

# BotSoc News



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## Four new officers take on BotSoc leadership

It's official. The Georgia Botanical Society refreshed its top leadership at a virtual membership meeting held July 16. Effectively immediately, the new officers are:

- **Timothy Estep**, president. Timothy served previously as vice president.
- **Mei Lee Fung**, vice president.
- **Susan Crozier**, treasurer. Susan and her husband, Todd Morrell, served most recently as field trip chairs.
- **Eddi Minche**, secretary.

Officers serve two-year terms, with the vice president serving as principal planner for the society's annual Spring Pilgrimage. Members of the board, confirmed subsequently by the four new officers, remain unchanged: Linda Chafin, Brandi Griffin, Lisa Kruse, Hal Massie, Rich Reaves, Richard Ware and Teresa Ware. Additionally, Shannon Matzke has now taken on the role of field trip chair. For a full list of the BotSoc leadership team and their contact information, please see Page 12 of this newsletter.

## *BotSoc rallies to map and protect a mountain treasure after prescribed fire wipes out a spectacular springtime wildflower display*

Four members of the Georgia Botanical Society met on June 13 at Mulky Gap in the 30,000-plus acre Cooper's Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA) near Blairsville to map what is believed to be the largest population of pink lady's slippers (*Cypripedium acaule*) in the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest and maybe one of the largest populations of this species in Georgia.

The four were Dr. Bobby Hattaway, who

**Project:** Mapping Mulky Gap's Pink Lady's Slippers

**Date:** June 13, 2022

**Leaders:** Bobby Hattaway, Hal Massie, Clayton Webster, Steve Bowling

**Project Report:** Clayton Webster

**Editor's Note:** Sometimes even the best-intentioned projects have outcomes that no one foresaw. This is a story about the aftermath of one of those projects and about how a handful of longtime BotSoc members rallied to make sure that one of North Georgia's treasures—the legendary springtime display of pink lady's slippers at Mulky Gap—will be protected going forward. It's a fine example of the kind of good work that we support with our society memberships!

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I am honored to take the helm as president of the Georgia Botanical Society. Let me tell you a little bit about myself. I grew up in the pine flatwoods, scrub sandhills, coastal bluffs, islands, and beaches of Glynn, McIntosh, and Wayne counties, Georgia. My parents always kept a garden, and tending to it was my chore. Although I knew the plants in the woods and the weeds, I didn't know their "names" until graduate school. There I took Bobby Hattaway's (our society's immediate past president) plant identification course. This introduced me to the tools of plant identification. This was also the time I joined the society in 2010.

After graduating, my professional career has been fighting invasive species and inspecting for plant agriculture commodities imported into the United States and exported to dozens of countries around the world. By combining my livelihood, passion for plants, and government work, I study plants. Now my next botanical adventure, society president.

With position comes responsibility. Each officer, chair, board member, trip leader, and society member has a role in the society. My role now is to keep this strong organization going.

When I read the newspaper, journal articles, species accounts, field guides, and government documents I see the names of our society members. Our membership contains a fantastic group of experts on Georgia botany. We not only have field trips to great locations to see plants, we are also a great network for the subject. As a member in this network you have a tool you can use for your study, work, hobby, or passion. Don't know the identification of a species? Ask. Wonder where you can get help on growing a particular plant? Ask. Have trouble understanding regulations, finding funding, protecting a rare location/ ecosystem? Ask.

Fortunately, our society has many experts in their fields that can provide solutions. My role is to help guide members to the right people for their projects and keep that process going. As a member I've asked questions and obtained helpful, informative answers from other members for my botanically related endeavors. I hope I can similarly direct you to help for your work. If I do this for the society, I will feel that I have succeeded as president; my responsibility becomes a reward.

One of my goals as president is to continue to keep members involved with the society. Do you have ideas for the society or think of ways on how to make the Georgia Botanical Society better? Put thoughts to action, get involved.

The society has plenty of involvement opportunities and people that are willing to listen. For some examples, I want to thank the past officers for their roles. Bobby Hattaway's method of early planning, a great organizational skill, and taking care of business helped lead the society. Treasurer John French excelled in managing society accounts. Karan Rawlins pushed minor suggestions out

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**President's Perspective—Continued from Page 2**

into the open for large impacts that benefited the society.

