

WEEKLY UPDATE – OCTOBER 15 – 22, 2017

“The trees are in their autumn beauty,
The woodland paths are dry,
Under the October twilight the water
Mirrors a still sky;
Upon the brimming water among the stones
Are nine and fifty swans.”

W.B. Yeats (1865-1939), “The Wild Swans at Coole”

VanDusen Garden does not have swans (although wouldn't it be nice if it did?), but does host geese, ducks, herons and other water birds that may stop over on their migratory path. And there are trees, many in their splendid autumn beauty right now, especially the ash trees along the Autumn Stroll. The woodland paths identified in the October Self-Guided Tour invite quiet exploration even as the brimming bins of pumpkins near the Lathe House indicate the preparations for the upcoming bright, busy Glow in the Garden event. There is nothing to report.

Guide Goings On

1. Thursday, October 19 – GLT Meeting – 10:00am – Cedar Room
2. Thursday, November 9 – Guide Education/Business Meeting
The speaker is Carl C., a Tuesday guide;
He will be talking about Chinese culture, myths,
legends and folktales vis a vis plants of Chinese origin
in the garden.
3. Thursday, December 7 – Annual Guide Christmas Potluck Luncheon

Garden Goings On

1. Works by Vicky Earle
Until December 30 at the Bloedel Conservatory and Josef Wosk Library
2. Vancouver Mycological Society 2017 Mushroom Show
Sunday, October 22 – 11:00am – 4:00pm
Floral Hall/Cedar Room
Admission \$3.00
3. Dried Flower Arrangers' Sale
Friday, October 27; Saturday, October 28; Sunday, October 29
1:00pm-4:00pm (Saturday, 10:00am-4:00pm), HSBC Arrival Hall
4. Oil Paintings by Grazyna Wolski
Until October 31 in the Discovery Room

Garden Clippings

1. In the “Weekly Update” archives for 2016

Oct. 15-22 – Henry’s Maple

2. Bird Brains!?! – A recent item in *The Economist* (Sept. 30-Oct.6) describes a study undertaken at the National Autonomous University of Mexico that reveals that finches deliberately gather and weave discarded cigarette butts into their nests, “to keep ticks at bay, and improve the survival of their young.”
3. Sad Events: Another item in *The Economist* (Oct.7-Oct. 13) reports that Venezuela which once had five glaciers near the peaks of the Sierra Nevada de Merida now has only one, the Humboldt glacier (named after Alexander von Humboldt who explored and mapped this area at very beginning of the nineteenth century); at the present melt rate brought about by climate change it will disappear in a decade or two, making Venezuela the “first country in the satellite age to have lost all its glaciers. Adding to the tragedy is the inability of scientists to properly study and gather useful data due to the political crisis currently afflicting the country.

In an Opinion piece in the “Sunday Review” section of the *NY Times* (Sunday, October 8), Margaret Renkl laments the continuing decline of the monarch butterfly due to the loss of milkweed, whose disappearance was accelerated by the use of Roundup in the last century. “In 1996, the year before Roundup resistant soybeans and corn were first planted in the Midwest, the butterflies’ primary migration corridor, there were a billion migrating monarchs in North America. This year there are roughly 109 million and that number is down 27% from just last year.” Also contributing to population decline are deforestation in Mexico, where they winter, and climate change.

All three items are inside the front cover of the Information Binder.

4. A correction: Hope Jahren’s web address is www.hopejahrensurecanwrite.com

The Franklin Tree – *Franklinia alatamaha*

If Thursday’s torrential rain didn’t knock all the blossoms off, you may still have a chance to see the beautiful camellia-like flowers which have an orange blossom or honeysuckle fragrance and the vivid orangey-red foliage of the Franklin tree.

A member of Theaceae, the tea plant family, which also contains *Camellia* and *Stewartia*, the Franklin tree is native to the state of Georgia, where it once grew along the Altamaha River Valley and where it was first discovered by John Bartram and his son William in 1765. While most plants in this family are evergreen, *Franklinea* and *Stewartia* are deciduous. *Franklinia* can take the form of a large shrub or small tree.

John Bartram (1699-1777), one of the influential men that Andrea Wulf writes about in *The Brother Gardeners*, was a botanist, horticulturalist and explorer. Given that he has been called the “father of American botany” and that his best friend was Benjamin Franklin with whom he cofounded the American Philosophical Society, he could easily be called one of the “Founding Gardeners.” Linnaeus, whose classification system Bartram used, called him the “greatest natural botanist in the world. ”

John Bartram travelled extensively throughout eastern Canada and the United States recording his observations and discoveries and collecting seeds and plants, many of which he sent to Peter Collinson, an English merchant in London, who then shared them with his friends and private collectors including Lord Petre, the foremost collector of North American trees and shrubs in Europe, the Duke of Norfolk and the Duke of Richmond. In 1765, he was appointed the Royal Botanist for North America by King George III and his annual deliveries of seeds and plants were added to the royal collection at Kew Garden. In this year also, he undertook the journey which would lead to the discovery of the Franklin tree and which he recounts in his *Diary of a Journey Through the Carolinas, Georgia and Florida*. Bartram is also noted for the discovery and introduction of kalmia, rhododendron and magnolia species.

His son, William, returned many times to the Altamaha River region and collected the Franklin tree seeds, returning with them to Bartram's Garden in Philadelphia where he was able to produce flowering plants by 1781. He named the "rare and elegant flowering shrub" *Franklinia alatomaha* (this is the old spelling of the Altamaha River) after his father's great friend, Benjamin Franklin. The Franklin tree was last verified as growing in the wild in 1803 and it is officially extinct although it is not clear why. Some possible causes include fire and floods, over collection by enthusiastic plant hunters, clearing of the land along the river to grow cotton and accompanying fungal diseases and something with which we are very familiar and which Alexander von Humboldt identified: climate change.

All trees known today are descended from the seeds grown by William Bartram. That we enjoy this lovely tree today is a credit to the intrepid plant explorers and subsequent work by botanical gardens to ensure its survival.

According to the July, 2016 PCR, *Franklinia alatomaha* can be seen in beds 16, 28, 33A and 107D, all in the Eastern North America Garden, and in bed 46E on the Rhododendron Path west of the *Stewartia*.

Please send comments, questions, corrections etc. to pkbuchanan@shaw.ca

Only a few more weeks before the end of the guiding season!
Stay warm and dry!

"In shadowy woods the brown nuts fall
As sweeps the wind through treetops tall...
In golden bars through leafy doors
The sunshine falls on golden floors...
Phoebe Holder, "A Song of October" in *The Queries Magazine*, 1890