

“Man living  
in harmony  
with nature.”

– B.W. Wells



# Rockcliff Farm Quarterly

THE B.W. WELLS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

## ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL ANNUAL MEETING!

About 110 members and guests attended the B.W. Wells Association annual meeting Sunday, September 20. Jimmy and Alice Ray and family and friends again provided a fabulous Pig Pickin’.

The highlight of the meeting was the presentation by Julie Moore, endangered species biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. She knew B.W. and Maude Wells personally and recounted several anecdotes about her experience with them. She emphasized the importance of protecting Rockcliff Farm and places like it, pointing out that once a natural area is given over to development it is gone forever.



Guest speaker, Julie Moore.

Election of board members and officers largely consisted of those with expiring terms agreeing to continue for another term. We have one new board member, Pamela Andrejev, who has served on the membership committee for a number of years and will now serve as chairwoman of the committee. Bill Williams decided to step down as Treasurer after serving several terms. Bill has done an outstanding job and we are in his debt for doing a very competent job for all of those terms. Joe Paulonis was elected as treasurer and we look forward to his efforts.

President John Pelosi gave the annual report (See page 4 of newsletter). Johnny Randall provided a free raffle of several wildflowers donated to the association by the N.C. Botanical Garden.



## UPCOMING EVENTS

### NOVEMBER 2009

Saturday, Nov. 7 (2pm – 6pm)  
Location: Rockcliff Farm  
Fall color day for camera buffs.

### JANUARY 2010

Saturday, Jan. 28 (9am – 12pm)  
Location: Chamber of Commerce,  
Wake Forest, N.C.  
Seminar on Ecosystems  
of North Carolina.

### MARCH 2010

Saturday, March 27 (9am – 4pm)  
Location: Rockcliff Farm  
Heritage Day!  
See trout lilies, Hepatica and  
other spring ephemerals. Games,  
guided tours and more.

Rockcliff Farm is open  
for guided tours.  
Please see the website  
for contact information.

## WAKE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEETS AT ROCKCLIFF FARM

Thirty plus members of the Wake County Historical Society met at Rockcliff Farm on Sunday, September 27. Rockcliff Farm is located within the Falls Lake State Recreational Area and is the retirement home of B.W. Wells and his wife, Maude.

Members listened to John Pelosi, Society Board Member and President of the B.W. Wells Association, describe the importance of Dr. Wells' work in the State during his 35 years as Professor and Chairman of the Botany and Plant Pathology Department at N.C. State College. Wells documented eleven different plant communities across the state and was a leading figure in the development of the field of ecological botany. Wells documented his findings about distinct plant communities in the book, "The Natural Gardens of North Carolina". First published in 1932, the book is still published today and is considered to contain the most easily read and understandable descriptions of the state's native flora.

Dr. Wells and Maude bought an old farm located along the Neuse River in 1950 and moved there in 1954. Over the 24 years he lived there he transformed it from the old farm to a nature preserve, documenting over 500 different types of plants including 320 different wildflowers. The north-facing rock cliffs along the Neuse created the

environment for plants unique to this area including a stand of mountain laurel. The wildflowers and geology of Rockcliff Farm are truly remarkable.

Wells died in 1978 and his friends and colleagues memorialized him by forming the B.W. Wells Association, a non-profit, charitable organization. Though the organization became inactive as members got older it has been revitalized through the work of Ranger Brian Bockhahn and the Wake Forest Garden Club. Since 2001 it has held special events for children and their families and other organizations, gotten the property listed on the National Register of Historic Places, carried out several restoration projects on the buildings and has installed new professional display cases around the property and along the 5 miles of trails running throughout the 83 acres of Rockcliff Farm. One important enterprise is the restoration of many different kinds and amounts of wildflowers on the preserve. The association partners with the N.C. Botanical Garden to accomplish this task. It is a "Friends Group" of the Falls Lake State Recreation Area and works with the park to carry out its mission of environmental education and interpretation.

—John Pelosi



## SUMMER WILDFLOWERS

At this time of year, hiking is not always pleasant. The chiggers are abundant along the grassy trails while ticks drop from the trees and shrubs onto the unsuspecting hiker. These nuisances can be avoided by using boats to navigate the local waters. To this end, the B.W. Wells Association organized a trip along Falls Lake on the last Saturday in July. The starting point was the canoe launch site at Shinleaf Park. This faced directly across the river from the southern bank of the B.W. Wells Park, so we paddled along the water between the Shinleaf and the Wells lands. Outward bound we stayed close to the Wells side enjoying the shade along the north-facing shoreline. At this time of year there were no wildflowers blooming along these north-facing banks. Such sites are favored by the spring ephemerals and shunned by the sun-loving summer flowers. Nevertheless we enjoyed seeing how the Mountain Laurels perched on the soapstone outcrops, and proceeded on to the landmark Zeagle's Rock, a ledge of metasedimentary rock that projects at a pronounced angle over the water. We paused there to give our artists time to sketch the scene. To my delight, I discovered some summer wildflowers on the east-facing slopes adjacent to the Rock.

The real treat came later, as we turned and paddled back along the Shinleaf banks. The summer flowers were blooming profusely along these south-facing slopes. No doubt they had been spurred along by the copious rains we have enjoyed following four years of drought. St. Andrew's cross, *Hypericum hypericoides* was proudly showing its odd-shaped blossom atop a scrubby plant rather like a huckleberry. It seems to prefer a rocky and well-drained base.

