
WILDFLOWERS

The Bulletin of the Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania • March 2003

The Next Meeting is March 10

The next meeting will be Monday, March 10, **7:15 p.m.**, at **Kresge Theater**, Carlow College, 3333 Fifth Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA (Oakland). Kresge Theater is on the top floor of the Grace Library and is accessed from the upper campus. Place a note on your dashboard saying "Botanical Society Meeting," or use your parking permit.

Member **Mike Fialkovich** will present "A Collection of Plant Slides." Mike will present his favorite plant slides, many from Pennsylvania, and will discuss the reasons he selected these as favorites.

Mike has been photographing plants for 14 years. He is Seasonal Editor and county compiler for the journal *Pennsylvania Birds*, and Bird Reports Editor for the Three Rivers Birding Club.

Our meeting scheduled for February 10, 2003 was cancelled. The scheduled speaker, **Jeff Wagner**, has been rescheduled for April 14, 2003.

If it appears that there will be hazardous driving conditions the night of the meeting, call telephone number (724) 872-5232 after 5 p.m. for a recorded message indicating whether the meeting will be cancelled.

American ginseng: a forest resource with deep roots in Pennsylvania needs your help.

American ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius L.*) is a native perennial forest plant whose distribution

has been documented in nearly every County of Pennsylvania. As a result of strong international demand and often astonishing profitability, the collection of American ginseng for market from Pennsylvania forestlands has been practiced for over two centuries. In July 1783, the Bavarian scholar Dr. Johann David Schoepf visited Pennsylvania and observed the following:

The hunters collect it incidentally in their wanderings; in these mountains the plant is still common, but in the lower parts it has pretty well disappeared.....Much is brought into Fort Pitt. Industrious people who went out for the purpose have gathered as much as sixty pounds in one day.

Of the medicinal plants collected for market, American ginseng in particular is credited with having contributed to the economy of many of Pennsylvania's early towns and outposts. From historical and contemporary accounts, it is known that throughout its range the plant has always been important to farmers and woodsmen as a supplemental source of income. Under the natural conditions provided by a forest, American ginseng has few maintenance requirements. Accordingly, a farmer or homesteader could propagate plants in a nearby woodlot and dig a few pounds here and there for profit. Similar methods are undoubtedly followed today by ginseng enthusiasts.

The best efforts of conservation-minded farmers and woodsmen, however, failed to offset the unscrupulous collection behaviors of others—a scenario that resulted in the extirpation or decline of the species throughout much of its former range in Pennsylvania. At the turn of the 19th century, a solution to this predicament was found in the encouragement of private cultivation to alleviate pressure on existing wild populations. This is a tactic which the

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania duly pursued from about 1897-1930 as American ginseng cultivation in woodlots and under artificial shade was offered to rural Pennsylvania as a means to diversify income and utilize otherwise idle forested acreage. These efforts proved successful in shifting the burden of supply from wild to managed plants, a conclusion supported by the fact that today wild ginseng is still encountered throughout Pennsylvania, albeit under uncertain circumstances.

In recent decades, the collection of wild Pennsylvania ginseng has once again placed pressure on native populations as the price commanded for forest root has dramatically surpassed that of artificial-shade grown root. Today, it is not uncommon for wild (or wild-simulated) root to sell for \$300-\$500 per dry pound, while artificial-shade produced root sells for \$10-\$25 per pound. While this has been a boon to forest cultured root, there are increasing concerns about the sustainability of harvesting wild populations, about which so little is known. On average, about 200 fresh roots are required to make a single dry pound. Using this figure, it is estimated that over 400,000 plants were harvested from Pennsylvania forestlands in 2001. Even more astounding (and worrying) is that an estimated 7 million plants have been harvested from Pennsylvania forests since 1989. Accordingly, the species is presently listed as vulnerable in Pennsylvania pending further study.

Federal regulations require that the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) annually track the quantities of wild ginseng harvested within the State. The interpretation of available harvest data is complicated, however, by the fact that very little is actually known about existing wild populations and the ginseng enthusiasts collecting or cultivating the species. While a rural ginseng industry is viewed as positive and welcome, there is nevertheless need for communication and cooperation between stakeholders in order to support both species

survival as well as continued ginseng collection or cultivation activities.

In 2003, the Penn State School of Forest Resources, Pennsylvania DCNR, and Phipps Conservatory are launching a multi-year research and extension program that will develop information on existing wild ginseng populations and examine the extent to which forest cultivated root is replacing, or could replace, wild root. This study is sorely needed for the building of collaborative relationships with Pennsylvanians who can contribute to the management and preservation of this economically and ecologically valuable forest resource. To this end, individuals willing to participate in this study are needed in the following two areas:

- Wild ginseng study populations are needed from throughout the state. Forest landowners who have wild ginseng on their lands are asked to volunteer these sites for study. The locations will be kept strictly confidential and the populations will not be disturbed. Information will be collected about natural population reproduction and mortality as well as the site characteristics such as soil properties, vegetation, and physiography. This information will be used to determine what factors ginseng growers and conservationists should consider in site selection and management.
- Collectors and growers from throughout Pennsylvania are needed for exchange of information. Individuals should be willing to complete a confidential questionnaire pertaining to collection/growing practices and experiences. This information will be used to build future educational programs as well as acquire insights into the impact of any possible future regulatory actions.

