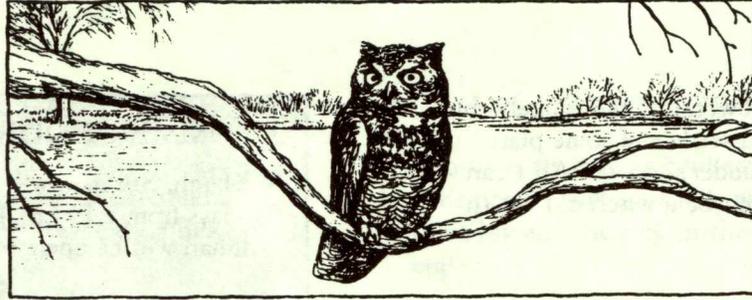


STILLMAN NEWSLETTER



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DOGS' TEETH, CRANES' BILLS & ADDERS' TONGUES

--Mark Spreyer

Contrary to the title, we won't be dissecting any animals for this story. Instead, we are going to revisit the early blooming flowers that decorate the forest floor.

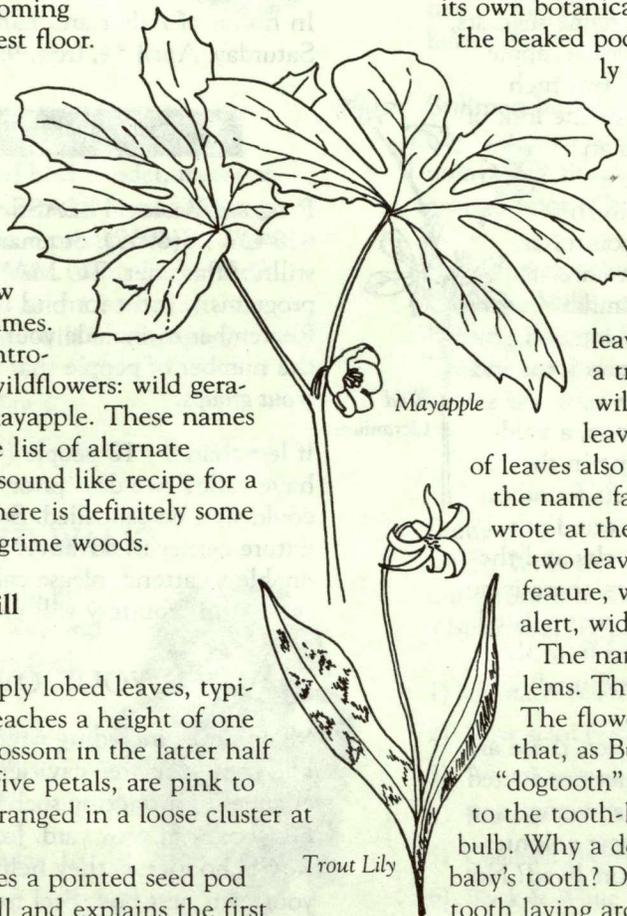
In the Spring 1997 newsletter, I wrote about three of these beauties: the Virginia bluebell, white trillium and jack-in-the-pulpit. As you may recall, along with describing these plants, we took a look at how they earned their colorful names.

In this newsletter, we'll introduce three more woodland wildflowers: wild geranium, white trout lily and mayapple. These names sound like flowers unlike the list of alternate monikers in the title which sound like recipe for a witch's stew. As you'll see, there is definitely some magic occurring in the springtime woods.

Wild Geranium or Cranesbill (*Geranium maculatum*)

This wildflower, with deeply lobed leaves, typically grows in shady areas, reaches a height of one to two feet, and begins to blossom in the latter half of May. The blossoms have five petals, are pink to lavender in color, and are arranged in a loose cluster at the tip of the plant.

Later, each flower becomes a pointed seed pod which resembles a crane's bill and explains the first part of its scientific name. *Geranium* comes from the Greek *geranos*, meaning crane. For the same reason, the genus name for the greenhouse geranium is



Pelargonium which means storkbill.

As its seeds mature, cranesbill prepares to perform its own botanical sleight-of-hand. When fully ripened, the beaked pod splits into five segments that suddenly coil upward, scattering its seeds for a distance of several feet.

White Trout Lily alias Fawn Lily alias Dogtooth Violet alias Adder's-tongue (*Erythronium albidum*)

Unlike the other two wildflowers, this one is named for its leaves, mottled leaves that are spotted like a trout or fawn. Plants with a single leaf will not flower while those with a pair of leaves can be expected to flower. The pair of leaves also offers an additional explanation for the name fawn lily. As naturalist John Burroughs wrote at the turn of the twentieth century, "Its two leaves stand up like fawn's ears, and this feature, with its recurved petals, gives it an alert, wide-awake look."

