

Naturally Kentucky

Spring 2003

Number 38



It is the mission of the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission to protect Kentucky's natural heritage by: (1) identifying, acquiring and managing natural areas that represent the best known occurrences of rare native species, natural communities and significant natural features in a statewide nature preserves system; (2) working with others to protect biological diversity; and (3) educating Kentuckians as to the value and purpose of nature preserves and biodiversity.

The Rare Plant Act - It's Official!

by Deborah White

Last April the rules for the Rare Plant Recognition Act made it through the scrutiny of the legislative review process and were approved. The regulations, which include the list of state endangered and threatened plants, can be viewed on our Web site (www.kynaturepreserves.org). We thank Charlie and Arlene Lapham for bringing Kentucky's need for a plant protection law to the attention of their legislator in Glasgow, Rep. Steve Nunn, who in turn proposed the original legislation. We must also applaud the role of Gov. Brereton Jones in signing the bill into law in 1994.

The statute specifically prescribes a four-year review cycle to consider possible changes that may be made to the lists under this law. However, a candidate for the list may be proposed at any time and commission botanists will research whether it meets the criteria for listing. Rarity can be difficult to assess – it can be a messy science, not because of the information that we have, but because of what we don't have. Grass and sedge species are difficult to identify and therefore often avoided or overlooked. Aquatic plants are difficult to collect unless you get wet or carry a boat in your backpack. For this reason, the number of known occurrences most likely under-represents the species in the wild. A Web site that is helpful in understanding how this information is used is www.natureserveexplorer.org, which is produced by the national organization that manages all natural heritage information for the United States (including the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission's).

Other factors that we consider in assessing the rarity of a species are distribution, the availability of habitat (a plant occurring in second growth forests versus a rare community like bogs or acid seeps), and its life history. Annuals, for instance, are usually less resilient than perennials. Orchids have complex associations with soil fungi that enable seeds to establish themselves, and may be a stumbling block in their dispersal and success. Some species such as lilies, trilliums and orchids are threatened by collectors. All information available on a species is weighed in determining whether to include it on the list of rare plant species.

Kentucky, in general, is not as botanically well-known as many other states. A plant may remain on the candidate list for several years while more information is gathered on its status before it can be added to the official list. We have recommended some changes that we would like to see to the original legislation, but for now, we are happy to at least see a law in place that officially acknowledges the importance of Kentucky's rare plants.

Pine Mountain Weekend Hikes

Here is a listing of upcoming hikes during the month of May.

These hikes will be guided and full descriptions of the trails covered and degree of difficulty is available online or by calling our office. All hikers must be preregistered for all hikes.

To register for the Pine Mountain Weekend hikes, contact Regional Preserve Manager Kyle Napier by phone at (606) 633-0362.

Please visit our Web page at www.kynaturepreserves.org to learn more about these and other hikes.

May 24 - 9 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Blanton Forest State Nature Preserve (SNP)

May 24 - 3 p.m. - 6 p.m.

Pine Mountain Settlement School

May 24 - 8 p.m. - 10 p.m.

Pine Mountain Settlement School

May 24 - 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Bad Branch Falls SNP

Springtime at Logan County Glade State Nature Preserve

by Byron W. Brooks
Stewardship Assistant

Springtime is a truly magical time of year at all of the preserves in our Commonwealth, and a diverse profusion of wildflowers awaits visitors to Logan County Glade State Nature Preserve in Russellville. The 41-acre preserve is predominantly a forested knob, but also features a limestone glade community characterized by thin soils and drought-resistant native grasses such as little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) and side-oats grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*). Many of the species found in a limestone glade community are remnant prairie species and are considered rare.

Along the preserve's half-mile loop trail the attentive hiker can observe shooting star (*Dodecatheon meadia*), and bicolor bird's foot violet (*Viola pedata*) in mid-April. On display later in the season is the striking pale blue Carolina larkspur (*Delphinium carolinianum*). This parade of color continues throughout the growing season. The trail winds through both the glade community and steeply uphill to the top of the knob.

Like all of our state nature preserves, Logan County Glade is a work in progress. Cedar removal and prescribed burns have been conducted at the site. The Commission is currently removing a non-native shrub *Ligustrum sinense*. This shrub, known commonly as privet hedge, is used as a landscape ornamental. Privet has escaped cultivation and is invading the glade openings at this preserve and threatening the native plant biodiversity. Efforts to eradicate this invasive weed are being carried out by KSNPC stewardship staff and volunteers.

