Native Orchid News:
The Newsletter of Native Orchid Conservation Inc.

Members' Night
Friday, October 24, 2014
7:30 PM
Dakota Lawn Bowling Centre
1212 Dakota Street
St. Vital

See Page 4
for more information

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Members' Night
Friday, October 24, 2014

Plant of the Month
Northern Wild Comfrey
(Cynoglossum virginianum var. boreale)
Plant of the Month

Northern Wild Comfrey (*Cynoglossum virginianum* var. *boreale*)

By Doris Ames

The genus name comes from the Greek words *kyon* meaning “dog” and *glossum* meaning “tongue” a reference to the shape and texture of the leaves. The plant is sometimes called Houndstongue for the same reason and also because it is related to European Houndstongue (*Cynoglossum officinale*).

This interesting and rare (S3) biennial is a member of the large Borage Family whose members all have a 5-lobed calyx, a 5-lobed corolla, 5 stamens and a style as well as hairy leaves that cause a skin reaction in some people. Other familiar members of this family are forget-me-not (*Myosotis* spp.) and viper's bugloss (*Echium vulgare*).

Northern wild comfrey grows 40-60 cm high and is most often found growing in southeastern boreal forests with rich, moist, calcareous woodlands in part shade or sun. It requires adequate light levels to bloom and set seed, so it often seems to suddenly appear in recently cleared areas of the boreal forest or after a fire. NOCI members may be interested to know that this plant occurs in the Brokenhead Wetlands along the new trail.

The entire plant is covered with soft hairs. The alternate leaves are simple and entire. The large basal leaves have long petioles. The stem leaves are larger at the base and smaller going up the stem and have petioles as well in this species. There are no leaves on the flowering stem.

Northern comfrey is distinguished from other comfrey species by its terminal clusters of bright blue 5-petaled flowers held high above the leaves. As well the petals have irregular lobes that do not overlap. This plant blooms in May and June and if conditions are right, produces fruit July to August. The fruits are drupes found in clusters of 3 or 4 small 3.5-4.5mm nutlets each covered in bristles and containing one seed. They attach easily to fur and clothing so are spread around the forest by people and animals.

Like all Comfrey species, northern wild comfrey is prized for its medicinal properties. Aboriginals of the boreal forest would smoke the leaves in a smudge to cure headaches. Traditional herbalists thought comfrey had many other medicinal properties for instance that a poultice made from the leaves would heal tissue and mend bones.

Many plant species produce flowers that deviate from the idealized format. For instance, certain plant families generally have a specific number of nominal petals, be it 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 or 12. But just like the 3-leaved clovers can sometimes have 4 leaves, flowers too can have variable number of petals. The six-petaled Comfrey flower in the photograph illustrates this.
President’s Report

By Peggy Bainard Acheson

The leaves took awhile to turn colour this year, and the fine weather we’ve been enjoying over the last week has given us an unexpected reprieve from the winter that looms in the not so distant future. I don’t want it to end, but of course it is inevitable and perhaps that is a good thing. We have much to look forward to – our upcoming Members’ Night on October 24 for one thing. But while we’re on the subject let me tell you about some things we have been doing over the summer.

Out of the six field trips we had to cancel only one – and due to popular demand that one was made up in August. Field trips were well-attended and by all accounts everyone enjoyed themselves. At the end of May we dedicated a bench, and celebrated the life of Eugene Reimer at Bird’s Hill Provincial Park. Eugene was so vital to both NOCI and Debwendon and we still miss him. Next up was Marble Ridge and here the unexpected and mysterious habits of the orchids were demonstrated. One of the main reasons for this field trip was to find the elusive Fairy Slipper (Calypso bulbosa). When Rose, David and I did the survey trip we found about four of the delicate slippers at the far end of the trail along with several Ram’s-head Lady’s-slippers (Cypripedium arietinum). Since it was Monday, and the field trip was on Saturday, we could only hope that some of them would last until the field trip. Alas, the Fairy Slippers were gone upon our return, although we still saw some Ram along with Wood amemone, Coltsfoot and Yellow lady’s-slippers. Moving on after lunch we went to a site along PTH 325 (off #17) where the alvar had been scraped clean by man’s hand and resembled an ancient Roman road. Growing from rocks and down the cliff was the rare Cliff brake fern. Further along the ridge we found a lovely stream where lungwort was profuse below the cliff. Thanks to Rose Kuzina and all the field trip leaders for making this year’s season a fun and enjoyable one.