The name Dogtooth Violet raises some problems. This plant is definitely a lily, not a violet. The flower is an inch wide with white petals that, as Burroughs describes, curve back. The "dogtooth" does not refer to the flower but, rather, to the tooth-like shape of this plant's underground bulb. Why a dog's tooth? Why not a cat's tooth or a baby's tooth? Did someone just happen to have a dog's tooth laying around for comparison's sake? Perhaps, I'm barking up, I mean, under the wrong tree.

Then we get to adder's-tongue. Unless you have quite an imagination, there is nothing to suggest a

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snake's tongue on this wildflower. It is more likely that the plant reminded European settlers of some plant from the old country called adder's-tongue. All I can say is with names like this, maybe a witch did use this in her cauldron.

Mayapple or Mandrake (*Podophyllum peltatum*)

Resembling a cluster of stubby umbrellas, colonies of mayapple can be found growing in maple or oak woods as well as on the edges of clearings. The leaves, which are dark green above and light green below, grow to a height of twelve to eighteen inches. Like the trout lily, only double-leaved stems produce flowers, single-leaved stems will not.

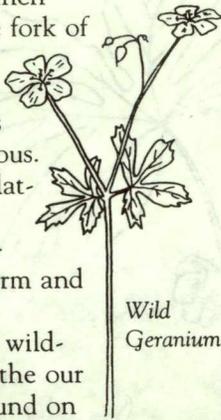
The flower is something to see but you have to lift up the large leaves to find it. As the name suggests, the flower appears in May and it resembles an apple blossom. Mayapple's single, large (one to two inch diameter), white, waxy flower is located at the fork of the two leaves. The flower develops into an "apple" (a berry, actually) that looks like a small lemon. Although the yellow pulp in this fruit is edible, the seeds it contains are poisonous.

The name mandrake comes from an unrelated southern European plant that has a similar looking root. The root of the Old World mandrake was once thought to resemble human form and to shriek when plucked.

Another seemingly magical occurrence, a wildflower disappearing act, occurs each spring in the our woods. Some of the early blooming flowers found on the forest floor will sprout, mature, flower and produce seeds between the time the snow melts and the tree canopy fully develops. In the summer, there is no leaf, no flower, no sign that these plants ever existed. The energy the wildflowers have gathered from the spring sun will be stored in their roots and used next year to repeat their life cycle.

Don't be fooled by this disappearing act, these are not short-lived plants. For example, studies conducted in southern Wisconsin indicated that the average age of a trout lily colony to be 145 years. Some colonies were found to be over 300 years old! Short lived? Not hardly.

You, on the other hand, have only a brief time to enjoy these flowers. So, some Sunday in early May, come visit the nature center. One last thought about a woodland wildflower walk, while I can guarantee that you won't be sharing the trail with any witches, I must warn you that the you could get hopelessly lost in the forest's springtime spell.



Wild
Geranium

SUMMER HOURS BEGIN IN APRIL

In March, Stillman will be open to the public on Sundays from 1 PM to 4 PM. Starting in April, Stillman will be open Sundays from 9 AM to 4 PM.

Please note that the Stillman Nature Center is available, by reservation, during the week to school classes. For a brochure that describes the programs and fees, just call or email (stillnc@flash.net) us and we'll be happy to send you one. Also, Stillman welcomes Audubon chapters, garden clubs and other organized adult groups. Call 428-OWLS to reserve a time for your organization.

Enjoy the Trees on Our Earth Saturday!

In honor of Arbor and Earth Days, we will be open Saturday, April 24, from 9:00AM to 4:00PM.

PROGRAMS

Program Basics: PLEASE CALL or fax us at 428-OWLS(6957), or email Stillman at: stillnc@flash.net TO MAKE RESERVATIONS for programs (except for bird banding open houses). Remember to include your name, phone number, and the number of people that will be attending. *Please, no scout groups.*

If less than 5 - 10 people (varying with the program) have called two days prior to a program, the program could well be cancelled. So, don't forget to call the nature center in advance. If you discover that you are unable to attend, please call to cancel your reservations. This courtesy will be greatly appreciated.

