



NaturePhile

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The Balsam Mountain Trust inspires people to be responsible stewards of the natural and cultural resources of the Southern Blue Ridge Mountains through education and conservation leadership.



The Healing Power of Nature

Greetings to all our BMP friends. As you read this latest issue of NaturePhile, please consider getting outside with us, your family and other loved ones—or, just by yourself. You'll find there are miracles all around you, especially as the spring season unfolds. Whether or not you're able to identify the wonderments upon which you gaze, we'll bet it will make you feel better inside your head...and your heart!

The photo above is of the very common (in the southeastern United States) sweet Betsy trillium (*Trillium cuneatum*) that Michael photographed along the Chattahoochee River in Atlanta recently. This trillium is also known by the common names of whip-poor-will flower, large toadshade, purple toadshade and bloody butcher. Whew! What a panoply of common names! While the Preserve does have a nice diversity of trillium species, this is not one found on property.

Photo by: M. Skinner

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From the Trailhead: Evaluating Everything...Now

By Michael Skinner, executive director

Time to take Stock

I'm fairly certain that anyone who reads this message in this issue is well aware of the pandemic sweeping the planet. If you're not then you must be living under a rock—which, as it turns out, may be one of the best places to socially distance yourself. LOL! On the last page of this publication we're offering a new protocol for successful social distancing.

What I'd like to offer is that while it's somewhat sad, and distressing, that we needed a pandemic to help us realize what things really do matter, it can also be something that engenders thoughtful introspection. In that, I mean everyone is assessing, or re-assessing what is valuable on the one hand, and on the other, what is meaningless. I won't bore you with a spreadsheet of what I believe fits into those two categories but I (and my wife Beth) have been having conversations centered on this very subject. We have personal family health issues we're dealing with related to her parents and thankfully, that has eased up. (Unrelated to the pandemic.) Knock wood! Rather we've been communicating with family and friends through, and with the wonders of, modern technology. We just met with some friends recently in Atlanta at our favorite virtual wine bar (Facetime) and it was really fun.

My main thought here is that each of us should, and probably are, taking stock of how fortunate most of us are by being in good health and being able to practice proper social and medical protocols to keep us healthy. The Trust team and its families are to in good health and all of the critters at the Nature Center are also doing well. We are physically staffing the Nature Center with one-person-at-a-time on duty while the rest work from home. This way, we can maintain animal care and administrative duties with very little interruption.

An Amazing Declaration from Many About Getting Outdoors:

We have been, for the twenty years of the Trust's existence, coaxing, cajoling, inviting, teasing and otherwise offering myriad ways for BMP members to get outdoors with us. There is now, virtually no better time than to get outdoors and enjoy the wonderful psychological calming and brain stimulating effects of the natural world. And it's so easy to maintain proper distances while in the great outdoors.

So what fascinates me is that many people are still nervous about going outside, but with common sense behavior being out on a trail can be prescriptive. I've been hearing more and more of the public discourse suggesting that getting outdoors is one of the best things you can do to release tensions from being cooped up indoors with the present pandemic. Sadly, the national parks (some state parks too) have had to close because it was becoming too much of good thing for folks as they were going to the parks, in droves, which then of course, surprise, surprise, caused overcrowding and improper social distancing. What I'm suggesting then is that the Preserve is the perfect place for solitude and social distancing because we have 4,400 acres of private land. So if anyone would like to engage Trust staff in, for example, a wildflower walk or fly-fishing or photography or just being zen with nature, ring us up and we'll do our best to accommodate your requests.

Stay well Friends!



Education Mewsings: Re-Wilding Your Garden

By: Rose Wall, Co-Senior Naturalist/Education Director

Former BMP homeowner Charlie Harris put it beautifully by saying, “When we are all gone, what we’ve planted in our backyards will be our true legacy here at Balsam. As your plants grow and spread, so will your lasting (beneficial) impact on this land.”

