

The BURR

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Chestnut Partners are Key to Orchard Planting

Two partner groups supporting chestnut research were key to prepping and planting VATACF's first two research orchards in Northern Virginia between March 22 and April 10.

The Virginia Chapter provided staff biologist Robert Strasser and a baker's dozen members and supporters over four work days. The Mt. Zion Church Foundation, under President Brad Bradshaw, donated land and labor on their 48-acre conservation site within the viewshed of the historic Mt. Zion Church in Aldie.

The rolling pasture site to the east of the Bull Run Mountains drew 11 Mt. Zion volunteers over 2 days. They kept busy staking, tagging, and setting protective tree tubes for 250 nuts two weeks before planting the 1.3 acre site.

On April 5, 19 volunteers showed up to plant and mulch the first nuts in brisk working weather. The National Capital chapter of the Society of Consulting Foresters sent four foresters, thanks to Jim Culbert. Continuing the TACF tradition of cross border help, Maryland member and orchard donor Harriett Crosby came to plant the first backcross nuts from local pollinations on the Fauquier County farm.

Thanks to Roland Farm manager Lewis Edwards, and four members of the staff, the gently sloping knoll had been cleared and rototilled before the first volunteers arrived to prep the orchard late in March. A total of 203 chestnuts, including check plantings of Chinese and pure American to provide a benchmark for blight

resistance were set in place. The weather defied predictions on each planting day, allowing for lunch and fellowship between new friends.

This year's Northern Virginia orchard and planting efforts were supported by a challenge grant from a local foundation to encourage other Virginia landowners to participate by donating suitable orchard sites throughout Virginia Piedmont within three years. The orchards are expected to remain in place for decades to test several generations of trees in order to select for ever improving levels of resistance. The best will serve as mother trees to help produce the millions of nuts that are needed for successful reintroduction into the wild.



L to R: Kim Schafer, Lewis Edwards, Andrew Fisher
snug in chestnut seeds

Lest any chestnut supporters regret a lost opportunity this season, the infant orchard at Mt. Zion still needs a deer fence. Watch the website at vatacf.org, or call the chapter office at (540) 364-0364 for updates on Orchard Work Days.

Forest Dynamics Subject of March Meeting



Ted Harris, from the 500 Year Forest Foundation, at the recent Charlottesville meeting

The Ivy Creek Foundation near Charlottesville hosted the VATACF Spring member meeting which drew 46 members and guests from as far as Richmond and Roanoke.

With the exploration of ecosystems that blight resistant chestnut must return to as its theme, the meeting led off with a presentation by Ted Harris, president of the 500 Year Forest Foundation. His organization seeks easements on tracts that can become old growth segments of Eastern upland forest from owners interested in conserving these rich but threatened habitats.

Forest researchers and volunteers working with the Foundation help owners inventory and protect their forest habitat against exotic

invasives in exchange for giving up timbering income. A slide show of the three properties currently under easement was well received. A habitat study detailing new challenges in the forest by PhD candidate Katie Burke, and a summary of the current state of chestnut restoration research by UVA biology professor Dr. Henry Wilbur followed Virginia TACF Board member Wayne Bowman's presentation on chestnut breeding at Lesesne State Forest. Virginia chapter President George Thompson summarized the urgency of rapid progress toward establishing locally adapted breeding lines in orchards across the state, a stance that was echoed by Nature Conservancy forester Jean Lorber of the Charlottesville office. Lorber called the chestnut "the missing link in the Eastern hardwood forest."

Energized by the presentations, Madison County Master Naturalist Kim Johnson Smith, and her husband Jim agreed to contact local volunteers from among the interested guests with a view toward locating and pollinating surviving native chestnuts this Spring. Local members can reach Kim at jadam@rcn.com.

For more breaking news about Virginia Chapter events, log on to www.vatacf.org

TACF 'Target' Tree Returns to Jefferson Plantations

Citing its "promise to restore the lost beauty of the forest" that surrounded the site where Jefferson played as a boy, national TACF board Development Chair Jay Mills delivered a 7 foot seedling for replanting on the east lawn at Monticello to kickoff the plantsman and President's 265th birthday celebration, Sunday April 13.

"This tree has the target level of resistance" we have been striving for, Mills explained to assembled Jefferson Foundation staff, chapter members of TACF and The Nature Conservancy, significantly increasing its chances of living with the blight into maturity. It is the first selected B3FC3 tree released from the Meadowview Research Farm.

One of its original parents is Chinese, said Mills, a subspecies that co-evolved with the fungal blight that devastated American trees without immunity. Because resistance is a recessive trait, it has taken TACF researchers almost 20 years and 6 generations of trees bred back to different American survivors to select those few with the desired double dominance and American characteristics.

