NEWSLETTER OF THE ALASKA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

BOREALIS

February-March 2025 Edition

MEETING DETAILS: FEBRUARY & MARCH

Monday, February 3, 6 PM
In-Person & Zoom
- In-person potluck (6-6:45 pm)
- Main Topic: **"Seaweeds,"** presented by **Marilyn Barker**
- Plant Families: Monocots, **Cyperaceae (Sedges)**, presented by **Kitty LaBounty**
- Mini-Botany: Medicinal Plants, *TBD*

Monday, March 3, 7 PM
Via Zoom Only
- Main Topic: **Intro to Williwaw Nature Trail Native Plant Walk**, presented by **Amanda Reimer**
- Plant Families: Monocots, **Iridaceae (Iris Family)**, presented by **Glenn Brown**
- Mini-Botany: Medicinal Plants, *TBD*

Virtual Meeting Link: Join via Zoom
Meeting ID: 947 5146 9324
Passcode: 812931

In person meetings are held at the **Campbell Creek Science Center** (5600 Science Center Dr., Anchorage, AK 99507)

Meeting details are also posted at https://aknps.org/upcoming-events/ and our Facebook page: facebook.com/AKNPS/

Nymphae tetragona is a native plant in the Nymphaeceae (Water-lily) family discussed by Justin Fulkerson during our plant family series on aquatic plants. *N. Tetragona* is found as far north as Bettles. It has an invasive, non-native look-alike, *N. odorata*, which has many more petals than the 8-17 petals found on *N. tetragona*. Photo by Jeff Mason via iNaturalist.

Read more about aquatic plants on Page 6.

RENEWAL REMINDER

Do you have an expiring annual membership? The grace period for renewal expires on March 1. If you have a recurring membership, you do not need to renew. Contact membership@aknps.org with questions.

President's Message: Seasons of Change & the Importance of Staying Connected

By Sara Hogan

As the seasons shift and winter deepens, Alaska reminds us of the quiet resilience of nature.

Much like our native plants, which adapt and thrive through even the harshest conditions, the Alaska Native Plant Society thrives because of the strength and connection of our community. This newsletter is our way to ensure everyone stays informed, even if you can't make it to meetings or don't catch the recordings.

This month, we're excited to spotlight our Mini-Botany series on Medicinal Plants—a fantastic opportunity to dive into the rich heritage and uses of Alaska's native flora. These are five-minute talks given by our members during our member meetings. No experience is necessary, just curiosity.

From wild herbs to traditional remedies, the Medicinal Plant series offers knowledge and inspiration for all. However, we need your help to fill in some of the upcoming five-minute talk slots for 2025. You can go to https://bit.ly/plant_talk_signup to sign up for a talk in the Medicinal Plant series. Or, at the same link, you can sign up to give a 5-minute talk in our Plant Family series on Monocots (grasses and grass-like plants).

Volunteers are vital to making these programs a success. If you've been waiting for a chance to get involved, this is a great opportunity!

Let's make this winter season one of growth, connection, and shared knowledge. Whether you join as a volunteer or simply spread the word, every effort makes a difference. Together, we can ensure our society continues to flourish—just like the incredible plants we study and celebrate.

SIGN UP HERE
Medicinal & Monocot 5-Minute Talks

"A non-profit organization to promote the study and conservation of Alaska native plants."

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Anyone may contribute articles, book reviews, event/class fliers, photography and artwork for publication in *Borealis*. All materials should relate to the study and conservation of Alaska's native plants.

Editorial deadlines are the 20th of September, November, January, March and April. Recommended article length is 400-600 words. Written materials are subject to copy editing and space constraints. **Send submissions** to newsletter@aknps.org.

Retiring Borealis Editor Ginny Moore Receives Lifetime Achievement Award

By Elizabeth Bluemink

At the December 2024 member meeting, Ginny Moore received a Lifetime Achievement Award for her decades of service to the Alaska Native Plant Society.

The society's Lifetime Achievement Award is awarded by our board of directors and comes with a lifetime membership. So far, only a few individuals have received this award. Ginny also received a plaque recognizing her "persistence, intellect, and creativity in producing an interesting and educational Borealis newsletter for over 20 years.'

During the member meeting, Ginny explained how she got involved. In the 1990s, she said, Verna Pratt's husband, Frank Pratt, was roped into being newsletter editor because of his computer skills. He wasn't too thrilled about this assignment, and somehow Ginny agreed to take it on. "One thing led to another, and I just kept going," she said.