Then to my delight we found a large extent where the beautiful Square-stem marsh gentian grows. It, *Sabatia angularis* was an instant hit with everyone as it holds many lovely pink blossoms open at the same time. In my opinion this plant would be well worth propagating for the home garden. The bloom season is July and August and it does require well-watered soil.

We also spotted a large area with another of my favorite flowers—Meadow beauty or *Rhexia virginica*. I have collected seed and planted this in my home garden where it has flourished now for three years. The petals are lavender in color with strongly contrasting stamen of bright yellow. The really quaint parts though are the seedpods which are shaped like miniature urns. It is easy to grow, and requires little maintenance.

Exploring back at the launch site, we spotted a couple of young trees of Papaw, *Asimina triloba* with green fruit on the stems. Reputedly this was George Washington's favorite fruit as it grew in profusion along the Potomac, Delaware and Raritan Rivers. Few Americans seem to eat the fruit perhaps because it becomes too soft when ripe for shipping. However I had eaten it in my home



Clockwise: *Hypericum hypericoides*, *Rhexia virginica* and *Sabatia angularis*

country of South Africa where we called it Custard Apple. That should give you some idea of the texture of the pulp. (Note in South Africa the name Pawpaw is used incorrectly for Papaya.)

Along the edge of the road, and not in the woods, I was attracted to some clumps of a tall airy legume. The branches formed long delicate sprays with pretty violet blossoms. My large wildflower book identified this as *Lespedeza violacea*.

Since this trip, I have followed my own prescription of kayaking to view wildflowers and to get exercise. The Wake Forest Reservoir, a quiet stretch of water, is less than a mile from my house, making it easy to throw my kayak into the back of the pickup and visit the lake on the spur of the moment. The banks along the edge of the water are populated with more Tag Alders than I have ever seen anywhere else. An occasional Buttonbush sometimes succeeds in pushing its head through this overgrowth. The blossom resembles a multi-antennae Sputnik covered in white. As the white fades, the seedpods maintain the odd antennae along the surface. This is another plant worth having in a wet spot in the home garden. Oh, how I long to have a little creek running through my garden. Join us in August 2010 for a guided tour of the Reservoir, which is a fine example of a Piedmont wetlands ecosystem.

>> Continued on page 4.



## ANNUAL REPORT

During the last week of July as I cruised along the water's edge gazing at the flora along the bank, to my surprise, I spotted a white spike doubled over as if in pain. What I had imagined was a Virginia Snakeroot (*Aristolochia serpentaria*) based on the leaf shape, was in fact a Lizard's Tail. This was my first live view of *Saururus cernuus* in bloom. It is an aquatic plant that provides a habitat for invertebrates in the water that in turn are eaten by the fish and water birds. Strangely it is one of a class of plants that has no petals or sepals. The pistils and stamens spring naked from the stem.

My recommendation to you is to consider obtaining a lightweight inexpensive plastic kayak. It is easy to paddle, easy to transport, and will provide loads of fun if you have ready access to a body of water. And you will get to see wildflowers in bloom while avoiding the ticks and chiggers.



Boaters enjoying a day on the lake and a look at Zeagle's Rock.

President John Pelosi began the annual report by indicating that our membership now includes over 130 Life, Individual and Family memberships. Given that there are 32 Family memberships, we actually have at least 160 plus members.

Plans are underway to move forward with renovation projects for the buildings. Liz Ford and Hugh Nourse have planted several different kinds of wildflowers to add to existing stands. They are also developing strategies to outwit the deer and other creatures from eating them. Hugh and John met with Superintendent Scott Kershner to work out a plan for protecting certain areas from mowing so that the flowers have a chance to grow and be viewed.

Hugh Nourse's Education committee has vastly increased the number of events sponsored by the association over the next year. The schedule for these events will be published soon and will include hikes and canoe trips highlighting different wildflowers in their season. Family Days and events for photographers and artists will be featured.

Pelosi summed up the report by saying that each year the association has accomplished or completed certain things that serve as markers for its progress toward fulfilling its mission. At first it was Heritage Day, itself, marking the rebirth of the organization. Having Rockcliff Farm placed on the National Register of Historic Places is another significant marker. The purchase and installation of eleven professional display cases marked last year. This year the book "Natural Gardens of Rockcliff Farm" was published and Vickie Cumbee and Brian Bockhahn teamed up to produce highly professional displays for the display cases, pending approval from Superintendent Kershner and N.C. Parks and Recreation.

Pelosi concluded by recognizing Matthew Keith for completing his Eagle Scout project to create conditions along the power line area that will increase certain kinds of wildlife. Eric Meyers was also recognized for his efforts to monitor and protect the park.

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## MISSION STATEMENT

The B.W. Wells Association will strive to educate the public about B.W. Wells, North Carolina's first plant ecologist, and promote his conservation ethics. The Association will achieve its mission primarily by assisting the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to preserve, restore and interpret the unique cultural and natural resources at Rockcliff Farm, the site of Wells' retirement.





**Join today!**

**BENEFITS:**

- > Organized walks and lectures pertaining to the ecology, geology and botany
- > Maintained hiking trails
- > Interpretive displays
- > Meetings and newsletters
- > Environmental Education projects for students of all ages

STUDENT AND SENIOR **\$10**

INDIVIDUAL **\$15**

PATRON **\$50**

FAMILY **\$30**

CLUB/PARTNER ORGANIZATION **\$75**

LIFE MEMBERSHIP **\$100**

**BWWA, P.O. Box 1901  
Wake Forest, NC 27588**

**B.W. WELLS ASSOCIATION**

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Secretary, Jean McCamy  
Committee Chair, Hugh Nourse

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