I believe I can speak for the newly elected officers — Vice President Mei Lee Fung, Treasurer Susan Crozier, and Secretary Eddi Minche — as well as myself as president in saying we are enthusiastic and proud to serve the society in our roles. In the future I hope to showcase other society people and projects.

Go out and look at some plants. Have a great day!

*Timothy Estep*

**Mulky Gap—Continued from Page 1**

Four BotSoc members worked together to map pink lady's slippers at Mulky Gap. From left are Hal Massie, Steve Bowling, Clayton Webster, and Bobby Hattaway. Note fire damage to the flame azaleas and mountain laurel in the background. Photo by Jimmy Rickard.

was then president of our society; Hal Massie, the society's immediate past president at the time and current board member; Steve Bowling, a past president of the society and field trip leader; and Clayton Webster, field trip leader for the society and "trail boss" for the Over the Hill Hiking Group. They were joined by Jimmy Rickard, forest ecologist and botanist with the Gainesville office of the Chattahoochee-Oconee

National Forest.

Mulky Gap has long been known in the hiking and botanical communities as a do-not-miss springtime trip when the lady's slippers are in bloom near the end of April or first part of May. But in 2021, as Clayton was scheduled to lead a field trip for the society as well as his Over the Hill Hiking Group, he learned that a U.S. Forest Service (USFS) prescribed burn on April 19, 2021, had appeared to have wiped out all the lady's slippers that were almost fully matured and in bloom. The two trips, along with a third trip planned by the Benton MacKaye Trail Association, had to be cancelled.

Clayton notified Bobby Hattaway. He contacted numerous associates and botanists in various outdoor organizations, including the USFS, and Jimmy Rickard took the lead on follow-up. It was

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## Mulky Gap—Continued from Page 3

eventually agreed that the USFS would organize and host a meeting in May 2022, to observe whether—or how well—the the lady's slippers had come back a year later. The principal objective or goal everyone had in mind was to prevent a recurrence of something like this in the future.

A meeting was set for May 2, 2022, at Mulky Gap. It was led by Dr. Steverson Moffat, then acting district ranger (now district ranger) of the Blue Ridge District of the USFS. A large number of USFS personnel, including Mike Brod, staff officer for Fire and Natural Resources, and David Vinson, fire manager at the Lakemont Office, were in attendance. There were also representatives from many other government and nature organizations. They included the Georgia Plant Conservation Alliance at the State Botanical Garden in Athens; the Georgia Department of Natural Resources; the Georgia Nature Photographers Association; the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and, of course, our society.

Steverson led the discussion as to what had happened and explained that the USFS would make every effort to ensure that it would not happen again. Brod and Vinson were discussion leaders.

Our society members and photographer Tom Wilson all had questions that USFS personnel answered. USFS personnel also explained how the fire management process works in our national forests.

After the May 2 meeting, Steverson wrote up a report that went to all involved. There he recapped the meeting and made some assignments to help with future prescribed burns in this particular area. The assignment given Bobby, Hal and Clayton was to map the perimeter of the lady's slippers in a manner that is compatible with the USFS computer systems. The mapping will allow USFS to either schedule a burn for the area during dormant season or burn a fire break around the mapped area if the burn must be scheduled for the growing season.



Bobby Hattaway applies survey tape with a label at one of the points marking the outer perimeters of the extent of pink lady's slippers at Mulky Gap. Photo by Clayton Webster.



USFS's Jimmy Rickard (left) watches as Steve Bowling (center with backpack) finalizes the route of the Duncan Ridge lady's slipper population. Bobby Hattaway (center rear) looks over his shoulder while Hal Massie holds red flags used to set the perimeter of the population. Photo by Clayton Webster.

