

Long Island Botanical Society

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The Quarterly Newsletter

Spring 2006

Continuing the Botanical Tradition on Long Island: 1984–1985

Bob Zaremba

COMING TO LONG ISLAND

I remember well my first visit to Long Island. It was February 1984 and I was on my way to Cold Spring Harbor from New Rochelle for an interview with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) for a botanist position. I drove along the Northern State Parkway, which was lined with trees, and was surprised to see an extensive forest on this part of Long Island. In Hicksville, where I turned north, there were large open fields and what appeared to be farms. Laurel Hollow and Cold Spring Harbor had a forest that looked mature, healthy, and diverse. With all that *Liriodendron*, maybe this was an example of the Mixed Mesophytic Forest that I had read about in the Mid-Atlantic Region. Uplands Farm appeared to be a working farm, with standing dead corn from last year's crop and a greenhouse. Well, Long Island was not really what I saw that day, nor was it the developed suburban sprawl that I had anticipated. I certainly did not know at that time that I would become very familiar with the many natural areas on the Island, that I would become part of the continuing Long Island botanical tradition and would help to begin a new botany organization.

Carol Reschke and Beth Yanuck, the only two employees of the New York Natural Heritage Program, and Tom French of the TNC Regional Office in Boston conducted the interview. Long Island needed a botanist for a one-year position to document rare species and natural communities for the active land protection program in the two TNC chapters. This would be part of the Natural Heritage Program work to map and record species and community data for each state, an effort that was already 10 years old but slow to establish in New York. There were only a few hundred occurrences of species and communities in the New York database that was maintained by the Boston office. TNC wanted to be sure that it had selected the most important sites

for protection. They wanted to know the significance of these sites in relation to other sites in New York and the region. Each site was regarded as a contribution to a portfolio of places that would one day represent all diversity in the United States.

While completing a post-doctoral fellowship with the Massachusetts Audubon Society on Nantucket, I had learned how to find and identify rare plants and to use the methodology of the Heritage Programs from Bruce Sorrie, the Massachusetts Natural Heritage Program botanist. Bruce spent all of his time thinking about plants, searching the woods, fields, and ponds for rare species, and talking to other botanists about missing plants, historical fieldwork, and taxonomically confusing plant groups. What could be more fun than that?

Upon leaving Nantucket, I knew what I wanted to do. I wanted to work for TNC and to focus on rare plant conservation. There was really only one problem—I had no training as a field botanist. I had a Ph. D. in Botany, but I had never taken the basic flora course, so that what I knew of the Northeastern flora I had picked up in my two years on Nantucket. My interview was cordial, but I left thinking it had been a disaster. There was a focus on species identification and plant ecology. And there was a quiz, through which I stumbled: I did not know where to find *Aster acuminatus* and I guessed, never having heard of it, that *Lilaeopsis chinensis* was a lily. So I was surprised to learn that TNC would hire me.

BECOMING A HERITAGE BOTANIST

Before the field season began, I, along with other new Heritage botanists, traveled to Arlington, Virginia to learn Heritage methodology from Bob Jenkins, the head of TNC science, and Larry Morse, the chief botanist. We learned how to record herbarium information

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Long Island Botanical Society

Founded: 1986
Incorporated: 1989

The Long Island Botanical Society is dedicated to the promotion of field botany and a greater understanding of the plants that grow wild on Long Island, New York.

Visit the Society's Web site
www.libotanical.org

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Society News

LIBS is 20 years old! Our first meeting was held at the Museum of Long Island Natural Science in Stony Brook, on May 1, 1986. Founding members were Joseph Beitel, Jane Blanchard, Skip Blanchard, Karen Blumer, David Brandenburg, Barbara Conolly, Margaret Conover, Steven Englebright, Louise Harrison, Jane Hoar, Carol Johnston, Eric Lamont, Mary Laura Lamont, Robert Laskowski, Betty Lotowycz, Travis MacClendon, Chris Mangels, Vincent Puglisi, Glenn Richard, James Romansky, Steven Jay Sanford, Paul Stoutenburgh, Rosalie Talbert, James Thomson, John Turner, Perry Welch, Ray Welch, Robert Zaremba, and Kim Zarillo.

