SHORTIA

NEWSLETTER OF THE

WESTERN CAROLINA BOTANICAL CLUB

AUTUMN 2012

Shortia galacifolia

Oconee Bells
WESTERN CAROLINA BOTANICAL CLUB

President    Mary Kathryn Hardman    Secretary    Joy Charlebois
Vice-President Ruth Anne Gibson    Treasurer    Alan Graham

MEMBER NEWS

Any change of address, email, or telephone number should be sent to Alan Graham, 544 Top Road, Brevard, NC 28712, 884-3947, adgraham@citcom.net.

New member: Jim Poling, Black Mountain

SHORTIA TO BE SENT VIA E-MAIL

At its August 22 meeting, the Board of WCBC approved that the Shortia newsletter would be sent electronically to members who now receive their program schedule via email. Members unable to access Shortia in this manner will receive a hard copy in the mail from the editor. If you prefer to receive your copy by US mail, contact Paula Robbins at 828-274-4166.

Don’t miss the November 9 WCBC meeting at Bullington, where a token of appreciation will be presented to Anne Ulinski for her many years of service as editor of Shortia.

Field Trip Cancellations. On occasion field trips must be cancelled or changed either for weather conditions or other reasons such as road closings. Such changes are sent out by email to all members at the latest by 7 AM the day of the field trip. If you do not have email access, we will try to reach local members by telephone by 7 AM. If you are in doubt, contact a leader or co-leader whose telephone number is listed on the schedule. When a field trip is cancelled, no member will be at the contact point.

Members may be interested in a presentation on “Collecting Native Seeds and Plants” at the Butler Room of the Botanical Garden at Asheville on Sunday, October 21 from 2 to 3:30 PM by Ron Lance, Senior Naturalist and Land Manager for Balsam Mountain Trust. To register, call 838-252-5190.
The American Chestnut Foundation and the USDA Forest Service will present the 2012 American Chestnut Summit at The Crowne Plaza Resort in Asheville, October 19-21. The keynote speaker will be Dr. Patrick McMillan, Director of the Campbell Museum of Natural History at Clemson University. For registration information: www.acf.org/summit.

Winter Walks. Three surprise walks are scheduled this winter: for November 16, January 4 and February 22. Leaders will designate the locations close to the date, and information will be sent by email.

FERNHAVEN OPEN GARDEN EVENT
TO BENEFIT THE GARDENS AT BULLINGTON CENTER

WCBC members seemed to enjoy their visit to our "Fernhaven" at the end of April, so Juanita and I decided to open Fernhaven to the public on 9 June for the benefit of Bullington Gardens (the new name for “Bullington Center”). [The Lamberts are members of the “Bullington Botanical Bunch,” that originally included Bonnie Arbuckle and Frances Jones. Recently, Carol Lim and Sherry Metzger have also participated. More volunteers are always welcome! Ed.]

More specifically, we decided the event should benefit WCBC activities at Bullington, since the Botanical Bunch frequently incurs unreimbursed expenses when working on the Native Woodland Garden, the Azaleas Repository, the Nature Trail, and more. Additionally, we wanted to support the WCBC mission at Bullington Gardens by showing the public another example of use of native plants in a naturalized garden.

Bullington's PR person sent out a brief description to numerous news outlets, but the key publicity was provided by the Times-News of Hendersonville. They sent out a photographer who took what seemed like hundreds of photos. I sent a more-detailed description of Fernhaven to a writer, and she called back and interviewed me. In spite of some serious shortcomings, the resulting article produced enough interest or curiosity to draw a little more than a hundred people to wander around Fernhaven over a four-hour period. We collected $525 to use in development and maintenance of the "naturalistic side" of Bullington Gardens. There were a few disgruntled people and a few that came unprepared for the terrain due to lack of information in the news article, but for the most part, people really enjoyed themselves. Some folks really gushed about Fernhaven, and one person said it was her best experience so far this year.
Given this relative success, perhaps we will try to do this again in five years if we can make enough improvements to take some of the rough edges off and if the azaleas develop enough to put on a good show. Then members who were unable to come to this year's WCBC visit to Fernhaven would have another opportunity to see what they missed.

