



CHAPTER VI: UNIQUE FEATURES
Flora & Fauna

There are numerous notably rare tree & shrub species as one travels the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail. Below is a list of a few species one might see.

Scott County, Va., is one of only seven counties along and west of the Blue Ridge to be listed with Blue Huckleberry on the Digital Atlas.



Blue Huckleberry

Dickenson County, Va., is the only county joining the High Knob Landform to currently be documented with the locally rare Box Huckleberry. It is endangered in Maryland & Pennsylvania.

Highland Doghobble, a perennial evergreen shrub is a Virginia Natural Heritage Program (VANHP) species listed as critically imperiled to imperiled within Virginia (a very limited range in VA). It is drought intolerant and requires very mesic settings.



Highland Doghobble

Bigleaf Magnolia, a VANHP critically imperiled species, has an even more limited distribution and is Atlas listed as being native to only Lee County in all of Virginia. **Bigleaf Magnolia** has the largest leaves of any tree species in North America. It was also documented during the Martin's Fork Wild River Study.



Big Leaf Magnolia

Alderleaf Buckthorn is an extremely rare and critically imperiled species.

Silverling is endangered in Kentucky and a threatened species of Tennessee. It is very rare across far south-western Virginia.



Silverling

Note:

Bigleaf Magnolia is endangered at the northern and western fringes of its range. It may also occur locally within portions of Wise County, along the northwestern flank of the High Knob Landform.

Smooth Azalea is a VANHP imperiled species that is listed on the Digital Atlas of the Virginia Flora for only Wise, Grayson, Carroll, and Giles counties in the western mountains.



Smooth Azalea



CHAPTER VI: UNIQUE FEATURES

Flora & Fauna

Sandbar Willow is an extremely rare and critically imperiled species in Virginia, being at the eastern edge of its range.

Prairie Rose, or Climbing Rose, is a critically imperiled species native to Virginia. While having been so far found in half of the ten High Knob Landform counties, it has only been documented within six other Virginia counties.

Virginia Spiraea is a globally threatened species that is a VANHP designated critically imperiled shrub in the commonwealth. It is Atlas listed for only the counties of Wise, Dickenson, Grayson, and Carroll in Virginia.

Snowberry is a shrub from the limestone woodlands of Lee and Russell counties that is a VANHP imperiled species. Endangered in the states of Kentucky, Illinois, and Massachusetts, Snowberry is threatened in Ohio.



Snowberry



Canada Yew

Canada Yew is a rare, poisonous shrub that is known mostly from moist, cool microsites of the High Knob Massif area (especially amid its leese side snow shadow zone). It is believed to be a Pleistocene relic that was once much more widespread throughout the Appalachians. Today the High Knob Massif counties of Lee & Scott are near its southern most documented latitude, with only Pickett County in Tennessee being USDA listed with the species at a similar.

Southern Mountain Cranberry, or Bearberry, is a shrub of the mountains of western Virginia, eastern West Virginia, and western North Carolina, with limited ranges in Tennessee. It is listed as endangered in Kentucky. Southern Mountain Cranberry grows in upper elevations of the High Knob Landform, and requires unique conditions.

Northern White Cedar, is an evergreen tree of the karst terrain of the High Knob Landform counties that is locally rare. It is endangered in Indiana, Massachusetts, and New Jersey; it is threatened in Kentucky, Maryland, Illinois, and Connecticut; and it is a species of special conservation concern in Tennessee.



Northern White Cedar



Alderleaved Viburnum, or Hobblebush, is a northern shrub which reaches its southern limit within the southern Appalachians. It is also an endangered species in Kentucky and New Jersey.

Allegheny Chinkapin is a threatened species in Kentucky, and is locally common within the High Knob Massif area of Virginia.

Possum Haw Viburnum occurs within all the High Knob Massif counties, but like many others is a species that becomes restricted in range outside the main core of the southern Appalachians. Possum Haw Viburnum is endangered within Kentucky, Indiana, and Pennsylvania.



Possum Haw Viburnum



Black Maple

The once great **American Chestnut** is now a relic, and basically restricted to the understory as sprouts and small trees. Only very rarely does one find a native American Chestnut that will produce nuts.

Black Maples, for example, are found to be more typical over the karst terrain of the lower elevations within Scott, Lee, and Russell counties, and are likely within the Powell Valley of Wise County. Trees intermediate in form between Black and Sugar maples, as previously noted, are reported by the Atlas of the Virginia Flora to also occur amid these karst valleys.

The counties of Russell, Buchanan and Tazewell fall within the eco-regions of Central Appalachian Broadleaf Forest, the Coniferous Forest, and the Meadow Province. Some of the trees one will find in these counties include: Eastern White Pine, Red Pine and Jack Pine, maple, beech, yellow birch, black walnut and yellow poplar.



Red Pine



Black Walnut



Eastern White Pine

Sources:

- *State Natural Heritage Program of Virginia*
- *Digital Atlas of the Virginia Flora*
- *USDA Plant Database*
- *The Nature Conservancy & Clinch Valley Program of Southwestern VA*
- *Cumberland Gap National Historic Park*



CHAPTER VI: UNIQUE FEATURES

Flora & Fauna

FLORA & FAUNA BECOME THE ATTRACTION

Thousands of people travel east to the New England states each year to see the fall foliage which has become a major tourism draw. And yet, the coalfields of southwest Virginia have beautiful fall foliage. Communities should encourage tourists to come see it.