Members and friends will not want to miss the anniversary celebration at LIBS's May 9 meeting, which will feature a talk on the early years of LIBS by Society co-founder and first president, Dr. Bob Zaremba. This special anniversary issue of the LIBS newsletter features both an article by Bob Zaremba and a centerfold scrapbook of early photos of LIBS members. Then, in July, 18 LIBS members will be celebrating on a special 20th anniversary botanizing trip to Newfoundland.

As newsletter editor, and the other co-founder of the Society, I'd like to express my appreciation to all those members who have participated in the life of our organization over the last 20 years. I know that we share a lot of great memories as we have pursued field botany on Long Island. As Bob says in his article, we are all a living part of a wonderful botanical tradition.

IN OTHER NEWS...

At the January 10 meeting, Andy Greller reported sadly that Grace Forest is dead. [see Andy's 2005 article in the LIBS quarterly newsletter 15(1), pp. 6-7]. A Nassau County judge has ruled in favor of the development and the only satisfaction is that the DEC has been able to save the wetlands with a 100-foot border.

Several LIBS members have become interested in tracking down and verifying records of big trees. The last Long Island Big Tree Survey was conducted by Planting Fields and published by the DEC in 1991. On March 22, Margaret Conover, Andy Greller, and Gerry Moore spent a morning surveying some of the 50 or so record-holding big trees at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. Most of these were exotic species, such as weeping willow and Amur honeysuckle. A notable exception is the state record for the native species, *Ilex montana*, Mountain winterberry. With over 600 trees to be surveyed, this work is a monumental task, and the Society will not take it on as a project. However, we are planning a few more field trips. The national champion *Ailanthus* tree grows, not in Brooklyn, but in St. James.

Jenny Ulsheimer had resigned as co-chair of the Field Trip Committee. Bill Jacobs has left his position as Invasive Species Project Director at The Nature Conservancy.

Marilyn Jordan announced that some trials that she had conducted indicated that local *Kudzu* seeds are viable locally. Thirty-six percent of planted seeds in her experiment had germinated within three weeks.

Steve Clemants announced the publication of the book *Wildflowers in the Field and Forest*, which he authored with Carol Gracie. It covers 1450 species with distribution maps and color illustrations. He noted that the new nomenclature of the USDA Plant Database is employed. The book can be purchased online from Amazon.com.

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and map historical occurrences, and we became familiar with the Heritage database and the linkages between species, population locations, protection, and management. But more than anything else, we learned that we were part of a vision to create an interactive body of field scientists who would document the plants, animals, and natural communities that we call biodiversity. Over the next 18 years, as a member of this group of field-oriented biologists, I contributed to the development of the Heritage database, which has now become a powerful conservation tool.

Back on Long Island, TNC provided me with a list of people to contact and places to visit. Fortunately, Long Island has a long and well-documented history of plant exploration that included a trail that was easy to follow to sites. First, I traveled to the New York State Museum in Albany to meet Dick Mitchell and Chuck Sheviak who had recently published a book on New York State rare plants that was the basis for the initial Heritage rare plant tracking list of about 100 species. Dick noted that the Sag Harbor Ponds were the site of many historical rare plant populations that had not been seen for years. I should be able to find some of these populations, if I were to look.

The Herbarium of the New York State Museum held hundreds of specimens for Long Island rare plants with detailed information on locations of collections, habitat, and when to look for particular species, as well as a card file for all New York species, with specimen data from herbaria throughout the Northeast. And then there was a curious and massive list of New York species with numbers developed by Stanley Smith, who had worked in the State Museum in the 1950s and 1960s. While it never became clear to me what these numbers represented, they appeared to reflect abundance in a way that would eventually prove useful to me.

FIELDWORK

Upon my return to Long Island, I scheduled a series of field meetings with local botanists to visit sites and see occurrences of the listed species. My job was a continuation of work initiated by Ann Johnson, who, in 1983, had already made some of the major contacts and had recorded data for some of the well-known species occurrences on the Island. She had also found new populations of species, primarily on the South Fork.

