



TENNESSEE NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

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Aromatic Aster

By Donna Bollenbach

It's early November, and the aromatic aster in my front yard still looks spectacular. Aromatic Aster, *Symphyotrichum oblongifolium*, is one of the last wildflowers to bloom in its native range and the flowers usually last until the first frost. In the wild, it is found in rock outcrops and dry woodlands in middle and east TN along the Highland Rim, Cumberland Plateau Ridge and Valley, and Unaka Mountains. This plant is also a favorite for native landscapes, as it tolerates a range of growing conditions, including dry, rocky soils and full sun.

Aromatic aster, also known as Fall aster, is not only attractive and easy to grow but also plays a vital role as a nectar source for fall pollinators. Its blue-purple daisy-like flowers are a favorite among butterflies, skippers, and native bees. Moreover, it serves as the host plant for the Silvery Checkerspot butterfly larvae. Although the common name suggests its flowers

are fragrant, it is the leaves that give off a balsam-like scent reminiscent of a Christmas tree.

The aromatic aster is a perennial plant with composite flowers that are

1-1.5 inches wide, consisting of 25-30 blue-purple rays surrounding a yellow center disk. The plant's leaves are alternate, simple, oblong, and become smaller as they move up the stem. The stems of the aromatic aster are multi-branched, green to copper brown, and hairy.



Aromatic Aster, *Symphyotrichum oblongifolium*

In 2021, I purchased a small pot of this aster from the Reflection Riding Native Plant Nursery. Initially, I kept it in a container, but after a few months, I transferred it to the garden bed in front of my house where it receives afternoon sun. Within two years, it has grown into a rounded hedge, reaching a height of about 3 feet and a width of 5 feet. Despite its rapid growth, this aster plant is not aggressive and stays where I originally planted it.

TNPS Newsletter

This newsletter is a publication of the Tennessee Native Plant Society and is published four times a year, generally March, June, September, and December.

The Tennessee Native Plant Society (TNPS) was founded in 1977. Its purposes are to assist in the exchange of information and encourage fellowship among Tennessee's botanists, both amateur and professional; to promote public education about Tennessee flora and wild plants in general; to provide, through publication of a newsletter or journal, a formal means of documenting information on Tennessee flora and of informing the public about wild plants; and to promote the protection and enhancement of Tennessee's wild plant communities.

Dues for each calendar year are:

Individual/Family: \$20

Student: Complimentary

Institution: \$50

Life: \$250

Dues may be sent to:

Tennessee Native Plant Society

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Directors

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Bart Jones

Larry Pounds

Mitchell Kent

Newsletter Editor

Donna Bollenbach

President's Musings

As I write, we are rapidly approaching the time to go live with our new membership management program, Neon One CRM. This has been necessitated by a doubling of our membership in recent years. We are now much too large a group to be tracked with Excel spreadsheets.

Our team of Kim Sadler, Mitchell Kent, Bart Jones, and I have entered much of our 2023 data, created new forms, receipts, and letters, and are setting up our member portal. You can soon manage your membership online and correct or change your information whenever needed. No more wondering if you renewed yet or not. You will

receive reminder emails about the approaching expiration. Plus, you can always log in to check when you are due to renew.

The TNPS website will be unchanged, except there will be a "Login" button for you to use to check or make changes to your account. There will also be new Membership, Donate, and Conference Registration forms. PayPal will be eliminated. Payment will be made directly with a credit card. You will receive confirmation, receipts, and information more regularly via email. With an occasional survey, we will better understand what you want and need from TNPS. We are very excited about the possibilities this new management program offers and think you will be

pleased too. [More details on page 3.]

We do have some changes in our Board of Directors. Sadly, we lost Louise Gregory on October 11th to a fast-moving cancer. A service will be held for her in December in Parsons. When we have the details, they will be posted on the home page of our website.



Beautyberry, *Callicarpa americana*, showing beautiful neon berries for birds to eat through the fall and long after its leaves have fallen. My mockingbirds love it. Easily grown from cuttings.

In addition, Suzy Askew will be stepping down from the Board of Directors at the end of her term on December 31st. [More information on Louise Gregory and our annual elections is on page 7.]