Before the mapping project, which was scheduled for June 13, Bobby added Steve Bowling to



## Mulky Gap—Continued from Page 4



Here is why concern for the Mulky Gap site is so strong. The picture above shows a portion of the Mulky Gap display in a normal year. The one below shows how the same site (note the downed limb in both photos) looked earlier this year due to the April 19, 2021, burn. Note too, however, that the density of the smaller non-flowering plants in the “after” picture is still rather impressive, if not encouraging. Photos by Bruce Roberts.

catalogue the location.

Once we established the lady’s slipper perimeter, we would place a red flag at the outer boundary or tie some red survey tape to a tree. Each flag or tape would be numbered. These would be on a straight line from tree to tree with all lady’s slippers inside the boundary. This would make an easy-to-follow map on Steve’s phone. Once we got all the lady’s slippers on one side of the trail, we then crossed to the other side. Our map, when finished, made a loop with the last flag having a number and also noted as “END.”

Steve then walked the route to record it on his phone. Each flag or tape was recorded as a way point. Steve walked the trail and recorded it so that it would be on the map, making it much easier to see where the lady’s slippers are located if USFS was working in the dormant season. After Steve had completed the route and was satisfied with what he had recorded, Hal went back and picked up all the flags and tape so that we left no trace of the recorded route.

project group. Steve has experience as both a wetland delineator and in mapping projects.

In addition to the huge display of lady’s slippers at Mulky Gap, there is a smaller population nearby on the Duncan Ridge Trail. These lady’s slippers are usually very tall and robust. They were included in the burn area. We decided to start with this area as it was smaller and would allow us to work out any kinks in our plan. Clayton and Bobby had seen this area before, so they knew basically where to look.

The time for mapping was later than any of us would have preferred or liked, but that’s as soon as it could be scheduled. By June 13, lady’s slippers are no longer in bloom and undergrowth is up to knee or even waist height in the area. And one side of the trail has a bigger population than the other.

Our group fanned out to find the perimeter of the lady’s slipper population. Soon after we started, Jimmy arrived on the scene to give advice on how or what we could do that would best help USFS

## Mulky Gap—Continued from Page 5

After completing the Duncan Ridge mapping, it was on to the much larger Mulky Gap population. Hal has visited the area for probably 20 years to see the lady's slippers in bloom. Clayton has visited for nine years. But in discussion it was determined that neither one had ever been way up the mountain, or even to the far left or right, to see how far the population extended.

On past wildflower walks, the area has typically been so lush and thick with blooming lady's slippers near the road that it's never been necessary to climb the mountain. The blooms seem never-ending. With the high undergrowth in June, however, one could not up the mountain and not see even a single lady's slipper. They were well hidden.

The Duncan Ridge Trail crosses at Mulky Gap and splits the lady's slipper population. We started on the west side of the trail. Hal went all the way to a drainage dip and worked his way back. Bobby went down towards Mulky Gap Road. Clayton went up the mountain. When everyone found the perimeter in their respective areas, we flagged the trees so Steve could walk the route to map it. A few times, we later found a missed cluster of lady slippers and had to add a flag or tape to include it.

When we started on the east side of the trail, Jimmy estimated that we easily had around 200 lady's slippers there. The west side used to have over 1,000 in bloom. A group of 200 lady's slippers is a pretty large population for those of us who get excited to see 10 or 15 along a trail. But in this location, 200 is a very small part of the total.

When doing a burn, a Forest Service road or a trail makes a good fire break and requires less manpower to establish the burn. Jimmy made the observation that making a fire break on the east side in addition to the trail would create several problems. It would take a lot of work; create a curiosity and invite hikers off the trail; invite invasive vegetation; and, in this steep location, create erosion.

We countered that *our goal was to ensure that burns in this particular area take place only in the dormant season*, which would eliminate the need for a fire break at all. Steve said he would map the trail through the lady's slippers route so that, should the occasion ever arise that an in-season fire was necessary, the lady's slippers on the east side could be protected. This seemed like a plan that we and USFS could both live with.

After the flags and tapes were up, we walked the route to renumber them. We were using Mulky Gap Road as the southern border and flags on all the other boundaries. Steve started recording each location. Someone would stand at the next flag and someone in between so that Steve would have a straight line to walk (oftentimes over blowdowns). Then he and Clayton walked the Duncan Ridge Trail to show its location relative to the lady's slipper population.

