Birds Hill Park Fieldtrip, May 26, 2012 - Native Orchid Conservation Inc.

Birds Hill was sculpted by Lake Agassiz as it drained about 10,000 years ago, covering the hill to a depth of 120 m (394 ft.). During the great floods of 1826 and 1852, which threatened the very survival of the Red River settlement, entire families camped on this high ground with their livestock and possessions.

The park, established in 1964, is named after the Bird family who owned land in the area. Their family history is representative of those who settled along the Red River in the early 19th century. James Curtis Bird came to Rupert's Land in 1788 to work as a writer with the Hudson's Bay Company. During his 36 years in service, he moved up in rank to become Chief Factor of the Red River District. Many families built their homesteads in this Pine Ridge area, extending south to the Pine Ridge and Elmhurst golf courses and to the northern edges of the park. The Pine Ridge interpretive trail is on the Old School Road. The community of Pine Ridge, with about 150 residents, had its own post office, churches, school, store, and gas station along South Drive and in the campground area. By the 1930s-40s a strong Polish and Ukrainian community established itself in the Pine Ridge area. Pine Ridge Cemetery continues to be used, and part of the Kudlowich homestead is still extant.

The scenery in BHP is a mixture of forest and open prairie. Stands of trembling aspen are separated by patches of grassland and in the higher, well-drained areas, gnarled bur oaks thrive. This combination of grasslands and forest is known as Aspen/Oak Parkland, and you can stroll through tall grass (big bluestem), pick chokecherries at the edge of an aspen stand, feel the coolness in a cedar bog's shade and admire colourful wildflowers in a mixed-grass prairie. Rare plants include moonwort ferns, western silvery aster and whorled milkwort, as well as 13 or 14 native orchid species.

Trail brochure: www.gov.mb.ca/conservation/parks/popular_parks/central/birds_pine.html
Plants seen on scouting trip May 17/2012 Pineridge Trail-Birds Hill Prov.Park We walked from the west entrance to trail on South Drive(Kudlowich Homestead end to just past the bridge over Skolny Creek and back and then drove to the east entrance to the trail on South Drive and walked just up the hill to the meadow where the store and old schoolhouse used to be).

Strawberry(Fragaria sp.)
Hoary puccoon(Lithospermum canescens)
Mouse-eared chickweed(Cerastium arvense)
Coltsfoot(Petasites sagittatus)
Early blue violet(Viola adunca)
Downy violet(Viola pubescens)
Canada violet(Viola canadensis)
Marigolds(Caltha palustris)
Pussytoes(Antennaria parviflora)
Pale comandra/bastard toadflax(Comandra umbellata)
Dandelion(Taraxacum officinale)
Gooseberry ( Ribes oxycanthoides)
Balsam poplar ( Populus balsami)
Hazelnut ( Corylus cornuta )
Bur oak(Quercus macrocarpa)
Trembling aspen(Populus tremuloides)
Bearberry (Arcostaphylos uva-ursa)
Trailing Juniper (Juniperus horizontalis)
Blunt-Leaved Sandwort ( Arenaria laterflora)
Poison Ivy (Rhus radicans)
Wild Lily of the Valley (Maianthemum canadense)
False Solomon Seal (Smilacina stellata)
Common Horsetail (Equisetum arvense)
Meadow horsetail (Equisetum pratense)
Dwarf scouring rush (Equisetum scirpoides)
Rock cress (Arabis divaricarpa)
Three-flowered avens (Geum triflorum)
Saskatoon (Amelanchier ainifolia)
Wild plum (Prunus americana)
Pincherry (Prunis pensylvanica)
Chokecherry (Prunus virginiana)

We also saw butterflies, among them Red admiral, Sulphur, Monarch, Mourning cloak, Meadow fritillary, Blues and a Dreamy dusky wing skipper (Erynnis icelus) as well as red-winged blackbirds, crows, Canada geese, woodpeckers and warblers.

May 26 field trip:

We saw some additional species as follows:
Columbine (Aquilegia canadensis)
Nodding trillium (Trillium cernuum)
Baneberry (Actaea rubra)
Blue-eyed grass (Sisyrinchium montanum)
Silverweed (Potentilla anserina)
Wild vetch (Vicia americana)
One-eyed sphinx (Smerinthus ceresyi).

By the creek we heard a warbler singing "witchity, witchity, witchity" and I think that was a Common Yellow-throat (Geothlypis trichus). The little old nest we saw in the shrubbery might have belonged to one of them too as they build their nest only about three feet off the ground. These are the kind of warblers that often lose their nesting habitat to deer because they nest in shrubs that deer like to browse.