A hike through the preserve offers one an opportunity to connect with our Commonwealth's natural heritage. Be sure to return in the summer and fall to view the yellows and purples of the coneflowers, asters and sunflowers. Logan County Glade State Nature Preserve is easy to find, located directly behind the Health Department on U.S. 68/KY 80 in Russellville. The preserve is open for hiking year-round, seven days a week, from sunup to sunset.



KSNPC photograph of *Dodecatheon meadia*.

Tribute to Kris Snyder

by Deborah White

We are sad to have to bring the news of the loss of a friend and colleague, Kris Snyder. Kris' contribution to the Commission's work as one of the guardians of our nature preserves in the mid-1990s was invaluable. Her work ethic and commitment to conservation were examples for all of us.

Kris seemed to be able to do whatever she attempted and had a spirit of self-reliance. When she left the commission, she started her own environmental consulting business working on natural resource management guidance for the National Guard. She was co-founder of a rock climbing association that promoted environmental ethics with a focus on the Red River Gorge. Rock-climbing, kayaking, and skiing were all mastered with enthusiasm. In Alaska, where she moved after Kentucky, she was a leader in the Nordic Ski Patrol. She clearly loved the outdoors.

The abrupt end of her life has left the conservation world deprived of her tireless passion, yet those same qualities ensure that her life's work will continue to influence management plans on many conservation lands around the country. Kris was tireless in her determination and focus on improving this planet and the people who live on it. She is missed by many who came to know and respect her.

Director's Notes

by Don Dott,
Executive Director

The March commission meeting was eventful for three preserve additions. A total of 569 acres were added at two preserves, Blanton Forest SNP (Harlan County) and Thompson Creek Glade SNP (Larue County). Thanks to Ron Scott for making these additions happen. And in less than two weeks after the quarterly meeting Ron Scott and I were privileged to visit with some more of Kentucky's finest – the Perry family of Casey County. Two generations of this stalwart family agreed to enter their forested lands in our registry program, committing to protect one of the best populations of one of our rarest wildflowers, least trillium (*trillium pusillum*). We were quite fortunate to find many of them in bloom for the registry ceremony on a bright spring day.

Working to promote the recovery of another very rare wildflower, we had an office staff "working outing" at Blue Licks State Park, State Nature Preserve. This site is home to the federally endangered short's goldenrod (*solidago shortii*). Its habitat was being shaded out by a proliferation of cedar trees and woody brush. Ten staff members worked cutting down the encroaching cedars, piling and burning them. We made a significant improvement, opening up the canopy to allow more sunlight to reach the short's goldenrod and increase its growth and reproduction. If you get a chance to visit Blue Licks State Park, be sure to visit the preserve area (right next to the museum) and if you are there in the fall when this plant flowers you can gauge if our efforts were successful.

On the fiscal front the first several months of 2003 have been unsettling time with all the uncertainty over the budget during the legislative session. KSNPC was quite fortunate and fared very well with our budget due to strong support from key members of the legislature. But these are still frugal times, and due to the state employee reduction plans of Gov. Patton, which the legislature adopted, we will be unable to fill an ecologist and a data position. We are also unable to hire interims, the seasonal workers we need to assist our field biologists and our stewardship staff. Without these extra hands our effectiveness is reduced. If you think you could help and have some spare time, please let us know. As I said before our volunteers are truly Kentucky's finest!

Finally, if you would like to know more about the work of the KSNPC I invite you to visit our Web site and look at our biennial report. This report is submitted every two years to the legislature and the governor's office. Due to budget restrictions we were unable to print and distribute it in hardbound, but the electronic version is available. It contains a thorough summary of our programs and accomplishments during the last two years, and the challenges we yet have ahead.

Land Protection Report

by Ron Scott
Land Protection Specialist

In March, the Commission approved the dedication of two significant additions to the state nature preserves system. The 90-acre Spalding Glade property, acquired from Joe and Norma Spalding, was added to our Thompson Creek Glade State Nature Preserve in Larue County. Prior to selling their property to the commission in January of this year, the Spaldings had been enrolled in the Natural Areas Registry program since 1989. The new addition contains a high-quality limestone slope glade community supporting a variety of prairie/glade plant species, surrounded by a large expanse of forested buffer. The new addition increases the size of the preserve to a total of 154 protected acres.

