

Chestnut Mast



Volume 9, Issue 1 Newsletter of the Carolinas Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation Fall 2007

Summer Pollinations

It was a very busy pollination season because many southern chapters were pollinating in two directions this year:

1. Using Meadowview pollen on Carolinas native “mother trees” as we have in the past.
2. Using pollen from elite but hard-to-get-to Carolinas “father trees” on trees bagged at the Meadowview Research Farms.

Kentucky tried this last year with great success, and Fred Hebard graciously allowed the other southern chapters to pursue this strategy this year. This means that I was twice as busy as usual -- going to Meadowview twice to help coordinate the southern chapter members there and then trying to pollinate Carolinas trees as well. And we did not have money for interns this year, so I was on my own. But we did have money for

supplies and bucket truck rental.

We had a great lead on a bucket truck. Judy Coker’s son-in-law Ron Trull owns a company “Perfect

Cut Tree Service” that has a bucket truck with a 55-foot lift. Ron’s employee Joe Inman brought the truck to the Scott Pace tree in



Saluda and to trees in Avery County.

Ted Farmer of Avery County had located several blooming American chestnut trees, including one with a 13.5 inch diameter. Meanwhile, Louis Acker and Allie Funk discovered new trees in the northwest, Mark Rogers monitored trees on Lickstone Ridge in Haywood County, and Jack Johnston found a new tree on Cowee Mountain in Macon County. Steve Barilovits collected pollen from the “Stevie B” tree on Crowders Mountain, and Ashley Carter kept watch on the pollen

that was produced by an American chestnut tree in his front yard north of Weaverville. The Carolinas breeding program owes a lot to these hard-working volunteers.

*Paul Sisco, Ph.D.,
TACF Regional Science Coordinator
Southern Appalachian Regional Office*



Attendees at the 2007 Carolinas Chapter Annual Meeting took a tour of the hybrid chestnut plantings at the Terry Estate of Montreat College. Four rows of trees have been planted along what were the fairways of a golf course.

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THE AMERICAN CHESTNUT FOUNDATION

The Carolinas Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation

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Printing: *Sir Speedy Printing*

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President's Message



Just a few months ago, in late August, we held the 2007 Annual Meeting of The Carolinas Chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation in Montreat College's Gaither Hall. The wood and stone structure of Gaither Hall is a magnificent reminder of our chestnut heritage. Built in 1935, the Hall is made entirely of chestnut wood with stones from the creeks in Montreat. Our meeting's host, Montreat College, is a larger partner with us as the site of one of our significant chestnut research orchards, thanks to the work of Montreat professor and chapter board member Brian Joyce. We finished our meeting with an enjoyable tour of Brian's chestnut plantings, which are distributed across Montreat's beautiful mountain valley campus.



The range of the presentations at the chapter meeting illustrated the strength and innovation of our chapter members' efforts supporting the restoration of the American chestnut. Paul Sisco, the Southern Appalachian Regional Science Coordinator, gave an overview of the progress of the national organization's breeding program for blight resistant chestnuts and its underlying genetic scientific basis. Joe James gave us a preview of a paper he formally presented a week later

at an international conference of forest pathologists on the effects of *Phytophthora cinnamomi*. This is a water mold that infects the roots of a number of tree species with ink-disease, which in American chestnuts is almost always fatal. This disease has killed most of the chestnut plantings at Joe's farm, as well as plantings at other Piedmont locations. Joe and Steve Jeffers' work in screening hybrid chestnuts for *Phytophthora* may result in restoring chestnuts to the Piedmont and other low elevation sites in the south and mid-Atlantic states, where they disappeared between the Revolutionary and Civil Wars.

Bob Head, of Seneca, SC, showed us the results of a large experiment he performed to attempt to root chestnut leaf and twig cuttings gathered by chapter members across the Piedmont and mountains of the Carolinas (K. O. Summerville, Paul Sisco, Joe James, and I were four of those intrepid gatherers). So far, Bob has rooted several samples of the chestnut cuttings that we collected. These results may help us to clonally propagate desirable wild trees in controlled plantings to better capture their genetics into our breeding program. Lee Gragg, a professional land surveyor and civil engineer, gave a presentation on finding and saving low elevation chestnuts before full-scale development removes them from the environment. Steve Barilovits IV (my son, who got me involved with chestnut restoration about eight years ago) gave the final pre-

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sentation on his work as a summer volunteer at the national chestnut research farms in Meadowview, VA.