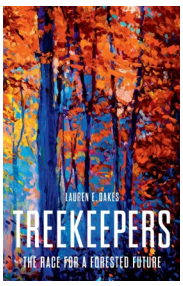
Ginny also mentioned that she had a trying experience with chemistry and physics in college, but after moving to Alaska, taking a botany class from Marilyn Barker in 1972 helped inspire her interest in botany.

Members spoke up during the December meeting to thank Ginny for her service. AKNPS Education Committee member Beth Baker, who helped design Ginny's award, stated that she would read the newsletter cover to cover, and didn't know of another club with such a consistently interesting newsletter.

Ginny served as the Borealis editor since March 1997, which is few months before I graduated from college. That seems like a lifetime ago and I don't know many volunteers with that kind of tenure.

We should be incredibly grateful for Ginny's service to our non-profit, especially in these sped-up modern times when your time is about the most precious gift you can give anyone—family, friend or stranger.

AKNPS members gathered for a photo with Ginny (middle, red vest) after the Dec. 2024 member meeting.



Treekeepers: The Race for a Forested Future

By Lauren Oakes
Basic Books (2024)

Reviewed by Anne Gore

In the opening pages of *Treekeepers: The Race for a Forested Future*, forest ecologist and science writer Lauren Oakes shares a 2019 study called "The Global Tree Restoration Potential" that sparked public debate about the importance of planting trees for mitigating climate change.

Oakes found herself wanting to "get to the bottom of the debate," to answer questions about whether and how trees can save us, and to find the people behind those efforts — the tree keepers of the world.

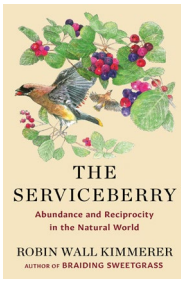
Treekeepers resulted from her process of asking and attempting to answer questions like: Who is planting trees? Where and why are they being planted? Are they flourishing, and why or why not?

Oakes interviewed more than 100 people and visited projects around the globe to inform her inquiry. Not all of her research made it into the book, but the examples that did present a comprehensive picture of the diversity and complexity of solutions, as well as the rewards and challenges of maintaining healthy forests as a climate change solution.

Among the case studies Oakes shares in the book are a climate-based seed transfer program in British Columbia, an urban tree planting initiative in Tacoma, Washington, and a large-scale, community-based reforestation project in Panama. The people she meets are scientists, business owners, nonprofit leaders, and local citizens, all passionate about making a difference, but often learning through trial and error.

Although Oakes comes across as more researcher and scientist than journalist and storyteller, Treekeepers is still an accessible read for anyone interested in forestry, conservation, and climate change. The book raises interesting questions about the role not just of trees, but of humans, in sustaining and stewarding the well-being of our planet.

Ultimately, Oakes concludes that while conserving and growing more forests can make a meaningful contribution, it isn't a silver bullet for solving the climate crisis. She says there is no single solution, but maybe more of us acting as tree keepers will help.



The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World

By Robin Wall Kimmerer
Simon & Schuster (2024)

Reviewed by Elizabeth Bluemink

I couldn't resist the opportunity to review a new book by Indigenous botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer with one of my favorite native plants in the title.

The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World is a slim volume you can read in a sitting or two. Under-appreciated by many modern Americans, the eponymous hero of the book has an enduring legacy as an important food source for Indigenous peoples throughout North America.

Kimmerer even mentions our own native *Amelanchier alnifolia*—her upstate New York neighbors cultivate it instead of the local *A. arborea,* which typically has small, hard fruits.

Her purpose for the book is to encourage us to transition to gift economies, in which relationships are reciprocal instead of transactional. As follows, she also writes reverently about serviceberries:

> "In Potawatomi, it is called *Bozakmin*, which is a superlative: the best of the berries. I feel one on my tongue, and agree with my ancestors on the rightness of that name. Imagine a fruit that tastes like a Blueberry crossed with the satisfying heft of an Apple, a touch of rosewater, and a minuscule crunch of almond-flavored seeds. They taste like nothing a grocery store has to offer: wild, complex with a flavor that your body recognizes as the real food it's been waiting for. I can almost feel my mitochondria doing a happy dance when I eat them."

Want to review recent or forthcoming botany/native plant-related books for *Borealis*? We can request free review copies mailed to your address. Contact newsletter@aknps.org to join our book reviewer list.