Larason Lambert

LIKIN' LICHENS

This title was borrowed from a Lichen Workshop presented in the Smokies. Jennifer Love, who presented that workshop, also presented one for WCBC members in March 2012, at Bullington Center. The first thing she did was to dispel the myth that lichens harm trees or indicate that trees are unhealthy. Actually lichens are a good indicator of air quality. If lichens are healthy the air is clean, but beware if lichens are dying!

So what are lichens? "Freddy Fungus took a lichen to Alice Algae… and now their marriage is on the rocks" is an oft-used phrase to remind us that lichens are a combination of fungus and algae and/or bacteria. Lichenologist Trevor Goward uses the phrase "Lichens are fungi that have discovered agriculture" to describe this relationship. The fungus provides the structural framework for the lichen but cannot photosynthesize and thus provide its own food. So it joins into a symbiotic relationship with algae or bacteria that provide food. In the Great Smoky Mountain All Taxa Biodiversity study, over 800 species of lichens have been identified. In the US and Canada more than 3600 species have been identified.

In addition to being a good indicator of air pollution, lichens are important to both wildlife and people. Lichens are used as nesting material for flying squirrels and for as many as fifty species of birds. They are a food source for caribou, deer, and other mammals and birds, including Spruce Grouse and Wild Turkeys. They serve as camouflage for some larvae and invertebrate species, and they are hosts to larvae of butterflies and moths.

Humans have discovered many uses for lichens. Beautiful dyes can be made from them, and they have been widely used as a fixative in perfumes. Harris tweeds dyed with lichens have been discovered to be moth resistant! Ancient medicine used lichens for teas and other remedies, and in modern times antibiotic properties have been found in up to 50% of them. Most lichens are edible, but not palatable, so I suppose we save them for when we have a food shortage!
Although they are very slow growing, lichens can grow on nearly any surface including trees, leaves, rocks, soil, and even man-made structures. For growth they need a substrate, light, moisture, and, of course, clean air. They are very important in our ecosystem, for they serve as pioneer species that begin to prepare the surfaces on which they grow for other forms of plant growth.

There are six growth forms of lichens: Crustose, Foliose, Umbilicate, Fruticose, Squamulose, and Gelatinous. All of these are quite varied in their colors, shapes, and sizes. As the name implies, crustose lichens form a crust that is tightly attached to its substrate. Colorful blotches on tree trunks or rocks are often attributable to this type. Foliose lichens are leaf-like and lobed with top and bottom surfaces that are more loosely attached to their substrate, while umbilicate lichens are attached only at a central point. Fruticose lichens are more branched and appear more three-dimensional, often looking like small shrubs. Squamulose lichens have overlapping scale-like lobes. Gelatinous lichens are just that, gelatinous, produced by a cyanobacterium on the surface of the fungus.

Go out and examine the lichens in your environment. They are varied, interesting and actually quite beautiful. You might even take a likin’ to ’em!

Harriet Walls

WCBC, THE CAROLINA MOUNTAIN CLUB AND THE BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY: A PARTNERSHIP?

When WCBC members arrived at Bear Pen Gap for our walk on June 15th, several folks were dismayed at the amount of recent mowing they encountered at the beginning of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail there, which had probably removed flowers of some interesting plants. I remembered that mowing had sometimes wreaked havoc along the trail to Frying Pan Tower, so, in preparation for our June 23rd walk, I contacted Pete Peterson, Maintenance Counselor for the Carolina Mountain Club, who assured me that the trail would not be weed-whacked until after our walk.