The Long Island botanists generously shared their data and showed me their favorite sites. Andy Greller, John Cryan, and Mike Laspia suggested places to visit. Later Bob Laskowski, Skip Blanchard, and Eric Lamont added their ideas on where to look. I visited Edgewood, the Dwarf Pine Plains, and the Peconic River Headwaters with John Turner; Connetquot River

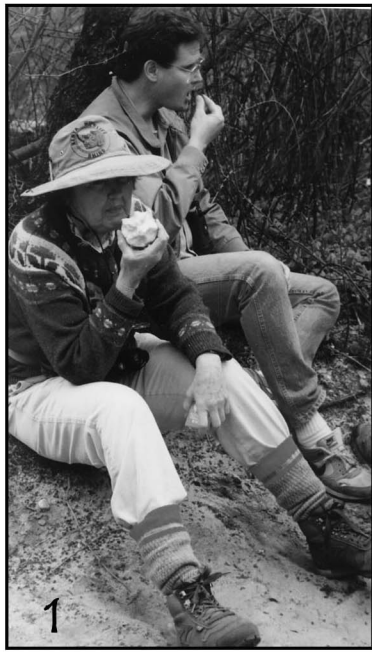
State Park with Bob McGrath; Cranberry Bog, South Haven County Park, and Big Reed Pond with Joe Beitel; Shu Swamp with Betty Lotowycz, Barbara Conolly, and Carol Johnston; the Hempstead Plains with Carole Neidich-Ryder; and Shadmoor with Larry Penny.

There were already many known sites for listed rare species that had not yet been entered into the Heritage database. There were well-known populations of *Pyxidantha barbulata*, *Polygala lutea*, *Schizaea pusilla*, *Plantanthera cristata* and *P. ciliaris*, *Liatris scariosa*, *Tipularia discolor*, and *Drosera filiformis*. There were also multiple occurrences for *Helianthemum dumosum* that we thought was a globally rare species that would be listed as Endangered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. At one time, *H. dumosum* seemed to define the importance of sites on the South Fork and even appeared on the lawns of several Chapter trustees. *Agalinis acuta* was also a celebrated species on Long Island. In 1983, Larry Penny had located a population at Shadmoor, the first documented population outside Massachusetts in many years. I visited all these sites and began to develop search images for the target species.

The visits to coastal plain ponds, particularly those in the Sag Harbor region, later called the Long Pond Greenbelt, were successful. That first year, I relocated populations of *Coreopsis rosea*, *Eleocharis equisetoides*, *E. tuberosa*, *Hypericum adpressum*, *Rhynchospora nitens*, and *Eupatorium leucolepis*, some of which had not been seen or recorded in 75 years. Dick Mitchell was correct that the Sag Harbor Ponds were worth a visit. That first year, I saw coastal plain pond species that were emergents or species that could live on the lower borders of lawns that were damp along the pond margins. I considered recommending that the trees and shrubs be cleared along ponds to enhance habitat for rare species. I did not know at that time how these ponds functioned or how botanically rich these site would be in other, drier years.

That first fall I also found two new populations of *Agalinis acuta*: one at the Hempstead Plains and the other at Montauk. By winter, there was a pile of over one hundred populations of rare plants to document. I had developed a card file of Long Island historical occurrences to seek and a full agenda for another year of fieldwork. My contract was renewed for the second year. I spent many days at the Planting Fields Arboretum, the New York Botanical Garden, the Brooklyn Botanical Garden, the New York State Museum, and a few days at the Bailey Hortoreum and Grays to amass data on rare plant sites and to become familiar with species that I had not yet seen. I also used the Stanley Smith DEC Region document to expand the rare species list for Long Island. I added nearly 300 species to

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Long Island Botanical Society

