



Botanical Notes from Dr. Jon Evans's Coastal Ecology Program on Sapelo Island

This Spring Break, we trekked to Sapelo Island, Georgia, with Dr. Evans for an intensive, week-long course entitled Coastal Ecology and Conservation. Sapelo Island is reached by a short ferry ride and has a rich history filled with Native Americans, plantation owners, the Hog Hammock Community, whose inhabitants are known as Gullah-Geechees, and a strong tradition of ecological research at the University of Georgia Marine Institute, where we stayed. A highlight of the course was a canoe trip out to Little Blackbeard Island, Georgia's newest barrier island, created when a new inlet was formed during Hurricane Irma last fall.

During our week-long program on the island, we explored the ecology of the sand dune, salt marsh, and maritime forest communities and got to experience the unique plant species associated with these habitats.

The following paragraphs, written by students in

the course, represent just some of the plants on the island and their fascinating characteristics.

—Shelby Meckstroth, herbarium post-bac fellow and course teaching assistant



Old growth live oak trees are an ethereal presence to anyone that comes across them, like ancient giants, dripping with Spanish moss and furry with resurrection fern. Their branches, huge and curving, reach wide, some almost as big as the main trunk, giving the short tree a squat and solid appearance. Southern live oaks (*Quercus virginiana*) are one of the many species of evergreen oaks grouped together under the name live oak. Live oak acorns are an important food source for wildlife, and their thick branches are host to bird nests and epiphytes. Epiphytes are plants, such as Spanish moss and resurrection fern, that grow on other plants, but are not parasitic, and derive all their nutrients from the water that drips off the branches and leaves.

On Sapelo, the live oak trees can be found all over the island, but some of the most awe-inspiring live oaks are in ancient old growth patches of maritime forests, where they share the canopy with giant magnolia trees, and an understory of saw palmetto, which grows clonally, slowly snaking along the forest floor to create giant patches. They can also be seen in secondary growth forests that were once cotton fields where live oaks were left for slaves to take shelter from the harsh midday sun. These shade trees can be recognized by their distinctive open growth pattern, from when they were growing without anything around them to impede their outward growth.

Live oaks are no longer commercially logged, but their wood is incredibly strong and was once important for ship building before the age of steel hulls, their thick branches and short trunks used for curved parts of the ship's hull.

—Haley Stubblefield, C'18



Zanthoxylum clava-herculis, also known as the toothache tree, Hercules' club, or the southern prickly ash, is a tree native to the southeastern U.S. coastal plain. On Sapelo island, *Z. clava-herculis* is found in dry, open dune ridges. Its common names provide some insight into its most distinct and noteworthy traits. The name of toothache tree is derived from a common folk use of the tree. When chewed, the leaves produce a rather potent anesthetic which was used by native peoples, as well as early settlers, to treat toothaches due to the mouth-numbing effects. Our class got to experience this strange sensation!

The names Hercules' club and southern prickly ash refer to the unique bark structures which are found on this tree. Hundreds of spikes protrude from the stem, likely an adaptation to prevent herbivory. However there is no species within *Z. clava-herculis*' range which both has the ability to be significantly detrimental to the success of the tree and would be deterred by such defenses. This suggests that whatever animal drove this adaptation has since gone extinct.

—Bradley Keegan, C'18

Look for two more student reflections from this trip in our summer issue.



Shakerag Hollow

Sewanee is a happier, more grateful town because we share Shakerag Hollow. A short walk from campus, beneath Green's View, lies a forest aptly described as a cathedral of nature. Like the great cathedrals of Europe, Shakerag has a transcendence about it. But this place is a masterpiece of God's hand. Lichen-encrusted boulders that tumbled from the cliffs overhead, possibly thousands of years ago, have come to rest here. Towering sugar maple, yellow-poplar, buckeye, and basswood trees, some of them hundreds of years old, hug the gentle slopes.

The story behind the name of this majestic forest originated during prohibition. A moonshiner operated a still deep in the Hollow. A patron could leave money in a prearranged

spot, signal by shaking a rag, and move off a discreet distance, soon to be rewarded with a jug of brew. Today, Shakerag Hollow offers refreshment of an entirely different sort—sustenance for the soul.

A two-mile trail leads through this extraordinary woodland, connecting Green's View to the main Sewanee gates. The rocky mountain path invites one to slow down and reflect on the surrounding beauty. Year-round, a walk through Shakerag is a spiritual, and often solitary, experience. But in the springtime—March and April—much of Sewanee takes to the Hollow to witness the miracle of rebirth as only Shakerag can present it. Joyful pilgrims share the trail, delighting in the appearance, once again, of myriad woodland wildflowers whose apparent fragility surprises even the experienced botanist.

Nestled among the roots of the giant trees are tiny hepatica, bloodroot, and toothwort, followed soon by trout lily and wild geranium. Trilliums cascade down the hillsides, and phacelia crowns the massive boulders. The

blue of dwarf larkspur and phlox is punctuated by the golden yellow of woodland poppy.

Look into the eyes of your fellow pilgrims: there is reverence here, as well as awareness of our great good fortune in sharing this precious gift of renewal. We knew spring would come, after the snow and ice and days and days of fog. After all, that is what faith is about.

