

2023 PA Botany Symposium Workshop Instructor Bios

Claire Ciafre, is an ecologist with the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program at the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. She has worked as a field botanist since 2013 doing primarily vegetative plant identification for monitoring plots, but she now spends her time on a much wider variety of projects. She earned her MS in biology in 2019 from Austin Peay State University (Clarksville, TN), studying the plant community ecology of isolated wetlands harboring grassland remnants. She has published a variety of works, including the description of a new species of *Rhynchospora*, ecology of rare *Dichantheium* species, patterns observed in wetland plant community assemblage, and a host list for spotted lanternfly.

Norris Muth, PhD is a Professor of Biology at Juniata College where he teaches courses in Winter Dendrology, Invasive Species, Plant Diversity and Ecology, and Evolutionary Biology.

Scott Schuette, PhD is the Botany Program Manager with the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program at the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. He earned his PhD in plant biology from Southern Illinois University, Carbondale focusing on the evolutionary biology of bryophytes. He is a bryologist, botanist, ecologist, and evolutionary biologist with a passion for conservation of native plant diversity. He has authored several manuscripts in botanical topics ranging from new bryophyte species accounts and regional checklists to the use of social media to document globally imperiled plants in Pennsylvania. His current projects include, rare plant surveys and assessments, reviewing bryophyte species records in Pennsylvania to determine conservation ranks, and plant conservation genetics for three globally rare species endemic to the Appalachian Mountains.

Jeff Polonoli has over 30 years' experience identifying plants in the field. He developed his identification skills while working as an herbarium technician, field botanist for The Nature Conservancy, and acting curator of collections for Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens. He specializes in vegetation monitoring, floristic inventories, and plant mitigation. Having a strong background in education, Jeff served as an Ecology Coordinator for a professional development program instructing teachers on implementing inquiry-based science in the classroom. Currently, Jeff works for an environmental consulting company conducting environmental surveys, wetland delineations, rare plant surveys, and mentoring junior staff.

Brian Daggs grew up in Dillsburg, PA, spending his youth catching insects around his yard and exploring the nearby woodlands. He attended the University of Pittsburgh, earning a double major B.Sc. degree in biological sciences and environmental science. During this time, he worked as a research assistant in the Carson Lab, studying the impacts of invasive species on understory plant communities and habitat succession. After graduating, Brian continued to work on invasive plants as a seasonal ecologist at the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, which transitioned to a full-time position as the invasive species ecologist within the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program.

Peter Wilf, PhD, professor of geosciences at Penn State, is a paleobotanist who uses fossil plants to investigate ancient ecosystems, past environmental change, biogeography, and the evolution and extinction of plants and plant-insect associations. His research emphasizes questions of relevance for modern climate change, biodiversity, biogeography, and conservation. Field work with his students includes Argentina, Vietnam, Indonesia, Brunei, the Western US, and Pennsylvania. Dr. Wilf is a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Paleontological Society, and the Geological Society of America and a recipient of the Atherton Award for Excellence in Teaching from Penn State.