Elusive cuckoo bumble bee proposed for Endangered Species Act listing. Is it in Alaska?

A bumble bee described by legitimate sources as native to Alaska has been proposed for listing as an endangered species.

The Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee (*Bombus suckleyi*) is an important indicator species for the health of pollinators and native flora, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Historically, this bee was broadly distributed across North America but its last confirmed sighting in the United States was in 2016 in Oregon.

On December 16, the USFWS proposed listing Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee as endangered, acting on a petition it had previously received from the Center for Biological Diversity.

Threats to Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee include its reliance on host species like the western bumble bee (*Bombus occidentalis*), which are dramatically declining, as well as pesticides, habitat fragmentation and conversion, and climate change, according to the USFWS.

A different kind of bumblebee

Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee has a parasitic relationship with other bumble bees. Females invade the nests of their host (the western bumble bee is the widely documented host species) where they will often "eliminate the host queen, destroy host eggs, and eject host larvae from the nest," according to the USFWS. The worker bees in the host colony end up collecting pollen and feeding the new cuckoo bumble bee queen's progeny.

Cuckoo bumble bees also differ from 'social' bumble bees in the following ways:

- They don't produce their own worker bees
- They emerge in late spring instead of early spring
- They eat pollen but don't collect it (they rely on their host species' worker bees)

According to the USFWS, cuckoo bumble bees are more difficult to find than social bumblebees because they are naturally less abundant and do not have worker bees flying around.

Discovery of Alaska misidentifications

Many sources state the Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee's range includes Alaska.

But the USFWS' proposed Endangered Species Act listing does not include Alaska in the species' range. Instead, the agency's Species Status Assessment for Suckley's Cuckoo Bumble Bee states:

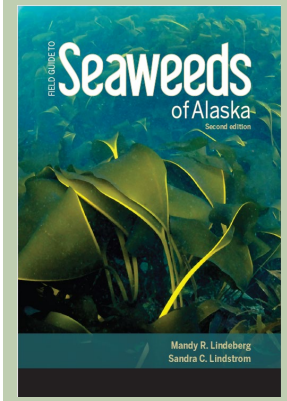
"Historically there were records of the species in Alaska, however verification of all known records has indicated they were misidentifications (D. Sikes and J. Rykken 2023, pers. Comms). However, Suckley's was recorded adjacent to the Alaska border in the Yukon; the species could occur in eastern Alaska, but we have no current evidence of its presence."

So, if you want to keep an eye out for a bee that is inherently hard to find, hasn't had a confirmed sighting in the United States in nearly a decade, and may or may not be in Alaska, the Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee might be the bee for you!

Sources for more information:

- You can find out a lot more about this bee and comment on the proposed Endangered Species Act listing by visiting the federal government's Rulemaking Docket.
- You can find out about Alaska native bees, including bee survey results from 2018-2024, by visiting the Alaska Bee Atlas.

Updated Field Guide for Alaska Seaweeds



NOAA is publishing a second edition of its *Field Guide to Seaweeds of Alaska* with 19 new seaweed taxa, 32 name changes and 100+ new images.

The book can be ordered at https://seagrant.uaf.edu/bookstore/pubs/SG-ED-69.html. Orders ship Feb. 20.

"Turions and suction traps"
Highlights from the 2023/2024 Aquatic Plant Family Series

Part of our society's mission is the study of native plants in Alaska. Aquatic plants seem to get less attention than terrestrial ones, so it makes sense for us to take a closer look, and a great way to do that is our Plant Family speaker series.

To that end, Marilyn Barker organized a two-year-long Plant Family series featuring five-minute talks on 15-plus plant families that contain freshwater and marine aquatic plants in Alaska.

Following are a scant few of the intriguing facts shared during this memorable AKNPS speaker series that ended in December. Kudos to our volunteer speakers including Justin Fulkerson, Glenn Brown, Marilyn Barker, Beth Baker, and Preston Villumsen.

1.) **Aquatic plants have wild anatomy.** Just one example is turions. These are wintering buds that detach from the plant, sink to the bottom of a lake or pond, and rise to the surface in the spring. Only certain aquatic species produce turions, and be aware this term is also used for buds on some other plants like horsetail *(Equisetum*) and asparagus. Note: It is hard to find close-up, in-focus pictures of turions on Alaska aquatic plants, perhaps because people don't like to wade in the water in the fall?