In return for their time and efforts, study collaborators/participants will be offered assistance and guidance in the management and cultivation of ginseng and other forest understory plants. Interested individuals are encouraged to contact the author at the earliest convenience so that arrangements can be made for the 2003 season.

Eric Burkhart, School of Forest Resources, the Pennsylvania State University

Eric Burkhart can be contacted by e-mail at epb6@psu.edu or by mail at: 7 Ferguson Building, School of Forest Resources, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16802. He can also be reached by phone through the Penn State Forest Resources Extension Office at (814) 863-0401.

Workshop Will Be Held on Non-timber Forest Products

The Institute for Culture and Ecology is hosting a one-day workshop on Thursday, April 3, 2003, from 8:30 a. m. to 5:00 p. m. The workshop aims to explore how harvesters might participate in a biological monitoring program of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) such as ginseng, wild edibles and medicinals, floral greens, moss, and maple syrup. This is part of a larger goal to assess the relationships between forest management practices, NTFPs and biodiversity in the U.S. This participatory workshop is built around small group activities and interactive discussions.

Anyone interested in the sustainable management of non-timber forest products including federal, tribal, state, and private land managers, harvesters and buyers, extension agents, policy makers and scientists should attend. The workshop is free and open to the public.

The workshop will take place at Beachwood Farms Nature Reserve, 614 Dorseyville Road, Pittsburgh, PA. The workshop is free and open to the public, but pre-registration is requested. For more information and to pre-register, please contact Katie Lynch no later than March 20th, 2003 (503) 320-1323, ktlynch@ifcae.org).

Field Trip Schedule

Registration is not required. Everyone is welcome, including non-members. For questions, call the trip leader or Loree at (724) 872-5232.

Saturday, March 8, 2003

**Little Sewickley Creek in Herminie,
Westmoreland County**

Time: 1:00 p.m.

Leader: Mark Bowers (724) 872-5232

Directions: Take the PA Turnpike to Exit 67 - Route 30/Irwin/Greensburg. Take the Route 30 East/Greensburg ramp. At the first stoplight on Route 30, turn right. Travel 0.5 mile to the first stop sign and turn right. Travel this road 3.7 miles to a T. Turn right at the T. Continue 0.9 miles to a stop sign. Turn right. Travel a very short distance to turn left at the street just before Mayers Maytag. Continue on this road to the next intersection. There will be a CITGO on your left. Cross the street and park in the John C. Bruno Memorial Stadium parking lot.

This is a joint trip with the Westmoreland Bird and Nature Club. This is a sure-fire spot to find snow trillium.

Sunday, March 30, 2003

Buttermilk Falls, Westmoreland County

Time: 1:30 p.m.

Leaders: Botanical Society of Westmoreland County

Directions: From Pittsburgh, take Rte. 22 east from Monroeville to Rte. 286 (Golden Mile Highway), which eventually becomes Rte. 380 after the commercial development. Stay north on Rte. 380 to Rte. 66. At end of ramp, turn right and follow Rte. 66 north for about 1.6 miles; at a Y, bear left onto Route 356 north. Go about 3.5 miles to a stop sign and a T. Turn left, staying on Route 356. At the traffic light just after this turn, turn right. Follow this road for ½ mile to the traffic light. (You will have passed Kiski Area High School on the right.) At the traffic light, turn left onto Route 56 west. Go 4/10 mile to a sign on the right "Allegheny Township Bldg." Turn right, then right again to the parking lot where we will meet.

Saturday, April 12, 2003 – Botanical Assessment at Raccoon Creek Wildflower Reserve – Details in next month's newsletter

Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania – March 2003

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Editor: Loree Speedy, 279 Orr Road, West Newton, PA 15089 Telephone: (724) 872-5232; E-mail: yoree@sgi.net.

President: Dr. Mary Joy Haywood, (412) 578-6175, E-mail mjhaywood@carlow.edu; **Vice-President:** Phyllis Monk, (412) 831-2724 E-mail: uscmonk@ieeee.org; **Treasurer:** Kimberly Metheny

WILDFLOWERS is published monthly by the Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania. We welcome short articles of botanical interest, drawings, and notices of botanical events and group activities. Send to the editor at the above address. Deadline for submissions is the 23th of the previous month.

The Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania - Membership Information

The Botanical Society was founded in 1886. 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. Annual dues are \$10.00 for individual and \$15.00 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, 279 Orr Road, West Newton, PA 15089. Your membership includes a subscription to the monthly bulletin WILDFLOWERS.

The Society meets the second Monday of each month, September through June, at 7:15 p.m. sharp, at Kresge Theater, Carlow College, 3333 Fifth Avenue, Oakland. All are welcome to the informative program and business meeting.

Wildflowers of Pennsylvania – Ordering Information – 400 pages of text and 612 color photographs

Wildflowers of Pennsylvania can be purchased for \$20.00 (plus \$1.40 sales tax for PA residents). Forward your check, made payable to Botanical Society of Western PA, to Dr. Haywood at the address below. If you order by mail, add \$2 postage and handling for one book, \$3.00 for two, \$4.00 for three, \$4.50 for four. Send your request to Dr. Mary Joy Haywood, RSM, Ph.D., 3333 Fifth Ave., Pittsburgh, PA 15213-3165 (412) 578-6175; mjhaywood@carlow.edu