

The Potent Teller

Newsletter of the Salal Chapter of the Washington Native Plant Society
serving Northern Snohomish, Skagit and Island Counties

November 2017

www.wnps.org/salal/

Issue 4-17



Welwitschia mirabilis

Brenda Cunningham

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Brenda Cunningham

I just returned from Namibia in southwest Africa, certainly the driest place I have ever been and the furthest from home. I went hoping to see some of the large mammals we associate with that continent: elephants, zebras, giraffes, lions. I saw those, but I was also pleased to see an ancient plant called *Welwitschia mirabilis*. A Welwitschia grows just 2 leaves in its lifetime. These leaves grow larger every year and split into fibrous segments, making it look like the plant has many leaves. But they are the same 2 leaves with which it started, in many cases hundreds of years ago. One venerable specimen I saw was estimated at 1,500 years old! These plants live in a landscape that feels and looks like the opposite of the Pacific Northwest. Much of Namibia has not had significant rain in 6 years. Rather than a temperate rainforest, hundreds of square miles in Namibia are covered in something called "lichen fields" and devoid of all but a few plants of size. And the geology of Namibia is very stable. Its volcanoes are so old they are difficult to recognize as such. Granite mountains have weathered to rounded shapes resembling sandstone. I felt I could not be in a place more different from home.

We live on an amazing planet, where in one place a tiny seed develops into a towering Douglas-fir hundreds of feet tall, shedding millions of needles in its lifetime, and in another place a seed produces a plant that lives just as long, or longer, growing no more than 5 feet tall, rarely

Salal Chapter Fall Events

Saturday, November 4, 10 - 1 – winterize the nursery, pruning, planting, weeding.

Thursday, November 16, 10 - 1 – pruning, planting, weeding.

Saturday, November 18, 10 - noon – chapter meeting, Padilla Bay Interpretive Center: *“Conservation of Washington’s Rare Native Plants”* by Wendy Gibble, Program Manager, Washington Rare Plant Care and Conservation (Rare Care). Also, Chapter officer election.

experiencing rainfall, yet thriving just as well. By looking for these botanical wonders in far off places I learn to better appreciate the incredible plants I see every day and not take them for granted. What other wonders exist right in our backyards?



Welwitschia mirabilis

Brenda Cunningham



Salal Plant Sale October 2017 Brenda Cunningham

SALAL NATIVE PLANT GARDEN UPDATE

Brenda Cunningham, Coordinator

We held our fall plant sale on October 28th. We had a diverse array of species available, including some species we have not offered before. Several people have been propagating plants at home for us and generously donated them for the sale. Sale day was glorious, with skeins of snow geese overhead. We had a good crowd with specific plants in mind and many went home happy. Gross sales were more than \$4,000, by far the best fall sale yet. We still have plenty of trees and shrubs, so let your friends know to mark their calendars for our spring sale on May 5th 2018.

The garden is in good shape for the winter, but I would like to have a few work parties to put the garden and nursery to bed. We will do some pruning, turn the tables in the nursery on their sides, and plant a few shrubs in the garden. We will gather on the following dates in November from 10 am to noon each time:

Saturday, November 4th
Thursday, November 16th
December, TBA

If the weather is nice and there is more to do in the garden in December I will contact volunteers via email with more dates this winter. If you would like to be on the list of volunteers to receive notices, please drop me a line at nativegarden@fidalgo.net.

See you in the garden! – Brenda

The Salal Chapter Native Plant Garden and nursery are located behind the Master Gardener Discovery Garden at the NW Research and Extension Center on Memorial Highway (16650 State Route 536), west of Mount Vernon.

UPCOMING SALAL CHAPTER MEETINGS

Saturday, November 18th, 10 – noon, Padilla Bay Interpretive Center.

Elections for Chapter Officers will be held at the meeting. The following people will stand for re-election for 2018:

Brenda Cunningham, Chapter Chair
 Kerman Kermoade, Chapter Vice-Chair
 Jean Birdsall, Chapter Treasurer
 Kathy Murray, Chapter Secretary

There will be an opportunity for nominations from the floor for these positions.