The growing season has ended for this year, but there is still lots of color if we look for it. Evergreens, holly, and mistletoe will soon

decorate our homes for the holidays. Many deciduous plants have produced beautiful berries in red, orange, and purple. Do we have any Tennessee natives that bloom in cold weather? Witch hazel comes to mind. Are there others?

The officers and board of TNPS are busy working on plans for field trips, seminars, and a memorable conference for 2024. May we all enjoy the holidays with friends and family as we look forward to the new year with all its possibilities.

PS: The Service for Louise was held December 9th and as of publication of the newsletter, the Neon membership program is live.

Neon CRM, New Membership Management Program

Last summer it became obvious that we were not successfully managing our membership database with Excel spreadsheets. We thought that membership had doubled but were losing track of renewal dates and changes in email. Our Membership Chair was overwhelmed.

A Special Meeting was called to deal with the problem on August 22nd. Five membership management programs were compared and discussed. **NeonCRM** was selected by our officers and board of directors because it best fit our needs and was used by several other native plant groups, including Georgia. With unanimous approval by the Board a contract was signed.

Then began the arduous task of updating our membership list. We have done our best to be accurate but fear we may have lost track of a few members. If you feel that has happened to you, please send as much information as you can gather about payments and dates to info@tnps.org. We will investigate.

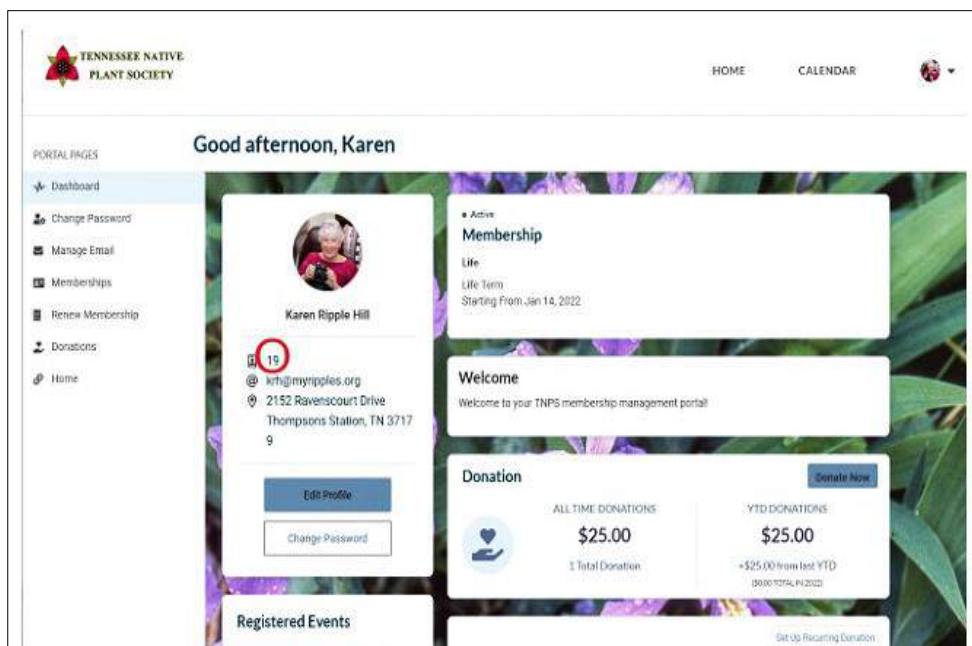
By the time you read this, **NeonCRM** will have been implemented. So, what does that mean for you the member?

NEW ONLINE FORMS: Forms for joining and renewing membership, making donations, and registering for our annual conference have been updated and streamlined. No more PayPal. No entering contact information twice. Just enter your contact info, select what you want, and then select either Credit Card or Deferred Payment (then mail a check or money order) and that's it! You will receive an immediate email receipt if you use a credit card.

MEMBERSHIP CHANGES: Beginning with your next membership renewal (and for all new members) membership will start and end with the date of the transaction or your current expiration date, whichever is latest. Memberships are not limited to starting on January 1st and ending on December 31st as they have been in the past.

If in the past you signed up for recurring membership payments, you must sign up again! Our credit card payment processor has changed, so your credit card information must be reentered. We do not store credit card information, that is done by the card processor which has the means of doing that securely.