"Forests have a great burden we have brought to them", Mills continued, citing imported pests and diseases that attack major forest trees like ash, oaks, hickory, dogwood and Eastern hemlock. Jefferson himself was actually the first to import Asian trees.

Mills pointed out that the three native American parents of the vigorous seedling came from different areas of Virginia, one being from Mt. Rogers, the highest point in Virginia.

"We are looking for a critical mass of nuts in the forest so extras will

spread," he said, as our knowledge increases and backcross breeding continues to create more locally adapted American trees with even greater levels of resistance to pass on.

"Survivors in the woods are waiting," Mills concluded, "for the seeds from our trees to grow. It's the type of thing we think Jefferson would do."

Dan Jordan, President of the Jefferson

Foundation, expressed pleasure that Monticello could participate in restoring the forest of Jefferson's time, and invited guests to share in the day-long celebrations.

Later the same day Jay Mills traveled with Virginia Education Vice-President Kathy Marmet to plant a grove of 3 backcross seedlings on a rolling site at Poplar Forest, Jefferson's lovely mini Monticello near Roanoke. Ms. Marmet gave a presentation to visitors and TACF members gathered for the ceremony and birthday celebration.



TACF national and state Directors, family and Monticello garden staff flank the new chestnut on the east lawn below Jefferson's home.

Chestnut Story Gets Out and Around Last Winter

While chestnuts sleep, their roots grow deep. Members used the winter lull in planting and pollinating activity to assess new trees or spread the word on chestnut restoration to audiences throughout the state.

The Virginia Board of Directors met January 25th and 26th in Staunton, Virginia to plan the year's activities. Maryland chapter President and National Board liaison Essie Burnworth was an honored guest. Directors agreed that the chapter would share the salary costs and expertise of biologist and orchard manager Robert Strasser with the Maryland chapter to allow swift startup of the research orchards donated by Virginia landowners. New Board members met each other and agreed to do outreach presentations within organizations they represent to foster chestnut restoration.

Meetings were held at the Virginia State Arboretum at Blandy to discuss the resumption of chestnut research, including 'Nanking' and Spanish chestnut on the grounds. It was agreed to start on a backcross orchard this year.

Meadowview Research Director Fred Hebard came north on February 7th with a study group from the farm to assess local survivors in Fairfax, Fauquier, and Loudoun counties. Brian Smith and Jack LaMonica of the Location committee guided the group to trees with potential for inclusion in this year's backcross program. On February 9th Metro area volunteers heard Dr. Joseph Nassif of

Arlington updated us on his plans to hold a Chestnut Festival next Columbus Day in Rowlesburg, WV. His son, Thomas Nassif, a local composer and documentary filmmaker, is working on a chestnut film to be shown at the festival. Mr. Nassif agreed to include footage from Virginia chapter activities this season to further publicize our efforts, making the final film useful to chapters throughout the Mid-Atlantic.

Visiting TACF Science Cabinet head Dr. Kim Steiner and Northern Appalachian Regional Coordinator Sara Fitzsimmons joined national TACF Board President Dick Will at the Chinese Embassy, where First Secretary for Science and Technology Jiangye Cao heard their request for support to visit chestnuts in the wild, and for joint research on wild chestnut pathogen and habitat. TACF scientists will attend an international chestnut conference hosted by the Chinese this September in Beijing.

In March, Virginia chapter Secretary Deborah Fialka appeared before the Fairfax County Tree Commission to ask for cooperation from County agencies in finding and preserving local trees for breeding purposes. She was a guest on a Fairfax cable television program called Business Beat, emphasizing the genetic importance of surviving trees hidden in patches of woodland throughout the suburbs. As a result, the public access station asked to present some of our activities on the local children's show in May.

Celebrate All Things Chestnut for the 25th Anniversary

Virginia, with 550 miles of the Appalachian Trail within its borders, is participating in not one, but two TACF celebrations at either end of the state to mark 25 years of progress in chestnut research and restoration within its borders.

Home to the main complex of 3 chestnut research farms at Meadowview, and with 2 new orchards just planted in Northern Virginia, state chapter volunteers have plans to energize members and new supporters from across the state with a full menu of planned events and opportunities to support chestnut during the coming year. They fall into several categories.

Volunteer Training

Education Director Kathy Marmet will hold Location and Identification workshops at the State Arboretum at Blandy, near Winchester, on May 3. A week later their services may be needed at the Garden Fair at Blandy Arboretum May 10 and 11, where Virginia chapter members will man an information and sales booth both days.

On May 31, a field id segment of the training will take place when Board member Wayne Bowman hosts a tour of Va. Dept. of Forestry chestnut plantings at Lesesne State Forest in Nelson County.

In late May or early June, the website at vatacf.org will list Robert Strasser's popular Pollination Training workshops.