Turion on *Utricularia macrorhiza* (Common Bladderwort), photo by akr via iNaturalist (link)

2.) **Duckweeds are in the same family as skunk cabbage!** Preston Villumsen presented on native species in the Aracea (Arum) family. He was intrigued to learn they include tiny duckweeds as well as the gigantic western skunk cabbage (*Lysichiton americanus*). This is based on DNA analysis. He also flagged one of several aquatic plant mysteries in our series—*Acorus americanus*—which has a single collection in Alaska from the Minto Flats area in the 1950s. Eric Hultèn described *A. americanus* as an introduced plant, which might not be the case.

3.) **Bladderworts are carnivorous**. Beth Baker covered Lentibulariaceae, a family of carnivorous plants. She explained that the species in the genus Utricularia (bladderworts) have the most sophisticated trap method of any carnivorous plant. When the trigger hairs on their 'bladders' sense a small organism, like an insect or protozoan, they activate a suction trap that opens and closes on the prey in a fraction of a second (Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zb_SLZFsMyQ). Utricularia species also have beautiful yellow snapdragon-like flowers that poke out of the water.

In contrast, species in the genus Pinguicula (butterworts) use an adhesive method. Insects are suffocated in mucilage on the leaf surface and their digestible parts are broken down and absorbed into the leaf surface, leaving only chitin exoskeletons behind.

Top and bottom: Bladders and flowers of *Utricularia macrorhiza* (Common Bladderwort), photos by akr via iNaturalist (link)

Interior group resumes after hiatus!

We're pleased to help spread the word that native plant enthusiasts in Fairbanks are meeting in person again!

If you are wondering, this Interior group isn't formally connected to our non-profit organization; however, we do cross-pollinate. Some long-time AKNPS members in the Fairbanks area, including board member Jeff Mason, are among its founding members. Current AKNPS vice president Amy Tippery was also a founding member.

In January, the Interior group resumed in-person meetings after a multi-year break. Anyone around the state is welcome to join the Interior group's listserv or attend its meetings on the UAF campus. Check out the flier for the meeting schedule.

Primulas get national spotlight in Juneau

Juneau's Jensen-Olson Arboretum is co-hosting the American Primrose Society's national show and meeting May 16-18 in Juneau.

Alaska boasts one of the largest—if not the largest—number of native primulas of any state. Nearly 50 if you count subspecies! The arboretum holds the nationally-accredited primula collection, with many cultivars from all over.

Registration is $75 and opens mid-February. Contact Ginger Hudson at ginger.hudson@juneau.gov for more information.

Alaskans seek statewide ban of bird cherry tree sales

So far, the State of Alaska has not banned the sale and distribution of two invasive bird cherry tree species, *Prunus padus* and *P. virginiana,* despite the negative impacts they are having on Alaska forests.

The sale of *P. padus* is banned in Anchorage but the trees are still available for sale elsewhere in Alaska. In January, the Alaska Community Forest Council passed a resolution seeking a statewide ban on the sale and distribution of *P. padus* and *P. virginiana*.

The Division of Agriculture is actively considering the issue but needs public support to move forward with regulations. Anyone can weigh in by writing a letter to Division Director Bryan Scoresby (bryan.scoresby@alaska.gov) with a CC to Invasive Plant Coordinator Cody Jacobson (cody.jacobson@alaska.gov) and Plant Materials Center Manager Casey Dinkel (casey.dinkel@alaska.gov).

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL

To join the Alaska Native Plant Society or renew your membership, you can either 1) fill out our online form and pay online at https://aknps.org/membership *or* 2) fill out and mail the form below with an enclosed check to **Alaska Native Plant Society, PO Box 141613, Anchorage, AK 99514.** There are two types of memberships:

- Single-year annual memberships are tied to the calendar year. Dues received in October-December are applied to the following year. After the first of the year, there is a two-month grace period for membership renewals before we consider your membership inactive.
- Recurring annual memberships are not tied to the calendar year and renew automatically. They must be paid online, and your membership is considered active until you cancel it. You can log into your PayPal account to view and manage your recurring payments.

Need some help? Contact membership@aknps.org

STATUS ☐ **NEW** ☐ **RENEWAL**

CATEGORY	**E-mail Newsletter**	**Mailed Newsletter**	**Email + Mailed Newsletter**
☐ Full-time Student	$12	$22	$22
☐ Senior Citizen	$12	$22	$22
☐ Individual	$15	$25	$25
☐ Family	$20	$30	$30

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Telephone: (Home) _____ (Cell) _____ E-mail: _____

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