The First Five Years 1986-1991



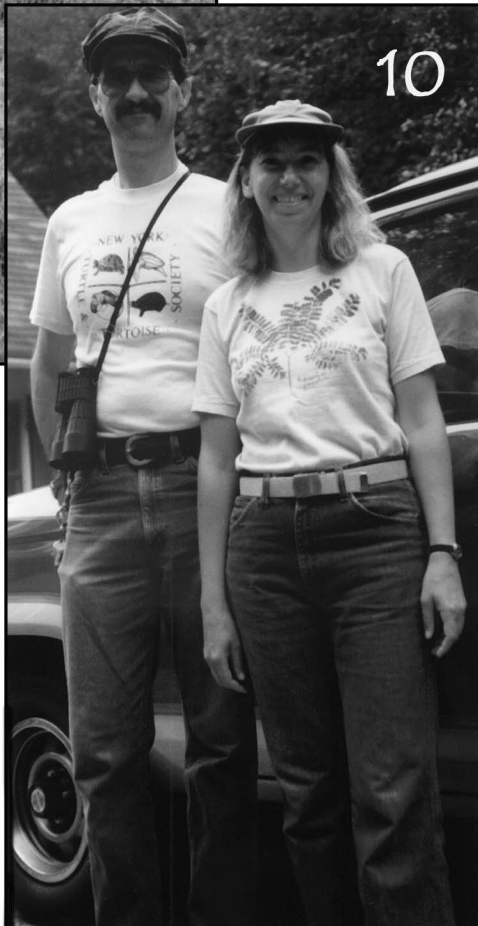
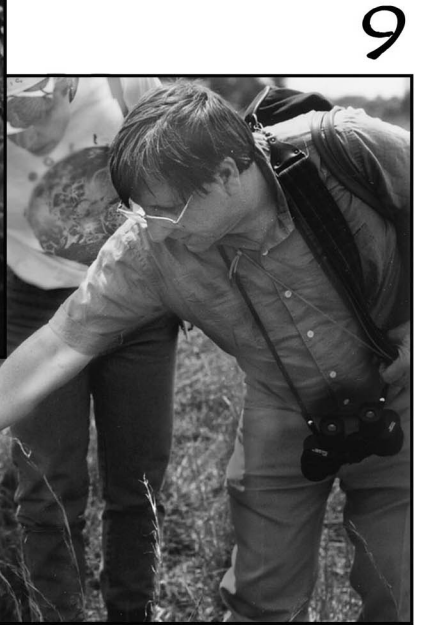
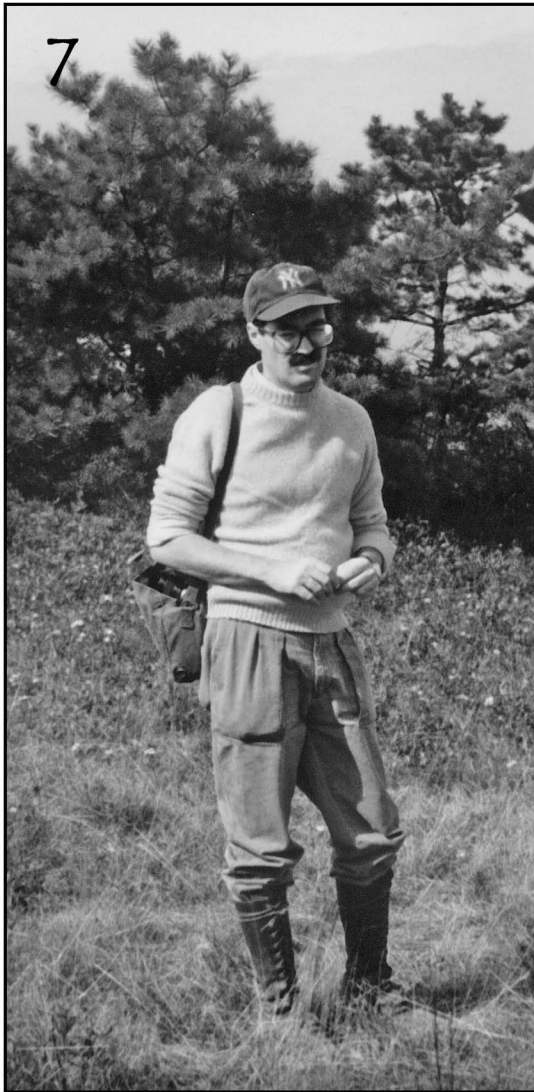
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Photos by
Barbara Conolly →

