
WILDFLOWERS

The Bulletin of the Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania • November and December 2002

The Next Meeting is November 11

The next meeting will be Monday, November 11, **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.

Our speaker will be **Dr. Mary Joy Haywood**. Come and enjoy a look at the plants of the prairie grasslands in "**Plants of the Plains.**" Some aspects of the vegetation are surprisingly similar, and some aspects are quite different.

The Holiday Party is December 9

Our annual Christmas Party will be Monday, December 9, at 7:15 p.m., at **the Atrium of the A. J. Palumbo Hall** at Carlow College, 3333 Fifth Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA (Oakland). As you approach the campus on Fifth Avenue (heading toward downtown Pittsburgh), do not turn right into the Carlow Campus entrance. Instead, pass the entrance, stay in the right lane, and make the immediate right into the parking area. Park here and cross the street. Place a note on your dashboard saying "Botanical Society Meeting," or use your parking permit.

This is the Wild Foods Holiday Party. Members and guests bring an assortment of foods made from something found in the wild. Appetizers, cookies, candies, fruits, and berries: a challenge for the most daring and the most creative. So bring a wild edibles and your wild self. Don't dare stay away if you have nothing to bring, for there will be plenty!

This is also Member's Night where we share our great plant sightings over the year. A member can bring up to twelve botanical slides.

A Blossoming of Flower Groups

Most people with a passing interest in nature, crossword puzzles or the English language are aware of the fanciful names applied to aggregations of various types of birds. Some of the most familiar are:

a murder of crows, a charm of finches, an exaltation of larks, a parliament of owls, a murmuration of starlings, a gaggle of geese, a skein of swans, a covey of quail or a kettle of raptors.

These collective nouns are not a part of the official language of ornithology. When birds get together the group is properly called an aggregation, flight or flock. If the purpose of the birds is to promote safety during the vulnerable nesting period, they become a colony. The other names, while full of imagery and whimsy, are a 17th century convention and now nothing more than wordplay for a snoop of birders.

Recently, while hiking along a woodland trail a patch of white asters caught my eye. The word "constellation" came to mind.

"A constellation of asters, what a perfect description," I thought. I mentally reviewed some of the collective nouns for flowers and plants and the implications of the phrases. The words I came up with were not very exciting; station, patch, stand, garden, bouquet.

Why should bird people have all the fun? So I began a list of flower collectives, limited of course to western Pennsylvania wildflowers.

Constellation was a good start but it didn't apply to all asters. White Wood Asters may grow in constellations but a field of Heath Asters would surely be a galaxy that would rival the Milky Way. Calico Asters would come on a bolt and when New England Asters get together they would certainly convene a town meeting.

Spring wildflowers offer a wealth of images. Anyone who's ever been in the woods on a cold spring morning would understand an awakening of Spring Beauty. Other groups of spring flowers would be:

A school (shoal) of Trout Lilies
A rubble of Rock Cress
A stampede of Coltsfoot
A clothesline of Dutchman's Breeches
A churn of Buttercups
A crib of Squirrel Corn
A transfusion of Bloodroot
A modesty of Bluets
A sagacity of Solomon's Seal
A flurry of Snow Trillium
A cascade of Trillium grandiflorum

The illusion of yellow mist created by the flowers on a common understory shrub suggests a smog of Spice Bush. The dangling catkins of the American Hazelnut perform a ballet.

Because of their serious demeanor and stern faces I elected a congress of Violets. Suburbanites are plagued by a consternation of Dandelions. A jackhammer of *Saxifraga*¹ *virginiensis* works but a Coltrane of Saxifrage is jazzier.

If you know the meaning of their generic names you will appreciate an aerie of Wild Columbine (*Aquilegia*² *canadensis*) and a chorus line of Pennsylvania Smartweed (*Polygonum*³ *pensylvanicum*).

Mountain folk will never reveal the location of an invigoration of Ginseng.