The view of Fall foliage as one drives along Hwy 460 through Tazewell County

CREATING ONE'S OWN ATTRACTION THROUGH FLORA

A legislator in Kentucky decided to create a reason for people to come to east Kentucky in the Spring and for years he has donated thousands of red buds and encouraged people to plant them along the interstates and highways. The results speak for themselves. In Virginia, there are programs and federal funds available for acquiring scenic easements along designated byways. For more on possible funding, see http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational_planning/gifunds.shtml



Redbuds blooming along Hwy 80 from Manchester to Hazard



This wayside exhibit in Leslie County KY "Redbud Capital of Kentucky" encourages visitors to come back in the Spring to see the redbuds and dogwoods when they are in full bloom and to attend the annual Red Bud Festival

There are funding opportunities for those wishing to preserve or improve desirable viewsheds through the Transportation Enhancement program, Virginia Outdoors Foundation and other private foundations and organizations.



VIRGINIA BECOMES THE FIRST

The State of Virginia recognized that birding and wildlife viewing could become a tourism draw and, in 2005, created the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail across the entire state becoming the very first statewide program of its kind in the U.S. Virginia was also the first to put up trailblazing signs at the site of each of the trail locations.



Trailblazing sign on Hwy 58 at St. Paul

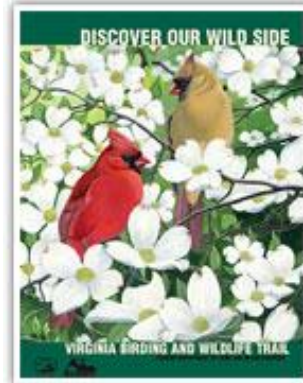


There are noted birding and wildlife viewing sites along the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail in St. Paul featuring the Sugar Hill Wildlife Trail, in Scott County for the Rye Cove Wildlife Viewing area and across from Crab Orchard Museum in Tazewell County.

Sign located along Highway 460 in Tazewell County noting a Birding & Wildlife Trail near the Crab Orchard Museum.

The Virginia Birding & Wildlife Trail (VBWT) is actually 65 looped driving tours across the state that connect one wildlife viewing area to another. Eight of the trails are located within the seven counties:

- Appalachian Wonders Loop (Scott, Wise)
- Big Stone Gap Loop (Lee, Wise)
- Lonesome Pine Loop (Wise, Dickenson, Buchanan)
- St. Paul Loop (Wise, Russell)
- Daniel Boone Loop (Wise, Dickerson)
- Mountain Heritage Loops (Tazewell)
- Compton Mountain /Horn Mountain Loop (Buchanan)
- Poplar Gap/Sunset Gap (Buchanan)
- Clinch Mountain Loop (Russell, Tazewell)



There is a four-color companion publication (shown above) which can be ordered online at <http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/vbwt/>. or by calling (866)748-2298.

To further capitalize on these trails, it is recommended that interpretive signs be added along the trails themselves. An excellent example of a well interpreted nature trail is located just off the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail in Downtown St. Paul at the Wetlands Estonia Learning Center & Trails. See *Chapter VII: Developing Walking Tours* for more on this.



For more on Virginia's Birding & Wildlife Trails including the economic impact of the trails, visit <http://www.trailsrus.com/swvirginia/finalreport/volume2/wildlife.pdf>.

On the following page is another example of a well interpreted wildlife viewing area which has become an attraction all in itself.

CHAPTER VI: UNIQUE FEATURES

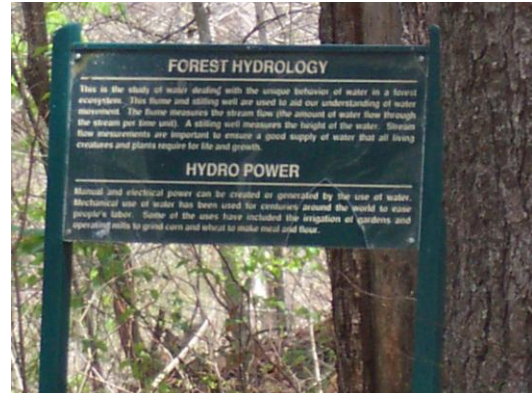
Flora & Fauna

INTERPRETIVE SIGNS PROVIDE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

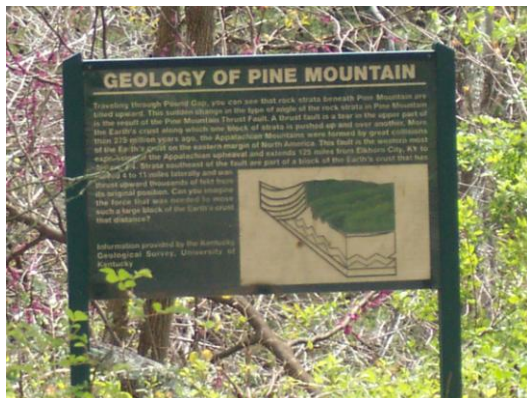
The Little Laurel Park has become a popular stop for tourists visiting Letcher County Kentucky due to the interpretive displays along its trail.



Tree Identification



Hydrological Information



Geological Information



Plant Identification



Wetlands Information



Animal Track Identification



Another unique feature at Little Laurel Park is a sundial that has an interpretive sign that explains how it works.

The above information came from the Kentucky Elk and Wildlife Viewing Study. For more on this subject, see <http://www.trailsrus.com/kywildlife/index.html>