In the springtime we bring a noisy clamor to this sacred space: professors expound, and devotees murmur appreciatively. Latinized plant names roll off the tongues of seasoned naturalists and new initiates alike. Photographers exclaim, and the young laugh as they dance down the trail. But listen: ours is a hymn of praise and thanksgiving. Life has come again. "Joyful, joyful, we adore Thee!"

—Mary Priestley

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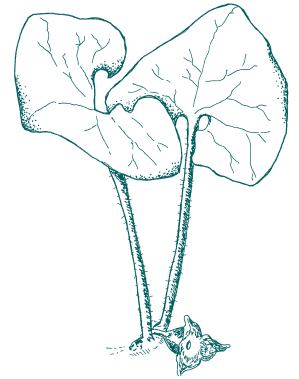
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Spring Calendar of Events

Collins Gulf West Hike

Sat., April 7, 9 a.m., Mary Priestley

This section of the South Cumberland State Park rivals Shakerag Hollow for diversity and abundance of spring wildflowers. Wear sturdy footwear, pack water and lunch, and bring cameras! Meet at the Collins West trailhead in Gruetli-Laager. Six miles, moderate to strenuous with 600-foot elevation change. For directions to the Collins West trailhead, call the South Cumberland State Park Visitors' Center (931.924.2980).

Roark's Cove

Sun., April 8, 2 p.m., Yolande Gottfried

A private property at the base of the plateau is being made available for a wildflower walk to see some species not seen on the upper plateau, such as shooting star (*Dodecatheon meadia*) and possibly some late Virginia bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*), as well as trilliums and much more. Meet just past the Sewanee tennis courts parking lot (on Green's View Road behind the Sewanee Inn) to carpool or caravan to the location of this easy to moderate walk.

15th Annual Trails & Trilliums Festival

Friday–Sunday, April 13, 14, and 15

South Cumberland State Park Visitors' Center

Mary Priestley will co-lead a hike with Jim Poteet on Sewanee's "Old Cowan Road" on Friday, April 13, at 1 p.m. See the Trails & Trilliums website for details on this and many other hikes. (www.trailsandtrilliums.org/hiking.html) Numbers are limited and pre-registration is encouraged.

All times are CST or CDT. Wear appropriate shoes on all of these walks. Risks involved in hiking include physical exertion, rough terrain, forces of nature, and other hazards not present in everyday life. Picking flowers and digging plants are prohibited in all of the above-mentioned natural areas.

For more information on these or other Sewanee Herbarium events, please call Yolande Gottfried at the Herbarium (931.598.3346) or by email at ygottfri@sewanee.edu. A map of meeting place locations is available at sewanee.edu/media/offices/herbarium/sewanee_herbarium_maps.pdf.

Shakerag Hollow

Sat., April 21, 9 a.m. and Sun., April 22 (Earth Day!), 2 p.m., Herbarium Staff

Celebrate Earth Day with a walk among the abundant and diverse spring wildflowers of this partly old-growth forest area. Meet at the Green's View parking lot (past the golf course). Two miles, moderate to strenuous, with one fairly challenging incline.

68th Annual Spring Wildflower Pilgrimage Great Smoky Mountains National Park, April 24–28

Mary Priestley will lead nature journaling workshops on Wednesday and Thursday as part of the Pilgrimage program of events. For more information, please see www.springwildflowerpilgrimage.org. Registration online is recommended.

Weed Wrangle

Sat., April 28, 1–3 p.m., Shelby Meckstroth

Meet at the Green House on Alabama Avenue.

Piney Point

Sat., April 29, 1 p.m., Yolande Gottfried

The community of plants that grows on the sandstone outcrops along the trail to Piney Point, including the rare elf orpine, is special. This moderate one-to-two hour walk begins at the tennis courts at St. Andrew's-Sewanee School (beyond the football field).

The herbarium sponsors a nature journaling group that meets Thursdays, 9–11 a.m. led by Mary Priestley. All are welcome. Email Mary for more information.

THE SEWANEE PLANT PRESS

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Drawings, by Mary Priestley, are of live oak, Celandine poppy, wild ginger, toothache tree, and sessile trillium.

HERBARIUM PUBLICATIONS

Fiery Gizzard: Voices from the Wilderness

What If Trees Could Walk?

Trail Guide to Shakerag Hollow

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Trails & Trilliums Festival

The Trails and Trilliums Festival celebrates its 15th year in 2018 with new family-focused activities, as well as time-honored traditions. This year's festival takes place April 13–15 in Monteagle, Tennessee, celebrating the peak of spring wildflower season in South Cumberland State Park, Tennessee's largest state park. Proceeds from the event support the park through the work of the Friends of South Cumberland, producers of the festival.

This year, the programs and activities associated with Trails and Trilliums move to the South

Cumberland State Park Visitors' Center in Monteagle (4.5 miles east of I-24 (exit 135) on U.S. 41). From 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday, April 14, rain or shine, the visitors' center will come alive with a market festival featuring art and craft vendors, a native plant sale, and live music, complemented by a day-long line-up of historical, gardening, and other outdoor-themed programs and workshops, as well as dozens of nature-oriented interactive activities for the kids. Bring a picnic lunch, or stop by the Shenanigans food truck, which will be serving lunch and

snacks on-site. All activities at the visitors' center are FREE and open to the public. Tickets for Wine and Wildflowers, as well as your hiking pass, can be purchased online at TrailsAndTrilliums.org.