Many thanks to our Georgia Botanical Society members for their efforts in completing this project and thanks also to USFS personnel and the personnel of other agencies for their guidance and cooperation in helping protect such special populations of native wildflowers in the future. It is a win-win for everyone, including all general public hikers and wildflower buffs.



## Field Trip to Big Hammock Natural Area

# Big Hammock showcases several natural communities and a botanical ‘star’ — Georgia plume

**Field Trip:** Big Hammock Natural Area in Tattnall County

**Date:** June 11, 2022

**Trip Leader:** Bobby Hattaway

**Trip Report:** Bobby Hattaway

This year’s summer trip to Big Hammock Natural Area (BHNA) was planned a week later than the one in June of last year in hopes of seeing the “star” plant — Georgia plume (*Elliottia racemosa*) — in full bloom. Last year, we did this trip the first week in June and barely saw a plant or two in bloom. We were too early.

This year, going the second week in June, though some of the trees were past prime bloom time, many were still in full bloom. In the near future, I believe that for the best chance to see these rare trees at peak bloom, one should plan for no sooner than the second week, but with climate change, it is increasingly hard to predict the best time. One thing for sure is, though they may be rare elsewhere, BHNA has the world’s largest population of Georgia plume with many fine specimens. Though we did not see it, this includes the grand champion tree, which is not on the trail we were on.

Besides myself, we had a nice little group of four. We had three of my favorite trippers -- Timothy Estep, Diane and David Ochala – and a non-member visitor, Katie Klemenich.

To beat the heat, we started at 9:30 a.m. With the small group, we were efficient and finished before 1 p.m.

and still hit all the usual highlights on the 1.3-mile marked loop trail.



The blooms of *Elliottia racemosa*, Georgia plume, make it the star attraction of an early summer visit to Big Hammock Natural Area. On this tree, both older (left) and newer (right) blooms are visible. Photo by David Ochala.

Our path took us through a number of different plant communities, or habitats, which are controlled by such factors as available water and fire. Speaking of fire, we saw where the Georgia



## Big Hammock—Continued from Page 7



Bobby Hattaway (left), trip leader and immediate past president of BotSoc, makes a point while Timothy Estep (right), BotSoc president, examines foliage with a hand lens. In the background, David and Diana Ochala look on. Photo by Katie Klemenich.



Scorched earth marks the spot where a prescribed burn was attempted in the BHNA. Sand live oak (*Quercus geminata*) leaves are abundant in the leaf litter, and the shape of the fallen leaves preserves moisture, making it difficult to ignite a fire. Photo by Bobby Hattaway.

Department of Natural Resources had recently tried to do a controlled burn of parts of the 801-acre BHNA within the more than 5,500-acre Big Hammock Wildlife

Management Area, and you could see firsthand how hard it is to get a fire started in an area with abundant oak litter -- even with a trip torch (see photo). Part of that difficulty has to do with the fact that sand live oak (*Quercus geminata*) leaves tend to fall to the ground with the upper surface down. This leaves a boat-shaped trap for water when it rains. And the leaves stay damp for a while afterwards.

BHNA has several interesting plant communities. One of them — the Dry Evergreen Oak Woodland — is a “featured place” in the 2013 *The Natural Communities of*

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A carpet of the fruticose lichen *Cladonia evansii* — Evan’s deer moss, or Evan’s reindeer moss — covers the foreground and middle ground in this photo taken on the BHNA field trip by Katie Klemenich.

*Georgia* book by Leslie Edwards, Jon Ambrose and Kay Kirkman. Another community described in the book, Dry Deciduous Hardwood Forest, though not given as a featured place at BHNA, adjoins and intermingles with the woodland. Despite the use of the word “dry” in both plant community names, the forest is more mesic than the woodland. Technically, a woodland has a more open canopy than a forest, with a woodland having only 50-80 percent tree cover.

Besides the rare Georgia plume (*Elliottia racemosa*), the uncommon (in Georgia) myrtle oak (*Quercus myrtifolia*) also forms a large population there. This is a small evergreen oak that usually does not exceed 15 feet in height. Another persistent-leaved oak, this one a canopy dominant, sand live oak (*Quercus geminata*), also helps convey the evergreen aspect of the Dry Evergreen Oak Woodland.