Individual members of the Carolina Mountain Club volunteer to be responsible for maintenance of specific sections of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail and the Appalachian Trail in Western North Carolina. For example, for ten years, Ken and Carol Deal of Asheville maintained the section just north of the Mills River Overlook, where we’ve enjoyed the annual July display of Turk’s Cap Lilies and leather flower.
In addition, five groups of volunteers (with an average age of 70!) meet regularly for a day of weed-whacking and other trail maintenance activities. They work on more than 300 miles of trails in other public areas in WNC: four national forests, three state forests, three conservancies, one county, and two towns. They built the Carolina Mountain Trail at the North Carolina Arboretum more than ten years ago. Their work makes it possible for us to access many of the interesting areas along the trails. (If you wish to contribute to the CMC to support their work, annual membership is $20, and checks may be sent to P.O. Box 68, Asheville, NC 28802.)

Paula Robbins

NORTH CAROLINA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

I became the President of the North Carolina Native Plant Society on June 1. The NC NPS was founded in 1951. The NC Wildflower Society (as it was called then) would promote the enjoyment and conservation of native plants and their habitats through education, protection, and propagation. We currently have about 500 members in six chapters across the state. We hold a spring and a fall outing at various places across the state to view the native plants in that region. The local chapters hold wildflower walks and talks about related subjects. The chapters also have booths at Earth Day events, festivals, and home and garden shows. Recently we had a booth at the Green and Growing Show in Greensboro and the Summer Green Show in Hickory. These are shows for the landscape trade; we hope, through our presence, to promote the use of native plants in the landscaping trade and provide information about how to do so.

We also were the impetus, along with the Habitat Stewards of the North Carolina Wildlife Federation and the Botanical Garden at UNCC in Charlotte, in establishing a Certificate in Native Plant Studies offered through the Botanical Garden. This program has been a huge success, with courses filling quickly and drawing from a wide range of people. Landscape designers, plant nursery workers, local faculty from nearby educational institutes, and a wide variety of other people have taken the courses.

In our last calendar year we donated a little over $11,000 to various botanical and conservation efforts. Our largest donation was $5,000 to the Natural Heritage Program to complete their Fourth Approximation of their data. We also sponsored four students to the Cullowhee Native Plant Conference. Locally, we donated $900 for native plants to be used in the landscaping at The Haven, the homeless shelter in Brevard. We also award scholarships to university students who are studying North Carolina native plants, and provide money for grants for conservation work involving native plants.
Our web site, www.ncwildflower.org, has a wealth of information about North Carolina's native plants. We gave about 60 talks last year heard by about 1700 people, led or sponsored 22 wildflower walks involving about 360 people, and had booths at 16 various shows and festivals.

Currently, we are working on our educational materials for children. We have a lot of material for adults but have neglected the young. When the materials are available we intend to share them on our web site, so others can use them. We have also been asked to write a chapter in the NC Master Gardener's Handbook, which is underway. In addition, we are working on a plan that will aid the big box stores to correctly tag native plants.

Here in Western North Carolina, we have about sixty members in the 828 area code and are hoping to have a vibrant chapter in place. If you have any questions, I would love to talk with you about the NC NPS!

Jean Woods

BOOK REVIEW


We all knew that vanilla comes from a bean, right? Well, no. I’ve just learned that the source of the flavor and fragrance from the expensive bottle of vanilla extract in my cupboard is the fruit of a highly prized orchid.

Botanist Ken Cameron is an international authority on *Vanilla* and its relatives and was one of the first to apply modern DNA sequencing methods to the study of orchid evolution and classification. He spent ten years as a curator and director of the New York Botanical Garden’s molecular systematics laboratory and is now professor of botany and director of the State Herbarium at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Cameron describes the fascinating origins and history of domesticated *Vanilla*, its evolution and geographic structure, harvest, processing and its commercial uses. There are also chapters on plant structure, cultivation, and pollination. Along with beautiful color photos, the author describes select *Vanilla* species and its closest orchid cousins.

Paula Robbins
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The purpose of the Club is to study the plants of the southern Appalachian Mountains and the Southeast through field trips and indoor meetings. Membership is open to all. Individual/family memberships are $15. New members joining from the period July 1-December 31 pay $8. All memberships are renewable on January first of each year. Send dues to Alan Graham, 544 Tip Top Road, Brevard, NC 29812.