Most everywhere you turn these days you hear about how bees, butterflies or other important pollinators are in trouble. The plight of pollinators is on most everyone’s mind, whether you are a farmer, a biologist or just a backyard gardener who enjoys seeing butterflies.

Here at the Trust, we want to help you help pollinators, not to mention, all the other wildlife that calls Balsam Mountain Preserve home! And, you don’t have to go any further than your backyard to make a big impact!

One important way to promote healthy wildlife is through landscaping with native plants. Non-native, exotic plants can be pretty, but in many scenarios, they are usually useless to native wildlife. And they are, often harmful, if not downright devastating, to native communities. For

example, the princess tree (*Paulownia tomentosa*) brought here from China for its beautiful blooms, has become invasive in our forests, usurping habitats of native plants and often, other living things that depend on those plants.

Plants brought from other parts of the world can also have dangerous hitchhikers, one example being the Asian fungus (*Cryphonectria parasitica*) that pretty much rendered the American chestnut tree functionally extinct. Others include the hemlock woolly adelgid (*Adelges tsugae*), a small bug that is killing our native hemlock trees en masse. So, if you



A female ruby throated hummingbird is just one of myriad species that benefit from people planting native species such as the native columbine from which this bird is nectaring.

want to satisfy the birds and the bees and the trees—Go Native! It's also easier on you – native plants have evolved to exist where you live, meaning lower maintenance is needed to keep them happy.

On the Preserve growing native gardens and attracting native wildlife is a part of the culture. We just hope to make it simpler for you. Based on your feedback, one thing you want is easy access to plants that are on the BMP Approved Plant List. In order to help you we now host an annual spring plant sale. We work with four area plant nurseries that grow native plants exclusively, to give you a selection of over 40 different species, offering new options each year. In the first two years, you all purchased more than 1,000 plants!

We see this as a win-win-win-win, supporting: • The Trust and its environmental education/land stewardship mission • You! We hope that adding these beauties to your garden brings you joy • Your local pollinators, birds and other critters that come to visit • Your community - by purchasing from small-scale, local growers. The plant sale is just one way we hope to make 're-wilding' your gardens easy and fun.

Be on the lookout for our 2020 Garden Club announcements as well as workshops and other information about enhancing the now National Wildlife Federation's designation of the entire Preserve being a community-wide Certified Wildlife Habitat. YAY!



And it is indeed that time of year again when you'll have a chance to see black bears, including moms with cubs. They're out foraging for native plants and animals to feed their big appetites. Please consult with your Trust staff members to learn how to deal with these amazing creatures.

Trust Press Release

- ◆ *Are You Having Trouble Maintaining Proper Social Distances (minimum of 6 feet) during this challenging time?*
- ◆ *Are your Family and Friends Staying Too Long in Your Bunker? Or, are threatening to come 'visit'?*

*Worry No Longer! The Answer is in the Woods!
And you ask, "What is the answer?"*

Ramps!



Ramps...most effective when eaten Raw!

Yes, that's right, ramps will help you maintain an amazing social distance from just about anyone, either by 'freshening' your breath or 'off-gassing' through your skin. And if you eat them raw during the pandemic, you may never have anyone approach you, now, or ever again!

Ramps are especially good at keeping proper social distances from:

- *Your in-laws, exes, etc.*
- *Divorce attorneys*
- *Pesky bill collectors and door-to-door salespeople (are there any of these left?!)*
- *People in line at the grocery store*
- *Friends or family who just won't leave*

And added benefits include: antioxidants; reducing inflammation, cholesterol, blood pressure, and lowering the risk of heart disease and stroke; may protect against certain cancers; may promote healthy digestion, lower blood sugar levels; promote brain function and fight infections.

Ramps are in season now so find a patch and harvest them in a sustainable fashion. You just may live longer. Note: to harvest sustainably, call Michael at the Nature Center.

This message is brought to you by the Southeastern Association of Ramp Foragers (SARF); Ramps are one of the amazing and delicious wild members of the onion family.