MEMBERSHIP PORTAL: Current members should select Login at the top of any TNPS webpage. This will take you to a short form that prompts you to enter or (further down)



create a username and password for your TNPS account. The first time logging in you must create an account. Once you have logged into your account you can view your membership status and the information that we have on file for you. You may add a photo of yourself (subject to approval), edit your profile, change your password, unsubscribe to emails, renew your TNPS membership (if Individual/Family or Organization), and donate in support of TNPS or in tribute to someone special. In the future a list of events that require registration will be available along with a registration form. Be sure to select the top right image to Log out when finished.

Should you ever need it, each member is assigned a membership number which can be seen on the dashboard of your membership portal just above your email address and below your photo. (Look for the red circle in photo above.) This number may be required when registering for member only events.

CONFERENCE AND ANNUAL MEETING REGISTRATION: You must be a member of TNPS to attend our Conference and Annual Meeting. The registration form will be available on our website in early 2024 and in our March newsletter.

If you encounter any problems with our new forms, emails, or the membership portal, please report them at support@tnps.org. We will do our best to resolve problems and issues as quickly as we can, but please be patient with us. We are all volunteers learning a new system. If you are comfortable with IT systems like **NeonCRM**, please consider volunteering your assistance.

SAVE THE DATE: 2024 TNPS Annual Conference

June 7-9 2024

The Tennessee Native Plant Society is delighted to announce that its 2024 Annual Conference will be held at the beautiful Roan Mountain State Park in northeast Tennessee on Friday, June 7, Saturday, June 8, and Sunday, June 9. The 2,000-acre park is located at the base of Roan Mountain, which is not one mountain but a five-mile ridgetop of different elevations, each rich with plant life.

June in Roan Mountain is like spring in the valley. The temperatures typically stay in the 70s during the day and the 50s at night: perfect hiking and sleeping weather. If you are lucky enough to rent one of the cabins in the park, you enjoy a rocking chair on the porch, a full kitchen and bathroom, gas-powered heat, and a wood-burning stove. There are also campsites for tents and RVs.

Wherever you stay, Roan Mountain State Park and the surrounding area have so much to offer, and the TNPS Conference Committee is working to provide you with the best opportunities to explore the area's native wildflowers and scenic views. So far, we have arranged:

A visit to the Rhododendron Gardens, the Cloudland Hotel Site, and the Roan High Bluff Overlook. You can drive up to the recreation area at the top of the mountain; from there, you have several options. You can take an easy walk through the Rhododendron Gardens on a paved trail. If you're up for longer hikes, you can visit the historic Cloudland hotel site and the Roan High Bluff Overlook. There's also a gravel loop road that you can drive on to see wildflowers.

A scenic hike from Carver's Gap up to Round Bald, and if you feel up to it,

you can continue the adventure by taking the Appalachian Trail across Engine Gap to Jane Bald and then to Grassy Bald. Although mother nature can be unpredictable, you should be treated to stunning displays of the Catawba rhododendrons and flame

azaleas, as well as a variety of late spring and early summer wildflowers on the balds and in the gaps. On a clear day, the views of the mountains from the tops of the balds will also be spectacular.

A guided tour of the Miller Farmstead in Roan Mountain State Park. The Miller House was built in 1909 and is now preserved

as a reminder of the way folks used to live in these mountains. In addition to the historical value, the farmstead supports a large pollinator garden, including many milkweeds and asters. Above the homestead is a field that is a National Wildlife Federation certified wildlife habitat.

Apart from organizing field trips, the conference committee is coordinating with local experts to give presentations on Friday and Saturday evenings. As usual, we will be offering catered dinners on both nights. Additionally, talks and activities will be held on Saturday for those not going on the hikes. Our business meeting on Saturday evening will include a door prize drawing.

The March edition of the TNPS Newsletter will provide much more information about the conference, including how to register. Meanwhile, check out "Things to Know Before You Go" on the next page.



