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# WILDFLOWERS

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

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## Next Meeting is November 9

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

The speaker will be member **Virginia Phelps**. Virginia will be showing "Favorite Wildflowers from Favorite Haunts".

Virginia has been a very active member of the Botanical Society since 1956. You can be sure that her program will contain many interesting wildflowers from all over the country.

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## Little Shop of Horrors for Protozoa

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For the first time, botanists have found a carnivorous plant that preys on protozoa.

The discovery ends considerable puzzlement over lifestyles in the genus *Genlisea*. Discovered at the beginning of the last century, these rare plants form tiny rosettes of leaves on the ground and send up flowers that look like snapdragons. Darwin guessed that the wad of pale, rootlike strands trailing underground from the rosette might trap some kind of creature. "But it's underground—what could it catch?" asks Wilhelm Barthlott of the University of Bonn in Germany.

The plants can survive in soils so poor in nutrients they're practically glass, like Brazilian quartz sands. Yet even in these extremes, a *Genlisea* typically sports showy flowers, a bit like the tax cheat living too well for his or her known resources. "It has to have an additional source of income," jokes Barthlott.

These dainty beauties are actually specialized death traps for protozoa, Barthlott and his colleagues report in the April 2, 1998 *Nature*. Y-shaped forks at the tips of the underground strands secrete chemicals that attract protozoa, say the researchers. They found that paramecia streamed to cubes of agar which had picked up the attractants from contact with the strand ends. This is the first example of a carnivorous plant secreting a chemical lure, says Barthlott.

*Susan Milius - Reprinted with permission from Science Service, the weekly newsmagazine of Science, copyright 1998.*

*Thanks to Gail Blakeley. Gail says that there are also some fungi that prey on nematodes.*

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## Giant Puffball displayed with Pride

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A member of the Botanical Society found a giant puffball (*Calvatia gigantea*) measuring seventeen inches and weighing about ten pounds. Carl Patsche, a retired science teacher from Weirton found the puffball near U.S. 22 between Weirton and Burgettstown, on Wednesday, September 23, 1998.

"I found this large one, along with four or five smaller ones, among the crown vetch. A man from Burgettstown stopped and took the smaller ones, which were about the size of basketballs."

Patsche resides near a wooded area, and competes with the many deer for the mushrooms growing there. Patsche has found it easier to identify the various edible mushrooms over the last several years. "I cut them into small pieces, dice, and sauté in butter . . ., and I don't worry about the poison."

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## Pittsburgh Ecoforum integrates Research, Conservation, and Education

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To capitalize on the wealth of expertise in the areas of ecology, biodiversity, conservation, and the environment in southwestern Pennsylvania, a consortium of local science and conservation organizations recently established the Pittsburgh EcoForum. Through programs such as the Eminent Biologist Lecture Series, the Pittsburgh EcoForum promises to bring Pittsburgh to the forefront as a national center for discussion of biological issues. The following nationally prominent scientists will discuss their research.

November 4, 1998 - Stephen P. Hubbell – **Ecology of Tropical Rainforests**

December 2, 1998 - Jeanne Altmann – **Behavioral Ecology of Baboons**

February 3, 1999 - Scott K. Robinson - **Habitat Fragmentation and Bird Populations**

March 3, 1999 - Peter H. Raven - **Global Biodiversity**

April 7, 1999 - Michael J. Donoghue - **Evolutionary Relationships and Diversification**

November's lecture, Ecology of Tropical Rainforests, features one of the world's leading tropical ecologists. Dr. Stephen Hubbell focuses on long-term studies of the dynamics of rainforests in Panama, Malaysia, and Thailand.

April's lecture features Peter H. Raven, who is Director of the Missouri Botanical Garden and Professor of Botany at Washington University. He is an international expert in biodiversity. Dr. Raven applies his 40 years of botanical research experience to enhance public awareness of the ecological crisis in the tropics and the need for preservation of natural resources around the world.

All lectures will be held in the Carnegie Museum of Art Auditorium, 4400 Forbes Ave., at 7 p.m. For information and ticket reservations, call (412) 624-1299.

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## A Welcome from the President of Wissahickon Nature Club

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Everyone is invited to attend the meetings of the Wissahickon Nature Club every other Saturday evening at the Ben Avon Community Presbyterian Church.