“Conservation of Washington’s Rare Native Plants”

Wendy Gibble, Program Manager, Washington Rare Plant Care and Conservation (Rare Care)

Washington’s rare plants comprise nearly 15% of the native plants species in the state and are found in just about every habitat type and county, yet they are seldom encountered and therefore poorly documented. With the continuing expansion of the state’s population, degradation of habitat, and changing weather patterns due to climate change, these plants face an uncertain future. In this talk, Wendy Gibble will present an overview of the conservation efforts to protect rare native plants by the Washington Rare Plant Care and Conservation (Rare Care) program and will introduce some of the rare plants of Washington.

Wendy Gibble is the Manager of Conservation and Education at the University of Washington Botanic Gardens. In her 12 years with the program, she has conducted research on rare plant ecology, overseen the seed banking program, and propagated rare plants for outplantings. She completed her master’s thesis in plant ecology at the University of Washington.





Trillium ovatum April 2017 Jim Duemmel

Trillium

Jim Duemmel

One of our welcome spring blooms is *Trillium ovatum*, in English, just plain trillium. When it's freshly opened the flowers are pure white; as they age they turn red. The Pacific-Northwest hosts two other species in the genus, purple trillium, *T. petiolatum*, and giant trillium, *T. chloropetalum*, but you must travel east or south to see them.

Trillium plants are distinctive, with parts in threes or multiples of three. The blooms of our local trillium are wonderfully suited to illustrating the parts of a flower. The petals, sepals, stamens and pistil are clearly separated, easily identified. There are no complications here.

If you look closer there are things to discover. The seeds of *Trillium ovatum* can be hard to find. They are often carried away by ants into the ant's mound where the ants consume an oily growth (elaiosome) on the seed – and leave the seed discarded in a favorable environment within the mound – to the mutual benefit of the plant and the insect. The elaiosome is usually much larger than the seed.

Usually you see trilliums in the woods as single plants, separated at least a slight distance from other individuals. However, grown in your yard they often form tight clumps. In yards I have seen masses of fifty blooms tightly clumped together. Then it's reasonable to bring cut flowers indoors - wild plants are best left untouched.

All plants are remarkable for the consistency of their growth patterns. But there are exceptions, and trilliums have a reputation for a particular exception: doubling the flower parts. Many years ago one Friday evening in the Bellingham Public Library, there on the shelves I found a very early edition of one of the famous "100 Hikes" books authored by Manning and Spring. Intrigued, I

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brought it home and scanned the contents that evening. The introduction contained a photo of a trillium with six petals, twice the usual number. The text noted that such blossoms were not unusual. My immediate reaction: "What? I've looked at hundreds and hundreds of trilliums and I never saw anything like that!" The very next morning, hiking a trail near Swift Creek, I saw just such a plant – petals doubled. I was so surprised that I did not think to check whether other flower parts might also be doubled.

As a part of all the recent changes in plant taxonomy, the Lily Family has been decimated. In the upcoming revised Hitchcock you will find trilliums listed in the Bunchflower family, the *Melanthiaceae*, along with death camas, corn lily and beargrass.

Our well used Hitchcock is a one volume condensation of a five-volume work. That five-volume work contains comments not seen in the smaller book. About the claim, sometimes made but not entirely true, that gathering a trillium flower will kill the plant, the authors suggest: "If the admonition was invented to discourage picking of the flower, the statement should be that the picker, not the picked, will die, but justice rarely is so obvious."



Trillium ovatum May 2017 Jim Duemmel

Check it Out!

The Salal Chapter is now on Facebook!

<https://www.facebook.com/Washington-Native-Plant-Society-Salal-Chapter-1042870195817684/>



2018 Calendar



Washington Native Plant Society

Now on Sale at WNPS: <http://www.wnps.org>

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