Photo Legend

(centerfold)

Photos taken on various LIBS Field Trips
between 1988 and 1991

- 1 Betty Lotowycz and John Turner
- 2 Bob Zaremba
- 3 (From left to right): George Talbert, Skip Blanchard, Jane Blanchard, Rosalie Talbert, Julius Hastings, Celia Hastings, Kerry Barringer, Bob Laskowski
- 4 Chris Mangels
- 5 Julius Hastings and Eric Lamont
- 6 Betty Lotowycz
- 7 Joe Beitel
- 8 Skip Blanchard and Elsa L'Hommedieu
- 9 Vince Puglisi
- 10 Al and Lois Lindberg
- 11 Eric Lamont
- 12 Carole Neidich-Ryder
- 13 Our photographer: Barbara Conolly

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the New York tracking list.

In 1985, the water levels in the ponds were low in early summer and very low by early fall. Some ponds were completely dry. The previous summer I had learned how to find many of the Long Island ponds in the Peconic River Headwaters, the Calverton Ponds, Sears Bellows Ponds, and the Long Pond Greenbelt. That year, as I learned a new species that I had not seen before, it was easy to cruise to multiple ponds and pick up a series of occurrences. Several newly listed species, including *Xyris smalliana*, *Lycopus amplexans*, and *Scleria reticularis*, were quickly removed from the tracking list because they were found in most ponds, were too common to document, and did not ultimately define the importance of sites. *Drosera filiformis* also was located at multiple sites and removed from the rare species list. The most new occurrences that I picked up in one day were 35, as I ran from pond to pond. These numbers would later haunt me as I tried to fill out field forms and sketch maps for each of these occurrences from abbreviated field notes. I always enjoyed company on these trips and benefited from what other people could see.

THE FOUNDING OF LIBS

That winter, a friend of mine from graduate school, Margaret Conover, was at SUNY Stony Brook and contacted me to see if I were interested in working with her to develop a group of botanists from Long Island to meet and share common interests. Margaret offered the Museum of Long Island Natural Sciences at

Stony Brook University as a site for the first meeting. We developed a list of people to invite, and contacted them, inquiring about interests and availability. We began to meet monthly and to conduct field trips. A short newsletter was sent out after each meeting. At first, I compiled this newsletter. When Karene Motivans joined TNC, she enthusiastically took over the newsletter, so that for the first two years, TNC contributed not only staff time to produce the newsletter, but the costs of printing and postage as well. Eventually, the botanical group decided to become a formal organization with incorporation, officers, and by laws. We sought legal help to fill out the forms for filing with the State, but it wasn't until 1989, when we received a \$300 anonymous donation that we were able to incorporate as the Long Island Botanical Society and receive the status of a not-for-profit in New York. (Editor's note: Through these early years, Bob served as president of LIBS.)

CONTINUED FIELDWORK

The botany group field trips continued and the rare plant forms piled up. Joe Beitel found a new *Agalinis* population in Bellport and Bob Laskowski helped locate another on the Sayville FAA property. I located a third new *Agalinis* population that year by checking on a 1971 specimen collected by Betty Lotowycz, again in Bellport. I looked at dozens of *Agalinis* populations that year and followed up on numerous leads. Most of these sites supported *A. setacea*, *A. paupercula*, or *A. purpurea*, but Long Island now had six populations of a species then known from only 10 populations worldwide.

Joe Beitel was an important link to Long Island natural historians. He was a student of Art Cooley and Dennis Puleston and learned sites and species from people who knew the Island over the past 40 years. Bob Laskowski was even more amazing. He had visited the Hempstead Plains with Stanley Cain, who described the thousands of acres of grasslands in the 1930s. Joe and Bob and Betty and all those who studied early Long Island writings and looked at herbarium specimens were a part of the passing down of natural history information that we all need to tell the biodiversity story of a place.

