

Native Orchid News:

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Field Trips

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Plant of the Month

Common Hop

(*Humulus lupulus*)

President's Report

By Doris Ames

Spring is coming in by fits and starts this year. I think that all the water lying about is affecting the weather locally. One day last week it was 19°C and I saw two mourning cloak butterflies flitting about and female cankerworm moths climbing up the elm trees. A few days later it snowed in the night and the rapid changes ground to a halt. Still today Canada geese were honking loudly from the swollen rivers and the robins, perennial optimists that they are, were singing cheerfully. I couldn't find any crocuses in bloom on the sunny places at Bird's Hill Provincial Park but on the way home we saw red-winged blackbirds and a killdeer and a jackrabbit running across the fields. Its body was all brown already except for its white backside.

We have an interesting event coming up on Saturday, May 9th. It is Gardening Saturday put on by the Friends of Assiniboine Park Conservatory at the Canadian Mennonite University, 500 Shaftesbury Blvd. We will have a display there along with many interesting speakers and exhibitors. See our website for details. Make plans to come out and join us that day.

Our first field trip of the year will be held Saturday, May 16th when we will drive to Steep Rock on Lake Manitoba. By then I hope the crocuses will be blooming on the magnificent cliffs at the edge of the lake. We will be going to a couple of new areas this year so make sure you sign up soon. Have a great summer and I hope to see you on some of our trips.

Plant of the Month

Common Hop
(*Humulus lupulus*)
By Doris Ames

The genus name “Humulus” is thought to refer to “humus” the rich, moist soil where hops grow. The species name “lupulus” is derived from the Latin “lupus” which means ‘wolf’. In the first century A.D., Roman naturalist Pliny the Elder named the plant *Lupus salictarius* or ‘willow wolf’ because of its habit of climbing up willow trees and strangling them. Linnaeus preserved the gist of that classical name when he renamed it centuries later.

Hops are just another interesting plant in the *Cannabaceae* Family. These hairy perennials are found in Europe, west Asia and North America in the northern temperate zone. In Manitoba, they grow in the eastern part of the province in moist, wooded areas, along riverbanks and on old farmsteads.

They have twining hairy vines up to 6m in length with opposite, toothed, deeply-lobed, palmate leaves that resemble a grape plant. The stems, coming from underground rhizomes, are woody and usually die back each year.

The petal-less male and female flowers are found on different plants and grow in the leaf axils. The approximate flowering time is June. The tiny, yellowish-green male flowers are in loose panicles, while the female flowers are pale green and hang down in catkin-like clusters. Hops are wind pollinated and in early August the one-seeded, cone-like fruits called strobiles appear. These inch-long, bract-covered fruits are the hops.

The hops are covered with a bitter, yellowish resin, which contains active chemicals that have both antibiotic and medicinal properties. The story of hops is the story of beer. Hops have been used as a preservative and flavouring in beer for more than 1000 years. Hops have been added to European beer to clear, flavour and preserve it since the ninth century and the oldest record of hops being used in brewing dates to 1067. In 1516, a Bavarian duke enacted the Purity Law which states that beer can only contain three ingredients; water, barley and hops. There was no mention of yeast, as its role in fermentation was not understood at that time. Brewers just left the barley and water mash exposed to the air where it was infected by wild airborne yeasts. In 1857, yeast was added to the list of ingredients allowed in beer.

The English initially believed that hops would spoil the flavour of ale and thought that it promoted melancholy. Henry VI and Henry VIII prohibited its use. It wasn't until the 17th century that hops gained acceptance in England. The English, once convinced, did get into the spirit of the thing and there were some strange customs associated with hop picking in Kent and Sussex. One of them was called “cribbing”. If a stranger wandered into the hop fields during harvesting the pickers would grab him and throw him into the cribs (large containers where the hops were stored) along with one or two fat women. He would have to kiss them in order to be let out. The only way he could avoid the cribbing was to pay his “footing” that is to say give the pickers some money the minute he entered the field.