Flame Azaleas on Round Bald, photo by Janice Miller



Catawba rhododendron, photo by Donna Bollenbach



Common milkweed at Millers Farmstead, photo by Donna Bollenbach

THINGS TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- Roan Mountain is in a remote area in northeast Tennessee, just a few miles from the North Carolina border. According to the park website: "Wi-Fi service is not available at the cabins, but all cabins have landline telephones. Wi-Fi is available throughout the tent and RV campground. Wi-Fi service is also available for cabin guests at the conference center/game room at the park office. There is also a cell phone booster at the park office that Verizon Wireless customers may use to assist with cell service." (From personal experience, the Wi-Fi near the park office is excellent. Also, don't be surprised if you hike to the top of the balds and your phone starts ringing or beeping; the cell phone reception will go in and out as you traverse the mountains.)
- The closest grocery store is in the town of Roan Mountain, approximately 5 miles outside the park. You may want to buy your food before entering the park. If you take advantage of the TNPS catered dinners on Friday and Saturday nights, you will only need groceries for breakfast, lunch, and snacks. The park's camp store has a small selection of food and sundry items and the gift shop has a great selection of tee shirts and books.
- If you plan to hike on mountain trails, bring your hiking sticks. Even if the hike starts out easy, there will be steep or rocky sections. Additionally, the tops of the balds are colder than the valleys, especially in the mornings, so think "layers." Our hikes will be at elevations between 5,500 and 6,200 feet, so if you are not used to it, you may experience altitude sickness. One of the best ways to prevent or counter altitude sickness is to stay hydrated with electrolyte-enhanced water.
- If Mother Nature is unpredictable, she is wildly erratic in these times of global warming. When I visited the Smoky Mountains last spring, I noticed many spring ephemerals were flowering a week or more ahead of their typical bloom time. Therefore, while we can expect to see many native wildflowers, shrubs, and trees in the Roan Mountain area, what we see may differ from what we expect. Having visited Roan Mountain in mid-June, late June, and early July, I can attest that it is always magical.

BOOK YOUR LODGING



TNPS planned the conference to precede the Rhododendron Festival when the park gets very crowded, but spring and summer are always busy. Book your cabin reservations as soon as possible if you plan to stay in the park. Cabins can accommodate 4 to 6 people, so you are encouraged to share. The park also has RV and tent camping sites.

If you are not staying in the park, your next best option would be the Hampton Inn, 508 N. Franklin Road, Johnson City, TN, about 45 minutes from Roan Mountain State Park. TNPS has secured a block of rooms at a special group rate of \$139.00 per night for a room with 2 queen beds or a room with a king bed and a sofa bed. This is a savings of \$50 to \$100 for similar hotels in the area. This special rate will be available until May 10, 2024. You can book your room online or by telephone.

Below is a link for you to use to book a room online:

[Hampton Inn Johnson City Special TNPS Rate](#)

Call the hotel directly at (423) 929-8000 to book your room. You will need to reference Tennessee Native Plant Society group and dates needed to receive the group rate.

Again, the TNPS room block will be reserved through May 10, 2024, after which any unused rooms in the block will be released, room rates will increase, and booking is subject to availability.

Other lodging options (at regular rates) are available in Johnson City, TN (26 miles/35 minutes), Elizabethton, TN (19 miles/25 minutes), and Elk Banner, NC (16 miles/25 minutes).

Big South Fork, September 2

Fieldtrip report by Larry Pounds



Grass-leaved golden aster,
Pityopsis graminifolia

This was a visit to the lesser-known areas of Big South Fork, sponsored by the TNPS and Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning (TCWP). We started with the sunny area during the cooler part of the day. We visited a power line with a lovely prairie area. Many species were in flower. There were concentrations of flowers creating outstanding displays. I'm remembering particularly creeping aster

(*Eurybia surculosa*) and grass-leaved golden-aster (*Pityopsis graminifolia*).

The afternoon was spent going in and out of sandstone rockhouses. These spectacular natural rock formations create a rare habitat for plants. The habitat is highly shaded with sandy soils that are often moist. Plants that predominantly grow in this habitat are called rockhouse endemics. They tend to be rare because the habitat is rare. We saw six of these species. One of these, Cumberland sandwort (*Arenaria cumberlandensis*), has recently been taken off the federal list of species needing help to avoid extinction. This action was based on the successful protection of populations of this plant.