Upcoming programs include Butterflies and Their Food Plants on November 7, China on November 21, Backwoods Pennsylvania on December 5, and Imperial Grasslands of December 19 (followed by a Christmas party and cookie exchange). More are scheduled for February through May. For a list of future programs contact Chuck Tague, bluejay@city-net.com -- (412) 488-8760.

The programs begin at 7:30 p.m., but the evening begins at 6:00 p.m. with dinner. Bring your own place setting, beverage and a covered dish.

From Pittsburgh: Take Ohio River Blvd (Rte 65) into Ben Avon. Cross the bridge into Ben Avon, then turn right onto Dickson. At the 2nd stop sign turn left onto Church St. After the 3rd stop sign look for a stone church on left. Turn left onto Rostrevor Place. Parking lot is on the left.

*Chuck Tague*

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## Field Trip Schedule

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Registration is not required. Everyone is welcome, including non-members. For questions, call the trip leader or Loree at (412) 521-9425.

**Saturday**                      **McConnell's Mills State**  
**November 14, 1998-** **Park, Lawrence County**  
Leader: Esther Allen  
(412) 366-0786  
Time: 1 p.m.

If you think botanical sightings disappear in September, you have not been on a winter trip with the Botanical Society!

This trip may could be cancelled, but only due to extreme weather conditions. If the afternoon weather is expected to be icy, snowy or very, very cold rain, call (412) 521-9425 the morning of the field trip. The message machine will let you know if the trip has been cancelled.

**Directions:** From Pittsburgh, follow I-79 North for 40 miles north to Exit 29. Exit onto U.S. Rte 422. Continue 1.8 miles west on Rte. 422. Turn left at sign for McConnell's Mill State Park. Park and meet at the lot for the playfield and picnic grounds.

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## A Topographical Description of Western Pennsylvania

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*In Trillia, the Proceedings of the Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania No. 5 1915-1919, Frank R. Alker compiled "Botanical Gleanings From Early Travelers", natural history descriptions of the area from early pioneers and explorers. The following is from "A Topographical Description of Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and North Carolina" by Thomas Hutchins. Published in London by J. Almon, 1778.*

"The lands lying on a westerly line, between the Laurel Mountain and the Allegheny River, and thence northerly up that river for 150 miles, on both sides of the same, tho' not much broken with high mountains, are not of the same excellent quality with the lands southward of Fort Pitt. They consist chiefly of White Oak, and Chestnut ridges; and in many places of poor Pitch Pines, interspersed with tracts of good land; and low meadow grounds.

"The lands comprehended between the River Ohio, at Fort Pitt, and the Laurel Mountain, and thence continuing the same breadth from Fort Pitt to the Great Kanawha River, may, according

to my own observations, and those of the late Mr. Gist, of Virginia, be generally, and justly described as follows:

"The vallies adjoining to the branches or springs of the middle forks of the Youghiogony, are narrow towards its source, but there is a considerable quantity of good farming grounds on the hills, near the largest branch of that River. The lands within a small distance of the Laurel Mountain (through which the Youghiogony runs) are in many places broken and stony, but rich and well timbered; and in some places, and particularly on Laurel Creek, they are rocky and mountainous.

"From the Laurel Mountain, to Monongahela, the first seven miles are good level farming grounds, with fine meadows; the timber, white Oak, Chestnut, Hickory, etc. The same kind of land continues southerly (12 miles) to the upper branches or forks of this River, and about 15 miles northerly to the place where the Youghiogony falls into the Monongahela. The lands for about 18 miles in the same Course of the last mentioned River, on each side of it, tho' hilly, are rich and well timbered. The trees are Walnut, Locust, Chestnut, Poplar and Sugar or sweet Maple. The low lands, near the River, are about a mile wide, and in several places two miles wide. For a considerable way down the River, on the eastern side of it, the intervals are extremely rich, and about a mile wide. The Upland for about twelve miles eastwardly, are uncommonly fertile, on the western side of the River, both up and down, are excellent, and covered with Sugar trees, etc.

"Such parts of the country which lie on some of the branches of the Monongahela, and across the heads of several Rivers, that run into the Ohio, tho' in general hilly, are exceedingly fruitful and well watered. The timber is Walnut, Chestnut, Ash, Oak, Sugar trees, etc., and the interval or meadow lands are 250 yards to a quarter of a mile wide." (Pages 1 to 3)

**Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania - Nov 98**  
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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.

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## **The Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania - Membership Information**

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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>.