People noticed that hop-pickers were often drowsy and gradually hops became recognized as a sleep-inducing drug. They are still used in herbal medicine today for sleeplessness and anxiety. A sachet of hops under ones pillow is said to promote a good night's sleep. In Europe, hops have also been used as a general tonic, a diuretic and a sedative. German patents even existed for hops as a preservative in sausage at one time and indeed it does inhibit gram-negative bacteria.

North American First Nation people made a sedative from an infusion of the blossoms and also applied a poultice of heated dried hops to relieve toothaches. In the late 19th century, doctors recommended hops as a diuretic, tonic and sedative.

Some people find the hairs on the leaves of the hop plant, the hop pollen and the resin on the hops irritating to the skin and eyes so care must be taken when handling them.

NOCI Field Trip Schedule 2009

- Saturday, May 16** **Steep Rock** - limestone cliffs and underwater caves created by Lake Manitoba. Unusual plant and animal communities and spectacular scenery. Crocus, plains cymopterus, sand bladderpod.
- Saturday, May 23** **Bird's Hill Provincial Park** - glacial history revealed by the gravel ridges (glacial eskers), erratics (large rocks), and old beach ridges of glacial Lake Agassiz. The resulting open prairies and forests contain an interesting mixture of plant communities - three-flowered avens, prairie buttercup, violets, fruit trees and shrubs. (New)
- Saturday, June 13** **Mt. Nebo** hill at the base of the Manitoba Escarpment. On the top of the hill - fragile prickly pear cactus, white onion, shining arnica. In the oak and birch forest lower down the unusual understory includes nodding trillium, spotted coralroot, columbine, yellow lady's-slipper and downy yellow violets. (New)
- Saturday, June 20** **Woodridge** - Cedar Bog contains many rare plants including orchids such as showy lady's-slippers and small round-leaved orchid, bluets, paintbrush.
- Saturday, June 27** **Brokenhead Wetlands** - cedar swamp and rare calcareous fen - rare plants include many orchid species and carnivorous plants.
- Saturday, July 4** **Portage Sandhills Wildlife Management Area** - south of Portage la Prairie - plant communities include species peculiar to sandhill complexes - pink-flowered onion, prickly pear cactus, Nuttall's violet, Indian paintbrush and more. (New)

Manitoba's Wildflower Diversity Highlighted at AGM

By Peggy Bainard Acheson

The highlight of this year's Annual General Meeting, held on Friday, February 27, 2009 at the Dakota Lawn Bowls Club, was Marilyn Latta's presentation of Manitoba Wildflowers A-Z. Marilyn is a long-time member of NOCI, is a past president of the Manitoba Naturalists Society (now also known as Nature Manitoba), and has been Chair of the MNS Habitat Conservation Committee for many years. This Committee was instrumental in developing the inventory of the last remaining tall grass prairie, which resulted in the Tall Grass Prairie Preserve in southeastern Manitoba. Marilyn's interest and knowledge of Manitoba's wildflowers is well known. Thanks, again, Marilyn for entertaining and introducing us to so many new and unusual species that are right here in our own backyard.

We had 48 members and guests in attendance. Richard Reeves, Nominations Chair, ably presided over the short election process. As a result, John Dyck, John Neufeld, and Peggy Bainard Acheson were elected by acclamation. We also voted on and approved minor changes to our Constitution. As a consequence we can elect two more volunteers to the Board (for a total of nine). We would be glad of the extra help to reduce the load on our hard-working board members – please let us know if you have some time and an interest in doing more to help conserve Manitoba's natural legacy.

The auction and raffle seems to be something everyone looks forward to every year. This year's auction, equipment sale, and donations raised about \$360, which more than helped to offset the cost of the AGM. This does not include book and pin sales, or memberships. Thanks to the many donors of raffle, silent auction and door prizes. The donors were Carol Clegg, Bep Vanderwoude, Rose Kuzina, Anita Cauldwell, Iris Reimer, Doris Ames, John Dyck, Dawn Kitching, Adrian Ames, Eugene Reimer, Bill Belcher, Richard Reeves and Peggy Bainard Acheson. Apologies if I missed anyone. Thanks to John Neufeld for helping to run the auction/raffle.

Thanks again to all the Board members and especially to friends and family for helping to set up and take down and making this another enjoyable and successful AGM!