The Commission also dedicated 479 acres as an addition to the Blanton Forest State Nature Preserve in Harlan County. Acquired with the assistance of the Kentucky Natural Lands Trust, the latest addition contains high-quality second growth forest immediately adjacent to the old-growth section of the preserve. At 3,055 acres, Blanton Forest remains the largest state nature preserve in the Commonwealth.

Along with the expansion of the state nature preserves system, we have also recently added two new sites to the Natural Areas Registry program. In December, the Jefferson County Sportsman's Club enrolled 12 acres of their property, which contains an outstanding occurrence of the globally rare and state-endangered glade cress (*Leavenworthi exigua* var. *laciniata*). On March 27, the Weddle family of Casey County registered 73 acres of their farm, pledging to help preserve and protect one of the best populations of least trillium (*Trillium pusillum*) known to be found on private land within the state.

Established in 1984, the voluntary and non-regulatory Natural Areas Registry program is designed to honor and recognize owners of outstanding natural areas for their commitment to preserving some our state's most unique remaining habitats. There are 56 properties encompassing more than 5,000 acres currently enrolled across the Commonwealth.

Commission Presents Annual Awards

Every year, the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission presents awards to deserving individuals for protecting the Commonwealth's biological diversity and to honor volunteers. The following statements were made by Commission Chair Clara Wheatley in making the awards at our March 2003 meeting:

2002 KSNPC Biological Diversity Award: Dr. Guenter A. Schuster, a professor in the Department of Biological Sciences at Eastern Kentucky University, is our honored recipient of the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission's Biological Diversity Protection Award. He has been chosen for this award based on more than 20 years of personal effort to conserve biodiversity in the Commonwealth.

Dr. Schuster's conservation and research focus is aquatic systems and the organisms which inhabit them. He has cultivated a particular emphasis on caddisflies, freshwater mussels and crayfishes. Dr. Schuster's expertise is well known and he is a nationally recognized authority on each of these extremely diverse groups of aquatic organisms. His contributions to biodiversity protection are deeply rooted in his dedication to teaching, sharing information and his research work. Illustrative of his work are numerous publications, reports and presentations Dr. Schuster has written or co-authored. They are far too numerous to list, but the topics include investigations of mussels, crayfishes, dragonflies, fishes, caddisflies and aquatic community assessments.

Not content to rest on his already substantial accomplishments, his current projects include a scientific publication on Kentucky's crayfishes and a guide to the identification of the state's mussel fauna. Dr. Schuster readily shares information with the commission and anyone else in need of his expertise. He contributes to our rare species list, provides endless taxonomic and field assistance, and serves as a commission scientific advisor. Dr. Schuster has made major contributions to the protection of aquatic resources of both state and national significance, especially the Green River in Mammoth Cave National Park, Buck Creek, Sinking Creek and the Licking River. Another laudable attribute is that Dr. Schuster spreads his interests and work through the students he has taught. He has a wonderful ability to multiply his influence. Former students can be found pursuing conservation goals for state and federal agencies, including our own Ellis Lauder milk. Based on these numerous and significant accomplishments, the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission is privileged to present this award to such a deserving individual – Dr. Guenter A. Schuster.

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2002 KSNPC Volunteer Stewardship Award: The Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission is pleased to present this year its first Volunteer Steward Award. And we are particularly fortunate to find that we are unable to present the award to a single individual. Instead we have three individuals who are equally deserving of our appreciation and recognition for their long term contributions to the citizens of Kentucky.

The Commission is privileged to congratulate Martha and Darren Payne and Carol von Lancken for their generous contributions of time and resources in planning a series of highly successful service trips for members of the Cumberland Chapter of the Sierra Club. These three dedicated individuals have greatly benefited the commission, not just over the past year, but over the past decade. The efforts of this enthusiastic volunteer corps have enabled the commission to complete a number of projects critical to the protection of rare plants and animals, as well as ecological communities across the state. Their work helping build trails has also made these very special natural areas more accessible to the public.

There have been volunteer outings with different leaders from the Sierra Club, but Martha, Darren and Carol have worked most often with the Commission. By handling the recruitment and logistics, they have saved our staff many hours of work. They have provided highly motivated and deeply committed people, who in turn keep our staff motivated. We honor all the volunteer steward participants with this award, but dedicate the 2002 award to Martha, Darren and Carol. I invite you to come forward to receive our recognition for your contributions to our mission to protect and preserve the most outstanding natural areas of the Commonwealth.

How to contact the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission:

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