We can also be proud of our chapter's involvement with the national breeding program. We have 26 breeding orchards across our two states representing at least 20 lines of native American chestnut families. It would take about four days of travel just to visit each of these orchards. This is the result of good planning and hard work on the part of Paul Sisco and the orchard owners, who range from individual chapter members to large organizations like the Biltmore Estate. We are planning a series of events around these orchards to publicize this important work over the next two years. We are also planning to start a breeding orchard of low elevation chestnuts resistant to both blight and *Phytophthora* and would like to have a number of American chestnut parents for this work. We ask for your help in identifying and collecting genetic material from chestnuts in the Piedmont and even, we hope, the coastal plain.

At the chapter meeting, two new board members, Judy Coker and Lee Gragg, were elected along with four current board members to serve two-year terms. Judy and Lee are filling the positions of Jack Johnston and John Frampton who retired from the board at the end of their terms. Jane and John Frampton did exemplary professional work in editing and publishing our chapter newsletter for the last few years. We thank Jack, John, and

Jane for all of their hard work and support. We also thank K. O. Summerville for his work as president of the chapter for the last two years.

I'd like to invite all of our members to participate in developing standing committees in the following areas: mother tree, research, membership, publications, funding, and public awareness. Please contact me if you wish to participate in any way to help further the restoration of the American chestnut.

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Editor's Note

My name is Ashley Craig and I am a Junior at Montreat College. My major is Communication. I just wanted to introduce myself as the new editor of The Chestnut Mast newsletter. This is my first time working with such programs as InDesign and Windows' Vista. It has been quite the learning experience. I have enjoyed it tremendously though. I want to say thank you to everyone who has sent me material for the newsletter. I will start working on the next issue right away so if there is something that you would like to see in the next newsletter please let me know. I am grateful for this opportunity to serve such a wonderful organization as the American Chestnut Foundation. Thank you for allowing me to do this and I hope to serve you well in the future.

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Retiring Board Member Jack Johnston Recognized at 2007 Annual Meeting



Jack Johnston, a Director of the Carolinas Chapter, retired from the Board on August 25, 2007, stepping down to allow another member to be elected to the position he had filled since 2003. Chapter President Kenneth Summerville presented Jack with a Certificate of Appreciation at the Annual Meeting, recognizing Jack for service as a board member and as a chestnut grower, grafter, and tree-finder. Don Surette, fellow Board Member, donated the frame for the certificate, which he made in his workshop in Pisgah Forest, NC, using reclaimed American chestnut wood.

Jack has helped increase the genetic diversity of the Carolinas Chapter's breeding program. He has experimented both with standard whip and tongue grafting as well as nut grafting. Nut grafting uses a scion from a parent chestnut tree, which is grafted into the germinating nut from another chestnut tree. Jack has done standard grafts of long-surviving Chinese and Japanese chestnut trees planted by the US Forest Service in the 1930's. Some of the trees he has propagated are growing at the Warren Wilson College chestnut orchard, have flowered, and have been used as pollen parents to cross with NC American chestnut trees to produce F1 generation hybrids. Jack also collects scion wood, and has samples sent to him, from pure American chestnut trees which he propagates into seedlings using the nut grafting process. Jack grows the seedlings in pots on his property in Rabun County, GA.

Jack has helped locate flowering American chestnut trees at Goat Bald in Macon County, NC. The trees were hand pollinated in the early summer of 2003 through 2005, producing backcrossed hybrid chestnuts for growing in Chapter orchards. Jack helps Paul Vonk, who also lives in Rabun County, GA, with the planting and growing of backcrossed chestnuts in Scaly, NC.

Jack will continue to be active with the Carolinas Chapter. He currently is a Member of the Board of the Georgia Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation. Carolinas Chapter members look forward to working with and staying in contact with Jack. He is an inspiration to all Chapter members.