Pollination, Inoculation, and Harvest

Early in May trained volunteers will seek out new trees with potential to join the breeding program in new areas across the state. So far a dozen trees have been selected in Fauquier and Loudoun Counties. Because of the short breeding season pollination teams will be needed in every county where trees are



found.

By early June volunteers will be monitoring selected trees to bag between June 7 and 15, with pollination following 10 days later.

An Elderhostel program to inoculate trees at Meadowview from June 1 to 6 is full, thanks in part to Virginia chapter response to the website posting. Harvest is likely to cluster around the week of the Fall equinox in September.

We are asking members and other chestnut supporters to Walk a Mile for the Chestnut on any section within the state, a perfect opportunity for any outdoor group to tune in to the presence of remnant chestnut populations along the way.

25th Anniversary Events

Kickoff for the Appalachian Trail observance through the heart of the American chestnut range will be the Trail Days festival in Damascus, Va. a 3-day gathering that starts May 16th. The

American Chestnut Foundation will man an information and chestnut sales booth open for the whole festival. Those in Southern Virginia interested in working can call Meghan Jordan in Ashville at (828) 281-0047 or by email at meghan@acf.org. 25th Anniversary mementoes will be given out to each participating hiker.

Participants will be able to log on the acf.org website and add their own miles to the total walked during the calendar year. This is a great beginning project for local Scout troops and other outdoor organizations.

If vacations carry you out of state, any miles from Maine to Georgia count. A member from each participating chapter along the Trail will pass a chestnut torch along at a series of festivals planned along the 1,500 mile route.

By the time trees are flowering on June 7, Virginia members will support the Maryland chapter at the Harpers Ferry Festival in West Virginia. The historic confluence of the Potomac and Shenandoah rivers is also headquarters for the Appalachian Trail Conservancy. Members are invited to a ceremony at ATC headquarters; and a TACF display will be open for the duration of the Saturday event. Hikes to nearby trees on the Virginia side of the Shenandoah River will be led by the ATC.

Chapter Events

On April 27, the Audubon Naturalist Society of Leesburg will hear VATACF tell the chestnut story at the Rust Center from 12-3 pm.

On July 4th, State chapter members are invited back to Lynchburg to help celebrate Independence Day at Poplar Forest where TACF backcross seedlings were planted last Saturday. President Jefferson's attendance is promised.

We return to Blandy throughout the season to help with orchard reestablishment and during the Arbor Day Festival in October.

Hold out Saturday, October 4th to attend the VATACF Annual Meeting, whose location is still to be decided.

To support the next stage of chestnut restoration, or to register, for specific events, get the latest information on the 2008 25th Anniversary season by calling chapter headquarters at 540-364-0364 weekdays. Web users should check the Virginia chapter website at vatacf.org, or the state chapter links on that national website at acf.org.

On April 4, TACF President Marshal Case visited Wise County on Arbor Day to participate in Operation Springboard, the first Virginia plantings of native chestnut to be used in forest restoration to reclaim coal mine spoil.

George Thompson and Kathy Marmet spoke to Fauquier and Loudoun landowners of the Goose Creek Association on March 12. The group is dedicated to preserving natural resources along the course of Goose Creek, which empties into the Potomac River.

Spring Events Calendar

April 27: Audobon Naturalist Society @ Leesburg Rust Center, 12pm

May 10-11: Friends of the State Arboretum Garden Fair @ Blandy Experiment Farm

May 17-18: TACF 25th Anniversary Event @ Damascus

May 31: Field Trip to Lesesne State Forest

June 7: TACF 25th Anniversary Event- National Trails Day

Early June: Monitor mother tree flowers for bagging

Mid-June: Bag Flowers for controlled pollination

Late June: Pollinate bagged flowers

3rd week of September: Harvest burrs

October 4: Annual Chapter Meeting @ TBA

October TBA: Arbor Day @ Blandy Arboretum

Virginia Wildlife Article

We are delighted to announce that the *Virginia Wildlife* magazine is preparing an article on "The Value of the Chestnut Tree to Turkeys and Other Wildlife" for publication in 2009.

The author, Virginia Shepard (email: laizhir@hotmail.com), has indicated that she would be pleased to hear from any of our members who care to make suggestions, provide pictures, or pass along exciting ideas for this article. WHAT A WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITY!

New Projects Require Your Support

Your help is needed! Please consider an extra donation to the VATACF. The chapter expenses far exceed our income and your dollars will be well spent on our educational efforts, symposiums/events, as well as the monitoring and record keeping on thousands of trees. The

13 directors and officers of the Virginia chapter have provided an initial pool of \$10,000 and we hope the membership will follow this generous display. Please make your donations payable to the VATACF and send them to:

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