
WILDFLOWERS

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

Next Meeting is February 9

The next meeting will be Monday, February 9, at 8:00 p.m., at the Kresge Theater at Carlow College, 3333 Fifth Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA (Oakland).

Member **Luc Berger** will present "Bushes, Blossoms and Berries".

This slide show covers common native shrubs and vines of Western Pennsylvania. They produce beautiful blossoms in the spring, and colorful fruits in the fall. For the amateur botanist, they have the advantage of remaining visible and identifiable throughout the winter. The present talk emphasizes similarities between plants belonging to the same family.

Help is needed for Biological Assessment

After seven years of perseverance, the Horticultural Society of Western Pennsylvania has finally succeeded in attaining a site for a world class botanical garden. The 390-acre parcel is part of Settler's Cabin County Park in Collier Township, located between downtown Pittsburgh and the Pittsburgh International Airport.

The planners have the opportunity to focus on North American natives as landscape plants and to create a repository for plants indigenous to western Pennsylvania. If we can elevate the importance of these indigenous plant species to the general public, it will be easier to educate

them about the importance of their preservation and protection.

This parcel of land has not escaped the hand of man, however, and its flatter hilltops have been stripped of their resources some years ago, making them ideal locations for public spaces and cultivated gardens. The remaining wooded slopes and rills are representative of western Pennsylvania terrain and will adapt well to the creation of various habitats, such as fields and wetlands.

Before there is development of any kind a complete biological assessment of the property will be undertaken under the guidance of the botanists of Carnegie Institute. This survey will include as much biological data as can be recorded from frost to frost of this year and will require much manpower. These individuals will be charged with collecting specimens of the plants and insects in order to make an accurate map of the site that can be recorded and studied a hundred years from now, making this a truly unique and important opportunity.

As soon as a project manager is named, the training of the surveyors can begin. The Horticultural Society hopes that it can count on the members of the Botanical Society to help in the collection of data, for, indeed, where else could such an experienced corps be found?

Sue Thompson, Curator of Plants at Carnegie Institute, has pointed out that the volunteers do not need to be able to identify the plants--it is more important that they simply be able to observe the differences between plants.

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If you want to take part in this important endeavor, as well as explore a new site, watch for information in this newsletter or leave your name, address, e-mail or phone numbers with me.

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Jeanne Poremski

Enjoy your Wildflowers: Common Chickweed

There are numerous related plants that have "Chickweed" as part of their name. Among them are Field, Giant, Mouse-ear, Sea and Common Chickweeds. Some plants from other families also do: Water and Indian Chickweeds and Chickweed Wintergreen.

Common Chickweed can grow almost anywhere it gets enough light and moisture. It has been found in suitable habitats throughout the world, though it may be native to Eurasia. There is speculation that early pioneers brought it to North America for its culinary and medicinal values.

The plant can produce its 1/3", deeply cleft, five-petaled flowers even in winter in our area if it has some protection. It has been found green and blooming in a hollow under ice, the ice forming a miniature greenhouse.

Flowering when no pollinators are around seems to be counterproductive. The plant adapts to this by producing *cleistogamous* flowers (Greek – *cleistos*, closed, *gamos*, married). These flowers self-fertilize inside the bud, which never opens, and seeds develop.

This sprawling plant, always with a fresh-green appearance, seems determined to reproduce

itself. It also has stems which root at their nodes when in contact with the soil. The reddish-brown seeds, produced year round, are light and wind-borne. Though farmers, gardeners and nurserymen do not appreciate these tactics, there are those who do.

Wild animals and birds as well as domestic fowl relish the tender leaves and the seeds. The "chick" part of the name refers to this. It is derived from a Middle English name for chicken, but evolved to designate the young of some birds. Chickweed sprigs were popularly used in England to feed pet birds when they were not interested in their regular food.

People, too, enjoy the fresh leaves that are available all year. The leaves are an excellent substitute for spinach, both raw and cooked. The entire plant has been used medicinally for centuries, both internally and externally.

The botanical name, *Stellaria media*, is Latin. *Stellaria* means "star" for the flower. *Media* means "middle-sized". Common Chickweed is in the Caryophyllaceae family, related to *Cerastium*, *Dianthus* and *Gypsophila*.

Anne S. Bahl



Common Chickweed– *Stellaria media* – by Anne Bahl

Winter Field Trip Schedule

Saturday

February 14, 1997- Moraine State Park,
Butler County
Leader: Esther Allen
Time: 1:00 p.m.

Directions: From I-79 North to Exit 28 (PA 488, Portersville). Go west (left) 0.6 miles to US19. Turn north (right) on US19, go 0.5 mile, and turn right on SR4007 (West Park Rd) Follow signs for "North Shore Moraine State Park". Go 2.8 miles on SR4007, crossing I79, US422, and Muddy Creek. Just after crossing the creek, turn right onto North Shore Drive.

Follow North Shore Drive, passing Lakeview and Watts Bay Marina, all the way to Davis Hollow Marina. We will meet near the restaurant.

Expectations: Nature and botany do not quit for the winter. There are tree buds, ferns, dead leaves, skunk cabbage, lichens, and mosses. Something unexpected and colorful will show up.

This field trip may be cancelled, but only under hazardous driving conditions. If you have any doubt whether the trip will be cancelled, call 521-9425 on Saturday morning to listen to the field trip message

Remit Your 1998 Membership Dues

To continue your membership, mail your name, your address, your phone number (optional) and your check for \$5.00 (single) or \$8.00 (family), payable to "Botanical Society of W PA".

Mail your check to our Treasurer: Walter Gardill, PO Box 226, Grosick Road, Ingomar, PA 15127

The Bruce Still Beckons

Are you interested in visiting the Bruce Peninsula in Ontario, Canada on the last week of June 1998 (June 20th through June 27th)?

On February 24, George Bercik will make reservations for those ready to definitely attend. If you cannot commit by that date, you can join in at a later date if lodging is still available at Red Bay Lodge.

A visit to the Bruce guarantees many interesting plants and beautiful natural areas. We will stay at the Red Bay Lodge in rustic cabins or hotel rooms.

See us at the winter Botanical Society meetings or call George Bercik at (412) 655-4701 or Loree Speedy at (412) 521-9425.

News about Our Members

Bob Bahl was ill over the holidays. He had pneumonia and heart failure while visiting his daughter in Philadelphia. We are glad to hear he is feeling better.

Enough of back aches! **Sister Mary Joy Haywood** is recovering from shingles.

Anthony Miklausen's revolutionary book, "The Brown Algal Origin of Land Plants", which he printed at his own expense, is now recognized in the Plant Science Bulletin of the Botanical Society of America. Mr. Miklausen reports that treatments have arrested his cancer, hopefully forever, and that he is getting well.

We offer sympathy to **Bernadette Lesko** on the loss of her dear mother.

Finally, we are glad to see **Eva Emmerich** looking very well and back at our monthly meetings.

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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://ansel.his.duq.edu/~speedy/b1.html>.