In addition to those two natural communities, we also saw transitions from the Pine Flatwoods where we started, which occur on low, flat, or mildly depressional sites, with moist to hydric soils, all the way to dry upland sites like Turkey Oak Longleaf Pine Sandhills. Closer to the end of our hike, we also saw a good example of a Cypress-Gum Swamp Depression dominated by pond cypress (*Taxodium ascendens*) and swamp tupelo (*Nyssa biflora*), both with buttressed bases indicating they are often inundated with water.



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The best place at BHNA to point out the differences between longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*), slash pine (*P. elliottii*) and loblolly pine (*P. taeda*) is near the end of the trail. All three were growing within 10 feet of each other in the parking area, but it is easier to point out the differences from afar in trees near the end of the trail. In the Dry Deciduous Hardwood Forest, we saw a fourth pine species – the shade tolerant spruce pine (*Pinus glabra*), though in terms of lumber, it is not a so-called hardwood.



Not everything that you might see on a BotSoc field trip is rooted to the ground. Here, a black racer (*Coluber constrictor*) perches in foliage. Black racers are found in all but a relative handful of Georgia's counties and seem to be among those reptiles least affected by human disturbances of the environment. Photo by David Ochala.

Longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*), despite earlier logging, is already making a comeback at BHNA after being logged out. This species is not listed as a member of the Dry Evergreen Oak Woodland in the natural community book mentioned

above, though the authors cite famed botanist R. Daubenmire when they state that longleaf pine can be present in younger stands of this community type. It will eventually be diminished in numbers by shade and fire exclusion. The ridge community had the typical park-like woodland appearance and will probably keep that look even with the few scattered regenerating longleaf pines.



Though it got hot before we were done, and we noted near the end that the first of the season's deer flies had emerged, we had a good time and can't wait to come back. We did not see another human the entire time.

Big Hammock Natural Area was designated a Registered Natural Landmark in 1976. It is one of just over 600 such sites scattered throughout 48 states, American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Photo by Katie Klamenchich.



## Society News

*Please see field trips page on BotSoc website for details on upcoming trips!*

Planning for BotSoc field trips is dynamic, which is why all the latest field trip information is available online, where updates and changes can be made as required. To view all scheduled field trip details, please visit the [2022 FIELD TRIP SCHEDULE](https://www.gabotsoc.org/?page_id=12) ([https://www.gabotsoc.org/?page\\_id=12](https://www.gabotsoc.org/?page_id=12)).

Day of the Week	Date	Month	Time	Name	Focus	Leader(s)	County
Sat	1	Oct		Sandhills WMA		Hal Massie	Taylor
Sat-Sun	8-9	Oct	9:00 – 5:00	Lost Creek Forest, Big Woods, Wolf Creek		Beth Grant	Thomas and Grady in southwest Georgia
Sat	15	Oct		Young Harris/ Hiwassee area	Mountain sites TBD	Mike Christison, Richard Ware	Townes
Fri	11	Nov		Veterans Day exploratory trip at Sprewell Bluff WMA	Old-growth longleaf pine and pyramid magnolia	Hal Massie	Talbot
Fri	25	Nov		Black Friday trip on Pine Mountain	TBD	Hal Massie	Harris or Meriwether

## BotSoc's COVID precautions now generally optional for outdoor events

*But trip leaders still have discretion to set policy for their events*

Effective March 10 of this year, COVID masks and social distancing are still encouraged but are now optional at BotSoc-sponsored outdoor events unless the trip leader decides otherwise. In other words, while it's now BotSoc's general guidance that such precautions are optional, field trip leaders still have discretion to impose conditions for their trips. They are free to set policy for the trips they lead.

BotSoc officers and board ask that all event participants be respectful of the rights and feelings of trip leaders and other participants. Current guidance is a policy recommendation, not a mandate, and is in effect unless conditions require a change. BotSoc officers and board continue to monitor those conditions and may adjust guidance accordingly in the future.

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