It was a time when it seemed like plants were important and defined priorities for numerous acquisition projects. Over a thousand occurrences of rare plants were documented on Long Island. It was during this early period that many sites were brought into conservation ownership: Barcelona Neck, Hither Hills and Ram Level, The Dwarf Pine Plains, and Calverton Ponds. There were new additions to the Peconic River Headwaters, Sears Bellows County Park, and Cranberry Bog.

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The concept of the Long Pond Greenbelt was developed. The Hempstead Plains was elevated in importance for the Nassau Community College. The ground-work was laid for later acquisitions at Shadmoor and Shinnecock Hills.

My duties on Long Island continued for two more years, expanding to include what we called "site design" and stewardship planning, as well as a continuation of Heritage fieldwork. Years after I left Long Island, David Hunt, who worked in my office, spent parts of his workweek keying old Long Island material collected during this time. Many additional occurrences were added to the Heritage database from these collections.



Upcoming Programs

May 9, 2006* **Tuesday, 7:30 p.m.**

BOB ZAREMBA: "THE 1984-85 FIELD SEASONS ON LONG ISLAND."

Bob worked in conjunction with TNC and the New York Natural Heritage Program and collected extensively on Long Island. His search for rare plants built a base of information on distribution and natural communities that helped gain momentum and enthusiasm in the local flora. Informal meetings and discussions in this time frame were the groundwork for the formal formation of LIBS. Please join us in welcoming back our special guest speaker at the **20th Anniversary Meeting of LIBS.**

Location: Museum of Long Island Natural Sciences, Earth and Space Science Building, Gil Hanson Room (Room 123) SUNY at Stony Brook, Stony Brook

June 13, 2006 **Tuesday, 5:30 p.m.**

(Please note early start time for the barbecue)

ANNUAL BARBECUE

The annual barbecue, featuring Chef Eric's made-to-order hot dogs and hamburgers. Salads, deviled eggs, desserts, etc., gladly accepted. The traditional location—on the green behind the Muttontown Preserve meeting house.

Location: Bill Paterson Nature Center, Muttontown Preserve, East Norwich

* Refreshments and informal talk begin at 7:30 p.m. Formal meeting starts at 8:00 p.m.

RETURNING TO LONG ISLAND

After I relocated to Albany, I continued to visit Long Island for the next 14 years as an employee of TNC in Albany and finally in Boston. In 2005, I returned to Long Island as a contract botanist to document some of the rare plants that I had found in the mid-1980s. Many of the sites were much the same: the Peconic River Headwaters Ponds, Calverton Ponds, and the Long Pond Greenbelt. *Phragmites* has expanded at Linus Pond, Northwest Harbor, and Cranberry Bog, but has disappeared from two areas at Long Pond where TNC has been working.

There is a question that we all know: If a tree falls in the forest and there are no people around, does it make a noise? For me, there is an obvious answer. Yes, of course, there is a noise. The squirrels and birds have ears. The fallen tree matters without anyone knowing that it is there. It lives and dies and provides habitat for other species and is part of a complex community. It does not require people to make it important. But for conservation of the tree and the associated species, it takes people. People to document the existence and importance of the tree. People to tell the stories of the tree to others and convince them, argue with them if needed, that the tree is important and has a place with people.

LIBS tells the story of the tree and hundreds of other plants that make Long Island what it is. We are part of a long tradition of people who document species and share details of why our natural areas are important. I am pleased and proud to have been a part of LIBS and the telling of the Long Island story, and know that the plant stories will need to be told many more times by many people to keep biological diversity a vital part of life on Long Island. ❖

Dr. Robert Zaremba is a botanical consultant and lives on Cape Cod with his wife Danielle.

And don't miss...

Alive in New York, A Growing Invasion, presented by the Garvies Point Museum and Preserve. You have only to the end of April to catch the exhibit. **Alive in New York** contains 43 works from 29 artists of the New York chapter of the Guild of Natural Science Illustrators. The exhibit focuses on the spread of non-native plants from cultivation and accidental introduction to our state's ecosystems. To view the gallery of images, visit <http://www.science-art.com/member.asp?id=121>. Garvies Point is located at 50 Barry Drive, Glen Cove, New York.