Pryor Farm

Scott and Nancy Pryor hosted a chapter picnic and chestnut roast at their farm in Edsneyville, NC, in November. Their chestnut trees have completed their third growing season, and some already have burs. The mother tree for these was the Max Kimel tree off Rt. 276 just east of Waynesville. Austin Wagner and Steven Slack were the interns who did the pollinations in 2004, and the seeds were planted by a chapter working party in the spring of 2005.



Seeds were planted by chapter volunteers in March, 2005.



Germination was good and the seedlings grew vigorously.

Scott's 96-year-old father Paul Pryor remembers chestnuts in their heyday in western NC and looks forward to seeing chestnut trees bloom in the mountains again. Scott and Nancy have built their retirement home at the top of the hill overlooking the orchard, which was originally an apple orchard owned by Nancy's father Will Hill.



Collecting Chestnuts on the Blue Ridge Parkway

With the help of several volunteers and thanks to a Permit from the Parkway biologists, we were able to harvest 1275 pure American chestnuts this year along the length of the Parkway from Alleghany County to Transylvania County.



Judy Coker of Cataloochee Ranch (center) and her friends Mary Fisher and Lisa Smith helped gather chestnuts along the Blue Ridge Parkway in September.



Chapter volunteer Jon Taylor of Asheville helped shuck the chestnuts from the feisty burs. Note Jon's heavy gloves!



Pure American chestnut seeds nestle in the soft velvet of the bur interior; while the sharp spines offer protection as the nuts are ripening.

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American Chestnut—Spirit Wood

Can a salvaged piece of American chestnut wood be given new life though the tree it grew from is long gone? Certainly! Pictured below is a beautiful Native American wood flute made of salvaged American chestnut wood that is 70 or more years old. The flute was produced by Danny Bigay and Kay Littlejohn of Mountain Spirit Flutes. The mouth piece and front end of the flute are of walnut as is the Eagle head block which is used to control air flow when the instrument is played. Deer skin wraps accent the flute.



Danny Bigay finds that salvaged American chestnut wood is an excellent choice for making flutes. The long-time aged wood is stable and shrinks and expands very little with changes in humidity. The sound coming from his American chestnut flutes have a pleasant, distinct quality that Danny Bigay says is perhaps the best sound produced among the flutes he makes from various woods.

Converting a salvaged piece of American chestnut wood into a fine instrument is more than an artistic effort for Danny Bigay. Handling the wood connects him to the spirit within the wood and the spirits of all those that have come in contact with the wood. While making a flute such as the one pictured, he thinks of the tree itself from which it grew. He thinks of the people who initially cut the wood many, many years ago to build the structure from which it was salvaged. He thinks of those who will handle and play the instrument he has made from the salvaged wood.

When Danny Bigay plays the instrument, he thinks too of how the spirit in the wood is given a voice that expresses feelings from his heart. He is connected to those hearing the music he plays, and them to him, and others listening, one to another.

The American chestnut tree continues to live on in the forest despite the devastating effects of the chestnut bark blight. The trees have a spirit that reaches out to those who respect it. That spirit is given a voice by people such as Danny Bigay and Kay Littlejohn in their converting its wood into a beautiful musical instrument.

If you wish to learn more about Mountain Spirit Flutes go on the Internet to <http://mountainspiritflutes.net>.

This article, written by Carolinas Chapter Board Member, Doug Gillis, is based on an interview he had with Danny Bigay. The picture of the flute was provided by Mountain Spirit Flutes.

Collecting Chestnuts on the Blue Ridge Parkway *continued from page 6*



Lucy Laurent uses a hand pruner to harvest pure American chestnut burs that could be reached from the ground along the Parkway in Alleghany County. The sister of Jane Laurent, Steve Barilovits' wife, Lucy was visiting from Phoenix, Arizona.



Harvested chestnuts are collected in bags that are labeled to indicate the parent tree and the source of pollen, if hand pollinated. The bags of chestnut burs are brought to a location to be shucked. Pictured are bags of burs waiting to be shucked at the American Chestnut Foundation's Meadowview Research Farm in southwest Virginia.



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