

# WILDFLOWER

Newsletter of the National Wildflower Research Center

Vol. 1, No. 1 Spring, 1984

## Lady Bird's Center is a Dream Come True

The founding of the National Wildflower Research Center in December, 1982, was, for me, a dream come true--the culmination of a long-held desire to learn more about wildflowers and to promote their use.

Many of you have shared this dream and generously devoted your time, funds or other resources to help the Center get underway, and I thank you with all my heart.

Our first year has been thrilling as we have watched the Center move along through its early days--planning, worrying and cheering all the while. I'm proud to say we have achieved a great deal. There is an office, a small laboratory and staff, a new building--nearly complete--the beginnings of our information clearinghouse, and very importantly, our first research plots (it is here where my heart really lies!).

These first steps now lead us to the challenge of strengthening the Center, and moving forward to meet our goals--to preserve our treasure of wildflowers, expand our "how-to" knowledge of their growth and germination requirements, and, hopefully, to unlock other secrets they may hold. Their aesthetic gifts and the benefits of saving precious water, fuel, and other natural resources for future generations promise great rewards.

There is so *much* exciting work ahead, and I hope you share my keen anticipation of "rolling up our shirtsleeves" and making 1984 a banner year!

*Lady Bird Johnson*

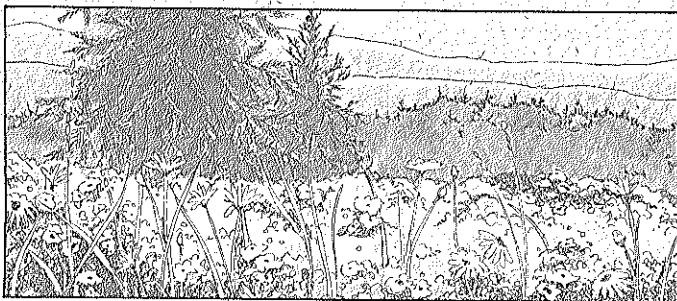


Illustration: Kelly Leahy



Message from the Trustees' President

## Our Wildflower Center Is Blossoming After First Year

We are on the way--well on the way!

In the short year we have been in business as the National Wildflower Research Center, we have brought together an outstanding array of people as trustees, moved toward a membership program, completed our administration-laboratory building, appointed an outstanding Director and staff, launched this first edition of our Newsletter and achieved many other things.

Trustees' Letter continued on Page 2

## Introducing Dr. Northington

Wildflowers have been more than a passing fancy for David K. Northington. For the past 15 years, he has been teaching about them, researching them, writing about them, observing them, and growing them.



Dr. Northington now has a new challenge with wildflowers; he will be promoting them as Director of the National Wildflower Research Center.

According to Nash Castro, president of the Center's Executive Board, "Our outstanding talent search committee literally scoured the country over several months for the best possible candidate. The committee, Mrs. Johnson and I are unanimous in agreeing that David K. Northington is clearly the best qualified person in the United States for this exciting and challenging position."

Northington received both his bachelor's and doctorate degree in Botany at The University of Texas at Austin. He began teaching at Texas Tech in 1971, and took over the curatorship of the E. L. Reed Herbarium at that time. He is now an associate professor of Biological Sciences. In addition, he is director of the Texas Tech University Center at Junction, a biological field station. At the Junction Center, Northington has been responsible for all program, development, budgetary and personnel management at the Center. He has also represented the Center at the community, state and national levels.

Northington has continued his own research in vascular plant systematics and adaptive mechanisms of arid and semi-arid plants. In his own words, "Essentially all of my scientific interest and...research in the past 12 years has been on flowering plants native to the Southwest, many of which are roadside wildflowers--the False dandelion, Mexican hat, Orange globe mallow, or native landscaping plants--the Yucca, Century plant, and Mountain laurel."

Northington also developed his interest in native plants by directing a three-year floristic survey of the Guadalupe Mountains National Park in Texas for the National Park Service.

He has been the supervising professor for ten graduate students, and has served as a committee member for 29 other graduate students. He has received many honors as a teacher including the Spencer A. Wells Faculty Award for the most outstanding teacher at Texas Tech in 1980, and the Mortar Board Omicron Delta Kappa award as one of the five most outstanding faculty members in 1981.

