful stems and berries, Pokeweed is exotic and attractive, albeit a very poisonous plant.

There are no petals on the flower structure, only sepals that form a white calyx. In the center of the calyx is a prominent green ovary that develops into a multi-sectioned berry. The lustrous purplish-black berries are tempting. Admire them, but don't eat them.

The berry juice was long used by Native Americans and later by colonists as a dye. Various shades of pink, red, rust, brown and blue were obtained, depending upon the mordant used. The juice served also as a paint pigment and as an ink. The latter use was the basis for two other common names, Red-ink Plant and Inkberry.

The botanical name is *Phytolacca americana*. The generic name, *Phytolacca*, acknowledges the color of the berry juice. *Phyto-* is a combining form of the Greek *phyton*, meaning "plant". *Lacca* is from *Carteria lacca*, a south Asian insect. This insect deposits its eggs on twigs of various trees and covers them with a dark red resin, called lac. Lac is used for a red dye and for making lacquer and shellac. *Americana*, the species name, refers to its native area.

The common name Pokeweed evolved from some Native American names for the plant — Pocan Bush, Coakum, Skoke. Poke is the name used for the very young shoots. They are delicious and safe to eat if properly prepared.

Roots, leaves and berries have been used medicinally for centuries by herbalists and the medical profession. Self-medication is dangerous.

Pokeweed played a part in a presidential campaign. James K. Polk's supporters indicated their loyalty by wearing a bit of Pokeweed in their jacket lapels.

Anne S. Bahl



Pokeweed – *Phytolacca americana* by Anne S. Bahl

Field Trip Schedule

Registration is not required. Everyone is welcome, including non-members. Trips are not canceled due to rain. Wear shoes that can get wet. For questions, call the trip leader or Loree at (412) 521-9425.

Saturday **Allegheny Front Hawk Watch**
Sept. 12, 1998- **& Dunnings Creek Wetlands**
 Somerset County
 Leader: Lee Tosh
Time: 11 a.m. lunch, leave for
 the Hawk Watch 12 noon

We will meet at Lee's Cabin on Stony Creek Lake. Please join us for **lunch at 11 a.m.** After lunch, we will leave for the Allegheny Hawk Watch at noon. After watching hawks, we will go to the Dunnings Creek Wetlands.

Dress warm, and prepare for wet feet. If you will be arriving for lunch (a very special treat), leave a message with Lee at (412) 833-2620 or Loree at (412) 521-9425.

Directions: From Pittsburgh, take the Turnpike east to the Somerset Exit. Follow Rte. 31 east about three miles to a Y where you will bear left to Shanksville. At the first stop sign in Shanksville, make a left. As soon as you cross the bridge over Stony Creek, make a right. After you pass Shanksville High School on your left, proceed about 100 yards and turn left onto Lake Shore Road. Proceed downhill past the dam. Proceed about another 1/2 mile to Lee's cabin, which will be well-marked for us.

Saturday **Fringed Gentian Fen**
Sept. 26, 1998- Lawrence County
 Leader: Howard McIlvried
 (421) 364-7329
 Time: 1:00 p.m.

Directions: From Pittsburgh, take I-79 north and Rte 422 west. Turn north (right) onto Rte. 388 and continue to the second crossroad. Turn left onto Frew Mill Road. Proceed less than a mile and park on the left near a white house (before John's farm).

Expectations: Fringed Gentian, Grass of Parnassus, and Nodding Ladies' Tresses. Prepare for wet feet.

"To the Fringed Gentian"

Thou waitest late and com'st alone
 When woods are bare and birds are flown,
 And frosts and shortening days portend
 The aged year is near his end.

Then doth thy sweet and quiet eye
 Look through its fringes to the sky,
 Blue – Blue – as if that sky let fall
 A flower from its cerulean wall.

William Cullen Bryant

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WILDFLOWERS - Bulletin of the Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania

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WILDFLOWERS is published monthly by the Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania. We welcome short articles of botanical interest, drawings, letters to the editor, and notices of botanical events and group activities. Articles, notices, drawings, etc. should be sent to the editor at the above address. Deadline for submissions is the 17th of the previous month.

The Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania - Membership Information

The object of the Society shall be to bring together those who are interested in Botany and to encourage the study of this science and a knowledge of plants. Our members include both amateurs and professionals. Annual dues are \$5.00 for individual and \$8.00 for family. Students can join at half-rate. To join, mail your name, your address, and check payable to "Botanical Soc. of W PA" to Loree Speedy, 5837 Nicholson Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15217. Your membership includes a subscription to the monthly bulletin WILDFLOWERS.

The Society meets the second Monday of each month, September through June, at 8 PM sharp, at Trinity Hall or Kresge Theater, Carlow College, 3333 Fifth Avenue, Oakland. All are welcome. An informative program follows the business meeting. Visit the Botanical Society Homepage at <http://home.kiski.net/~speedy/b1.html>.