A color guard of Blue Iris leads us to the summer flowers:

A sorcery of Enchanters Nightshade
A haunting of Indian Pipes
A tin-tin-tabulation of Bellflowers
A squall of Canada Thistle seeds
An unrelenting stare of Oxeye
A college of Cardinal Flowers
A shower of Blazing Stars
A Baskin-Robbins of Coneflowers

If you visit wetlands you'll discover a dabbling of Duckweed, a flotilla of Spatterdock or a pagoda of American Lotus. You can't help but smile at a fun-filled barrel of *Mimulus*⁴ *ringens*.

The late summer and early autumn landscape is enlivened by:

A Monet of Joe-Pye-Weed
An eminence of Ironweed
A tangled web of Virgin's Bower
A cellar (winery) of Bottle Gentian
A gleam of Wreath Goldenrod
A gilding of Grass-leaved Goldenrod
A Fort Knox of Canada Goldenrod

Early herbalists prescribed a clot of Yarrow, a soothing of Jewelweed and a knit of Boneset. Be careful you don't run into a rash of Poison Ivy, a fastenation (rider) of Beggar's Ticks or a Cling-on of Burdock. Halloween brings a coven of Witch Hazel.

All my ideas weren't great. The best I could do was a bushel of Mayapple, a peck of Chickweed, a bucket of Waterleaf and, well, a lot of Daisies.

These collectives are just plain mediocre:

A range of Mountain Mint
An infestation of Lousewort
A team of Horsebalm
A corps of Bugleweed
A lather of Soapwort
A usurpation of Knotweed
A toast of Marsh-mallow

A kennel of Dogbane

Some just didn't work. I had to reject these to preserve the good taste of the article.

An udder of Milkweed

An Imelda of Lady Slippers

An impeachment of Clintonia

This list is just a beginning and I would like your help. The diversity of our flowers, the wonderful images in our natural communities and the rich linguistic history of botanists and nature observers provide a bounty of fuel for our imaginations. What I've done so far could certainly use improvement. Plus there are gaps. What could we call a patch of Trailing Arbutus, Mountain Laurel or Rhododendron? There must be a perfect name for Ladies' Tresses and Blue-eyed Grass. If nothing else this gives us a reason to open the wildflower books during the winter.

Send your suggestions to: The Nature Observer News, 432 Olympia Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15211 or e-mail bluejay@city-net.com.

Chuck Tague

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¹*Saxifraga* means rock breaker

²*Aquilegia* refers to eagles

³*Polygonum* means "many knees"

⁴*Mimulus ringens* is the Allegheny Monkey Flower

Original Over-run Prints from Wild Flowers of Western Pennsylvania and the Upper Ohio Basin Are Available

The Wild Flowers of Western Pennsylvania and the Upper Ohio Basin, authored by Otto E. Jennings, was published in 1953. The second volume contains 200 full-size color plates of watercolor paintings by Andrey Avinoff. These paintings are still admired today for their

beautiful colors and exquisite detail. Avinoff achieved accuracy in form and color and portrayed the individuality of each plant.

Original over-run prints of over 150 of the plates are still available from the Section of Botany at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History. If you do not have a copy of this wonderful book (it is out-of-print), find it at your local library to discover these wonderful prints. These will make great holiday gifts.

For a list of available plates and an order form, call (412) 622-3253 or e-mail cmherb@clpgh.org. Each plate is \$25.00.

A Topographical Description of Western Pennsylvania

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 "Sketches of a Tour to the Western Country" by F. Cuming. Published in Pittsburgh, 1810.

"...Here I observed some seines for fishing, made by fastening bushes together with the tough and flexible stalks of the wild grape with which this whole western country abounds.

From Yellow creek the appearance of the soil and country is better than above it, and the river is very beautiful, being in general about a quarter of a mile wide, interspersed with several islands, which add much to its beauty; some being partly cultivated and partly in wood, some wholly in wood, and some covered with low aquatick shrubs and bushes; and all fringed with low willows, whose yellowish green foliage, contrasted with the rich and variegated verdure of the gigantick forest trees, the fields of wheat and Indian corn, and the dwarf alders, other shrubbery and reeds of the inundated islands, which they surround, mark their bounds as on a coloured map...."

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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