"I perceive considerable parallels between my present responsibilities and the described needs of the National Wildflower Research Center," Dr. Northington said.

## Volunteers ease growing pains

The desks were hardly installed and the phones plugged in when volunteers came to help.

In 1983, the Junior League of Austin selected the National Wildflower Research Center as a sponsored project, generously giving \$30,000 over a three year period to develop a volunteer program. Twenty-one League volunteers also filled vital jobs.

Help also came from members of the local Native Plant Society, the American Society of Landscape Architects, artists, photographers, media professionals, university students and other wildflower enthusiasts.

These volunteers have cheerfully assisted in every facet of our office work--typing, filing, publication production and program planning. They have sorted seeds, and turned dirt for research plots. In all, more than 60 volunteers have filled 22 positions. At the end of 1983 they had logged more than 1100 hours of service. We would never have met the challenges of our first year without them. They deserve more thanks than words can express.

There are still many jobs for willing hands. People are needed for office work, light groundskeeping, telephone receptionist work and more.

If you are nearby, have a few hours and would enjoy contributing them to the National Wildflower Research Center, call the office, 512-929-3600 and let us know.



*Continued from Page 1*

I am fortified in my belief by Mrs. Johnson's inspired and inspiring leadership. If anything distinguishes this lovely lady beyond her graciousness, it has got to be her instinct for what is right and her "can do" attitude.

We're on the way!

*During the years of the Johnson Administration Nash Castro was Director of the National Capital Region of the National Park Service, working closely with Mrs. Johnson on her projects to beautify the Capitol City. They have continued to work on many projects since that time, including NWRC.*



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# Why Wildflowers?

By Kathryn Kennedy

Wildflowers do much more than add beauty to the landscapes they occupy. They help preserve water tables, reduce mowing costs, provide nourishment to wildlife in all areas of the nation and protect the soil while providing it with needed mineral and chemical nourishment. In fact, the pragmatic uses of wildflowers have traditionally been overlooked and understated because of their natural beauty.

Increasingly we are becoming aware of the shortages and quality problems with our water, soil and air. Diminishing supplies of fossil fuels as well as fertilizers and other petrochemical products have increased the burden of maintenance for traditional turf, grass and ornamental landscaping. Some chemical solutions for plant and animal pests have had undesirable ecological side effects. The price of such solutions has increased while effectiveness has decreased.

Wildflower landscapes, used to surviving on their own, can cut watering by as much as 50 to 70 percent. These savings in water use can be significant, as water becomes more scarce. Water tables in Nebraska and Oklahoma are falling each year. In Arizona, three million acre feet/year more is pumped out of their supply aquifers than nature can refill. In Texas, 5.7 million acre feet/year more is pumped out of aquifers than goes in.

Costs of mowing also can be cut considerably with wildflower landscaping. Turfgrass landscapes need weekly or biweekly mowing, while wildflowers do best with minimal maintenance, generally requiring mowing only after the seed is set.

Potential savings can be in the millions for highway departments, considering the costs of fuel, oil, equipment, maintenance and manpower. In 1975, Nebraska's Department of Roads planted wildflowers to reduce mowing. They have been able to reduce their mowing force from 13 people to three. By expanding their existing wildflower program in 1983, Texas has saved 23 percent of 1982 mowing costs.

Wildflowers also help provide essential wildlife cover and food. Of the midwest's pheasant population, 60% are dependent on roadside habitat. Other studies indicate that range and pasturelands that have a good mixture of grasses and other flowering plants provide better livestock yields than pasture maintained in grassland alone.

These hardy plants have many other advantages, not the least of which are potential food, fiber and medicines. Appallingly, only a few hundred of our many thousands of native species have been investigated for such potential uses, although we know that many could be of significant value.

Wildflowers are an invaluable part of our national heritage and deserve both preservation and study. Support by conservationists and beautification enthusiasts is bringing wildflowers into the public eye. With increased support, a new and rapidly growing market has opened up for nurserymen and landscapers.

Tourism can also benefit. Texas started one of the first roadside wildflower programs in 1929. Since that time the state has developed fantastic displays, bringing springtime visitors from across the nation, resulting in several million dollars in additional income to Central Texas communities.

Several other states now have successful wildflower programs. The efforts of a Tulsa, OK, garden club started a wildflower beautification program that has become national. It is now known as Operation Wildflower, sponsored by the National Council of State Garden Clubs.