Field Trips

SATURDAY, APRIL 22, 2006, 9:30–11:30 A.M.

Garvies Point Museum & Preserve, Glen Cove, New York

Trip leader: Lois Lindberg

Lois has invited us to join her and others on a two-hour hike through Garvies Point Preserve to discover the difference between weeds and wildflowers. Find out which cultivated plants can spread throughout nearby woods and meadows, causing botanical havoc, and identify some native alternatives. This walk was scheduled to coincide with “Alive in New York: A Growing Invasion,” a traveling exhibit of botanical art now on display in Garvies Point Museum. Fee: \$2.00 per person includes Museum admission after the field trip. Please call Lois for information and to register for the walk.

Directions: From the LIE or Northern State Parkway, exit to Glen Cove Road, North. Take Glen Cove Road north. When it becomes Glen Cove Bypass, bear left at fork, and continue to last traffic light at the end of road, facing the Glen Cove Fire House. Turn right and follow directional signs.

SATURDAY, APRIL 29, 2006, 10 A.M.

Van Cortlandt Park, Bronx, New York

Trip leader: David Künstler

We will visit Northwest Forest with Dutchman's-breeches (*Dicentra cucullaria*), early wood violet (*Viola palmata*) and New York rare wild pink (*Silene caroliniana*); and also Vault Hill Meadow and Tibbetts Brook system (VC Swamp). Bring lunch. This is a joint trip with the Torrey Botanical Society.

Directions: From the Major Deegan Expressway, take the Van Cortlandt Park South exit, go west to Broadway, right to 246th Street area (just beyond the “el”) and park. Meet at Van Cortlandt Park Nature Center inside the 246th Street entrance behind Van Cortland house—bear left.

SATURDAY, MAY 13, 2006, 10 A.M.

Kings Point Park, Kings Point, Nassau County, New York

Trip leaders: Andy Greller and Skip Blanchard

Last November we had an *ad hoc* trip to this site, which was announced in our meetings and on our Web site, but was not planned in time for the LIBS newsletter. We liked the place enough that we wanted to revisit it this spring, hoping to coax out a few spring ephemerals. Bring at least something to snack on. It's hard to know when we will finish. The more courageous among us

may want to get our feet muddy and/or wet.

Directions: Find your way to Middle Neck Road* in Kings Point and proceed north to Redbrook Road, a left. Turn onto Redbrook and continue about 0.6 mile the park entrance on the left, opposite Cherry Lane.

*You can find Middle Neck Road from Route 25A in Thomaston, or via Lakeville Road going north, either from the Northern State Parkway Exit 25, or from the LIE Exit 33, Community Drive. If you are coming from the east, rather than taking Community Drive, continue west on the North Service Road to Lakeville Road.

SATURDAY, JUNE 3, 2006, 9:30 A.M.

Underhill Property, carpooling from Muttontown Preserve, Muttontown Lane, East Norwich, New York

Trip Leader: Al Lindberg

This trip is limited to 20 participants, and preregistration is required. Please call Al Lindberg for details.

Sitting atop the Jericho Moraine, the Underhill Property comprises 50+ acres of rolling fields in varying stages of succession, kettlehole ponds, and woodland margins. This preserve was recently acquired by Nassau County, New York State, and the Town of Oyster Bay. We will visit the property with an eye towards developing a plant survey for the site.

Directions: As there is no public access to the Underhill Property, we will meet at 9:30 a.m. at the Bill Paterson Nature Center, Muttontown Preserve. We will carpool to the site and park on private property with landowner permission for this trip.

Take Route 106 North from the LIE or Northern State Parkway for approximately three miles. Turn left (west) onto Route 25A (Northern Boulevard). Make the first left onto Muttontown Lane. The Nature Center parking lot is at the end of the road.

Join LIBS today!

Annual Membership is \$20 payable to:
Long Island Botanical Society

Mail your dues to:

Lois Lindberg
Membership Chairperson

Letters to the Editor, Articles, and News

Margaret Conover
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PO Box 507; Aquebogue, NY 11931