Although the Brokenhead Wetland Interpretive Trail did not open as we had hoped, the boardwalk was installed and leveled, and the transition from the gravel part up to the boardwalk was also made. I would like to thank Ryan Wakshinski, the project manager from Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship and the contractors, who did a wonderful job of protecting the surrounding forest during construction. We were thrilled to see the orchids and other rare plants growing along the side of the boardwalk and easily visible. Next year the washrooms, trailhead structure and signage will be completed and there will be an official opening. A number of articles came out about the trail including in the Winnipeg Free Press, the Eco-Journal, Nature Manitoba newsletter, and in The Cottager. All this publicity was in anticipation of the opening of the trail, but it hasn’t hurt anything as we have seen many people on the trail enjoying not only the plants, but the many songbirds, animals and insect life as well. This indicates to us that on opening the trail will be a huge asset to the area.

Karen Paul and her sister Norma Bergman contacted us about a fundraiser for Debwendon in conjunction with the Lake Winnipeg Foundation. They have kindly donated a number of spectacular limited edition prints which were made by their grandfather Eric Bergman, a well-known local artist. There are six different plants – all of which grow in the Brokenhead Wetlands. They can be ordered from the Debwendon website (debwendon.org) and there is a link on the NOCI site as well. More information and an order form are included elsewhere in the newsletter.

See also Dave’s invitation to join us at Members’ Night. We have some wonderful guests and presentations lined up so we hope you will add October 24 to your calendar. Come a little early to enjoy the sale tables and there will also be a raffle. We will start presentations at 7:30 pm sharp.

To keep up with our activities, please go to our Facebook page, which Heather Miltenburg has been very diligent at updating on a regular basis throughout the summer. The page can be accessed at: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Native-Orchid-Conservation-Inc/642374452483045
Members' Night 2014

Members' Night is coming.
Date: Friday, October 24, 2014
Time: 7:30 pm
Place: Dakota Lawn Bowling Centre, 1212 Dakota Street, Winnipeg.

Summer may be coming to a close, and our field trips have wrapped up for the year, but wait, there is more: You don’t want to miss member’s night.

This year will feature a fine line up of presenters. Chris Friesen from Manitoba Conservation will be giving a talk about protecting the rare and endangered plants of this province. Knowledge is the key and you will not want to miss this because you can make a difference. David Toop will be speaking on a short history about NOCI. Did you ever wonder how it all started, the personalities involved and what has been accomplished. Here is a chance to see where we came from and get some inspiration leading into the future.

John Neufeld attended the Native Orchid Conference in Bemidji this year. He will be sharing on the experience and what he learned.

Of course there will be refreshments, door prizes and opportunity to reconnect with some familiar faces. New faces are welcome too!

We will be having a raffle and donations of items for the raffle are always welcome. Please let me know at davetoop@gmail.com or 219-5829). NOCI will be able to provide tax receipts for items worth $50 or more. And, if anyone is interested in renting a sale table they will be available for nature-oriented "stuff" for $5.00. Please book your table by October 19 to ensure a spot. NOCI will provide a tax receipt for any cash donations made from the sales.

See you there!

Items for Sale

We made over $400.00 at our Garage Sale on May 10, but there were a number of leftover items which were later advertised on Kijiji and although Peggy sold quite a few, left to sell are:
35mm slide projector ($25), baby monitor ($10), retro leaded-glass hanging lamp ($25), wood-frame mirror ($20), 4 oak chairs ($60), ironing board ($10), and a heavy-duty computer bag ($15).
Contact Peggy at 204-261-9179 if you are interested in any of these items.