There are many success stories. But there are also reports of disappointing or inconsistent results. The long-range success of wildflower and native plant landscaping depends on continued availability of seedlings, commercial seed sources, ecological information, germination data and field work. The National Wildflower Research Center is committed to helping meet these needs.

*Kathryn Kennedy is the Administrative Coordinator of the National Wildflower Research Center and is also a plant ecologist.*

## Become a Charter Member

We invite you to participate in our wildflower adventure. With our first newsletter, we offer you an opportunity to join our fast-growing group of wildflower enthusiasts and this innovative center for wildflower research.

Charter membership in the National Wildflower Research Center is now being offered at the special rate of \$20.00 per year.

Members will receive our quarterly newsletter, information about wildflowers and an invitation to visit the Center. In addition, members will receive notification of other special opportunities and events.

This membership drive is part of a national membership program made possible by a generous gift from Lila Acheson Wallace. Her gift will underwrite costs of a national direct mail membership campaign.

In addition, the Center is undertaking a \$3 million capital fund effort. A gift of \$5,000 or more (payable on a scheduled basis) entitles the donor to be designated a permanent Founder. Information about the Founders Fund is available from the Center.

Funding in the form of other tax deductible gifts such as bequests, memorials, deferred gifts and other planned giving instruments is also encouraged.

Contributions of any amount are welcome and sincerely appreciated. These gifts are literally providing us with seed money!

For information or suggestions concerning how you wish to help, write to Carolyn Curtis, Development Director, National Wildflower Research Center, 2600 FM 973 North, Austin, TX 78725. Telephone, 512-929-3600.



# National Clearinghouse: A Top Priority

Start asking questions about wildflowers and native plants and you discover that there are many interesting things going on across the country.

- The New England Wildflower Society has been busily working for years to promote and preserve their wildflowers.
- Dr. Don Levin at The University of Texas has researched germination characteristics of several flowers native to Texas.
- A graduate student in New Mexico has been investigating the germination requirements of the common desert wildflower Fetid-Marigold *Pectis angustifolia*.
- The University of Nebraska has just acquired a fine old prairie for research.
- Californians started a group called The Native Plant Society in 1965 which has now spread to 17 states.

The growing interest in wildflowers is indeed a grass roots movement. Most investigators, groups, and individuals are working independently, and, in many cases, are unaware of efforts elsewhere. We have found that this is true at practically all levels of activity, from academic researchers to nurserymen, conservationists, ecologists and more. There is a need to share information!

The National Wildflower Research Center has committed itself to setting up a national clearinghouse of information on wildflowers and native plants.

"There has long been a crying need for a clearinghouse," according to Gail Haggard, owner of Plants of the Southwest, Santa Fe, NM.

Carlton B. Lees, recently retired Vice President of the New York Botanical Society, believes the clearinghouse will prevent much duplication of effort. Now a member of NWRC's executive committee, Lees said, "A vast communication network is being estab-

lished through the Center's function as a clearinghouse." Much can be learned by knowing where good examples of wildflower landscapes exist, particularly those which are the result of successful management.

From information the clearinghouse gathers, we will also learn what's most needed in this country in the way of research. Clearinghouse and information specialists have helped with planning a computer program.

We envision the clearinghouse to maintain lists of seed and plant suppliers, organizations, research scientists, planting projects, information sources, bibliographies, and much more. All wildflower activity will be monitored as much as possible, with information available to the public in return.

We have already assembled information on species, suppliers and resource organizations and individuals for each state. This huge project has made it possible to answer the thousands of requests we have received.

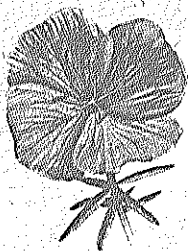
*Any information you have about wildflowers, organizations, agencies or individuals working with them, or native plant research articles, books or publications, would be helpful to us. Please write or call the Center with your information.*

## LBJ Symposium Planned

Environmentalists and beautification enthusiasts will be among those attending The LBJ Library annual Symposium, *The Land, The City and The Human Spirit* April 12 and 13. Also sponsored by the Southwest Center for the Study of American Architecture, the symposium will be held at the LBJ Library, 2313 Red River, Austin, TX. For information call 512-482-5137.

## National Wildflower Research Center

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