

Don Robinson – Sandstone Canyon Trail

November 17, 2025

MISSING SPECIES LIST:

No, the species list isn't missing. It's [HERE](#). True, it's 5 months old, but the many dozens of plants that we found when we were here in June are more-or-less still here. We just can't identify them as easily. Back then (although we probably weren't actively aware of it) we were mostly looking for COROLLAS. We were looking for petals with their memorable patterns and colors. It's the job of the corollas to attract attention. And they're really good at it.

But today those corollas are gone – and so it's a totally different ballgame. It's like seeing these plants for the first time. The language has changed. Instead of finding inflorescences full of eye-catching corollas, we feel lucky to find a single straw-colored capsule or any other kind of seed container from which we might glean information. It isn't the job of these winter remnants to attract attention. And they sure don't.

On the plus side, when we learn how to identify winter plants, we learn a lot of botany. We have to be able to read the bones of inflorescences, understand the different types of dry fruits, and know which type goes with which family. A good summer botanist isn't necessarily a good winter botanist. But a good winter botanist is probably good any time of the year.

WHERE WE WALKED:

One of John's objectives was to explore a reported GPS location of *Woodwardia areolata* – the C9 [Netted Chain Fern](#). To get there we followed the paved Sandstone Canyon Trail well past the point where it turns into a natural surface trail. We followed the natural trail until we met another marked trail, whereupon we made a right turn. We followed this new trail until we reached an area where Catholic priests once had a retreat house. The house is long gone, but the area marks the place where we traditionally find a large patch of *Diphasiastrum digitatum* (Fan Clubmoss). And we found it again! We then continued farther along the trail, leaving it at a bend in order to look for the *Woodwardia*. Unfortunately, we never found it. John explained that it's a deciduous fern, so maybe its leaves have already turned brown, making it too hard to find amongst the fallen tree leaves. Or maybe the fern no longer exists. He suggested that we return during the growing season and try again.

PHOTOS: Just as she did when we were here 5 months ago (and nearly every week since), Kathy Bildner has shared some beautiful photos of our walk. You can find them on our Google Drive [HERE](#).

SHORT OBSERVATIONS:

- Along the paved trail we found several small Callery Pear trees. Although usually not a plant we would ever welcome, they were quite attractive with their reddish leaves.
- Speaking of pretty leaves, we found a small Euonymus tree with its special shade of red. But was it a native Wahoo or the dreaded Burning Bush? John checked the underside of its leaf to see if it was hairy. It wasn't hairy. That's bad news. Kathy Bildner mentioned that she assumed a Burning Bush would have leaves that were more fiery-red. This one didn't. Although the data from one sample shouldn't be put in concrete, it's possible that the color of our native Wahoo might be just as intense as the color of the non-native Burning Bush. Maybe it's only the "Burning Bush" name that suggests otherwise.
- Standing in the parking lot, Don Robinson's house is North of us. Turning 90 degrees East we see a large hill in the distance. John told us that it's called "Chinkapin Hill" and is the highest in the area at 860 feet. Although it's within the Park boundaries, none of us had ever even noticed it before. But now that the leaves are falling, our view of the horizon is less obstructed and the once hidden Chinkapin Hill is starting to reveal itself.
- Although it has lost its leaves, the Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) is still identifiable because it has goosebumps on its trunks and spring flower buds on its branches.
- The little blueberry shrubs have lost their leaves, but their green branches and stems make them easy to identify.
- We heard lots of hammering. Years behind schedule, they finally seem to be making progress on the rebuilding of Don Robinson's old house.

PARTICIPANTS:

There were 13 of us botanists on this somewhat nippy but still very pleasant day. We are (in alphabetical order): Brenda Adams, Prem Barton, Kathy Bildner, Steve Bizub, Jerry Castillon, Wayne Clark, Michael Laschober, Sharon Lu, Burt Noll, John Oliver, Kathy Thiele, George Van Brunt, and Laura Yates

Brenda	Adams	brendasuea@gmail.com
Prem	Barton	premsribarton49@gmail.com
Kathy B	Bildner	kbildner@aol.com
Steve B	Bizub	bizubs@gmail.com
Jerry	Castillon	jerrycastillon@gmail.com
Wayne	Clark	wclark3@cs.com
Michael L	Laschober	twimfina@gmail.com
Sharon	Lu	lusongt@gmail.com
Burt	Noll	bw11@swbell.net
John O	Oliver	oliverjcomo@gmail.com
Kathy T	Thiele	thiele6330@aol.com
George	Van Brunt	geovanb7@gmail.com
Laura	Yates	LMY555@outlook.com