TCWP was instrumental in creating The Big South Fork National Park.

The Sands of Ghost River State Natural Area, September 23

Fieldtrip report by Allan Trently



On September 23, 2023, Allan Trently led an event onto the Walker Tract of the Ghost River State Natural Area. Not only was this a TNPS and a Division of Natural Areas event, but it was also an event to celebrate

National Public Land's Day. Fourteen people attended the event.

The Walker Tract was added to the Ghost River State Natural Area in 2022. This 90-acre tract includes the rare sandhill plant community (only known from Fayette County in Tennessee). While exploring the community, we saw the rare, state Special Concern sand post oak (*Quercus margarettae*) and Plukenet's flat-

sedge (*Cyperus plukenetii*). Sand post oak is only found in Fayette County in Tennessee. It was first discovered in the state back in 2001. According to the Guide to the Vascular Plants of Tennessee (2015), Plukenet's flat-sedge has "not been observed (in the state) since 1949". It was rediscovered in 2015.

A third rare plant found in the sandhill community is the state endangered capillary hair-sedge (*Bulbostylis coarctata*). This plant was once considered "possibly extirpated" in the state. The sandhill community contains many other plants that could be considered rare if not throughout the state than at least within West Tennessee.

After the field trip most participants ate a late lunch at the historic Cogbill's Store in La Grange.



Plukenet's flat-sedge,
Cyperus plukenetii



Sandhill Community

TNPS Mourns the Passing of Louise Gregory

Contributed by Bart Jones

On October 11, TNPS lost one of our Directors and friend, Louise Gregory. Louise was born and raised in Parsons, TN and was a fixture in my life from as early as I can remember. Louise and her family attended church with my family and it was through an invitation my mother extended to her to join me on one of my TNPS field trips that she discovered the society. In those early days, Louise would often ride with me to the trips, while we enjoyed each other's company and conversation. It didn't take long for Louise to start attending events and field trips on her own and she became quite close with several members. Soon enough, she was invited to sit on the Board of Directors, where she was always quick to give some valuable input and opinions.

Louise was imparted her love of flowers and nature by her mother, a passion she has passed on to her daughter Julianna. Julianna soon joined us on field excursions and became a member as well. As Julianna stated, "Through TNPS, Mom and I were able to share an interest outside of our common jobs or family. This connection made a huge difference in my adult relationship with my Mom." The pair quickly became fixtures at annual meetings and field trips and dear friends to many of us.



For those that knew Louise, you definitely were aware of her pride in being an educator. She was a teacher in the Decatur County school system for 27 years and instilled the drive to learn and pass that knowledge forward to both Julianna and her son Richard.

Louise was an avid photographer and loved to share her shots incorporated into cards for all occasions. I'm sure many of us received one of her cards, inspired by the personal touches and thoughts she put into them. I know I will miss them, and I will miss Louise.

Changes in TNPS Board of Directors and Upcoming Elections

In August Louise Gregory informed the TNPS Board of Directors that she had entered hospice care and needed to step down from her position as a Board member. Mitchell Kent was selected to finish the balance of her term (2023-2024), and he was approved unanimously by the Board at the regular September 26th meeting.

Terms for three members of the Board of Directors will end on December 31st: Bart Jones (West Division), Sue Bible (Middle Division), and Suzy Askew (West Division). Bart and Sue are running for reelection, but Suzy is retiring from the Board. Anne Balentine of Memphis has been nominated to replace her. If no one runs against any of these three candidates (Bart Jones, Sue Bible, and Anne Balentine) then they will be considered as approved by acclamation as members of the TNPS Board of Directors for the term January 1, 2024, until December 31, 2025.



When Are Dues Due?

Membership dues are due one year from the date of last payment. You will receive a reminder email 5 days before expiration asking you to renew. There is currently a grace period of 65 days in which you retain your membership status.

If you go into your membership portal (Login) you will see when your membership is due to expire. You may also renew your membership, if it is near expiration, and sign up for auto renewal if you wish. Payment is either by credit card or delayed payment if you mail a check. If there have been changes to your email or physical address, please update your membership.

If you have any questions or problems, contact support@tnps.org.

TNPS Newsletter
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