BUILD YOUR OWN BIRD HOUSE

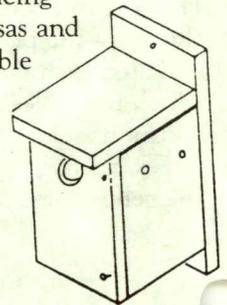
Many birds, including wrens, swallows and bluebirds, like to nest in tree cavities. You can increase the chances of attracting such birds by placing nest boxes in your yard. Join Jim Kaltsas and Roy Schodtler as they help you assemble your own nest box. Feel free to drop in between the times listed and *please bring your own hammer.*

Date Sunday, March 14

Time: 1:00 - 3:30

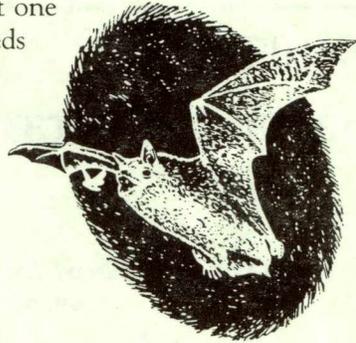
Member's Fee: \$3.00/house kit

Non-member's Fee: \$5.00/house kit



BUILD YOUR OWN BAT HOUSE

No, we're not talking about a place to shower or a place to keep your Louisville sluggers. We're talking about a roost for your night-flying, bug-eating neighbors. Bug zappers are a waste of electricity when you remember that one little brown bat will eat hundreds of mosquitoes in an hour. Of course, there is no guarantee that bats will use your new bat house but wouldn't be neat if they did!



Date: Sunday, March 28
Time: 1:00 - 3:30
Member's Fee: \$5.00/house kit
Non-member's Fee: \$7.00/house kit

BIRD BANDING IS BACK

Watch Mark Spreyer, a licensed bird bander, measure, weigh and record data about our resident and migratory birds. Birds are not caught in a predictable manner, so come prepared to hike the trails. With luck, you'll see a bird in the hand and two in the bush. If it is raining, the banding open house will be cancelled.

Dates: Sundays, April 4 & May 2
Time: 9:00AM to Noon
Fee: None

MORNING BIRD WALKS

Mark Spreyer will lead a morning bird walk. Migration will be under way and you never know what we might find. Binoculars and field guides are a must. If you don't have any, don't worry, Stillman does. *Please call 428-OWLS to make reservations.*

Date: Sundays, April 18 & May 16
Time: 8:00AM
Fee: None
Age: 10 years and up



WILDFLOWER WALKS

Join us as we explore Stillman's woodlands in search of ephemeral beauties such as white trillium, mayapple, trout lily and the jack-in-the-pulpit. Bring your camera!

Dates: Sundays, May 2 and 9
Time: 2:00PM
Age: Ten years and up
Fee: None

CALLING VOLUNTEERS

Daria Sapp and her indefatigable landscape volunteers need help. Duties include buckthorn clearing, prairie burning and wildflower planting.

Stillman has the tools. We need healthy, outdoor-loving bodies to wield them. Thursday mornings are our usual work times. We start at 9:00 AM and wrap up around noon. Questions? Call Daria at 381-5358.

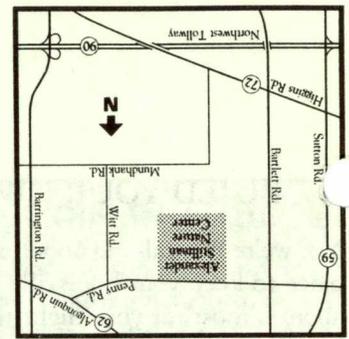
Speaking of volunteers, kudos to high school students **Candace Miller** and **Brian Wilson** who have been helping **Roger Laegeler** cut and clear buckthorn. Thanks for giving up part of your Saturdays, we really appreciate your efforts!

BIRD SONG QUIZ

Some people use words to remember bird calls and songs. With this in mind, I put together the following quiz. Your job, match the bird to the "words" it sings. The answers appear at the bottom.

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1) Common Yellowthroat | A. "drink your teeea;" "chewink" |
| 2) Olive-sided Flycatcher | B. "tea-cher, tea-cher, tea-cher" |
| 3) White-throated Sparrow | C. "o-ka-leeeee" |
| 4) Rufous-sided Towhee | D. "wicka, wicka, wicka, wicka" |
| 5) Common Flicker | E. "witchity, witchity, witchity" |
| 6) Black & White Warbler | F. "ol Sam Peabody, Peabody" |
| 7) Ovenbird | G. "pizza, pizza, pizza, pizza" |
| 8) Red-winged Blackbird | H. "hic -- free beers" |

1) E. 2) H. 3) F. 4) A. 5) D. 6) G. 7) B. 8) C.



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STILLMAN
 nature center



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