

Native Orchid News:

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Members' Night

Friday, October 22, 2010

Plant of the Month

Western Spiderwort

(*Tradescantia occidentalis*)



Eugene Reimer



Eugene Reimer

Members' Night

Mark your calendars and blackberries, and what have you. We have planned a wonderful tenth Members' Night for you. Field trip coordinator John Dyck has offered to give us a visual presentation of all the wonderful NOCI field trips this year. So if you were there, or if you weren't, be prepared to visit (or re-visit) the trials and tribulations of the 2010 field trip season.

And Doris, our effervescent President, has agreed to give us a tour of the Wildflowers of the RM of Reynolds, a very well-received presentation she gave on behalf of NOCI at the East Braintree Homecoming Festival this past July.

Friends and family are welcome – there will be displays, door prizes, and of course, refreshments. See you there!

Date: Friday, October 22, 2010

Time: 7:30 p.m.

Place: Dakota Lawn Bowling Club
1212 Dakota Street, Winnipeg

Plant of the Month

Western Spiderwort
(*Tradescantia occidentalis*)

by Doris Ames

Named after John Tradescant (1608-1662) who served as gardener to Charles I of England this very rare (S1) and beautiful perennial is listed as Threatened under Manitoba's Endangered Species Act and is also assigned Threatened status nationally under the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). In Canada it is found in only a few isolated spots in the Prairie Provinces including at Routledge and Lauder sandhill complexes in Manitoba. The largest populations by far are found in Manitoba but even so these sites comprise less than one square mile in total area. Protection of its critical habitat occurs mostly on privately owned land where it is protected voluntarily by individual landowners. The Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation also purchased a 160 acre property in the Lauder Sandhills to preserve sandhill species.

Western spiderwort grows mostly on partially stabilized sand dunes on steep south-facing slopes and on blowout areas. Some species found in association with it are ground juniper, spear grass, sand bluestem, purple prairie clover, lilac-flowered penstemon and pin cushion cactus.

The plant looks highly unusual. It grows 4-20 inches high from fleshy roots. The slender stems have swollen nodes where the long leaves are attached. The ribbed leaves are folded in half and appear very long and skinny and are an unusual shade of green.

Spiderwort blooms in early July. A cluster of flower buds (up to 25) are found at the top of the stem surrounded by long and skinny pointed bracts that somewhat resemble the leaves. Flowers open early in the morning on sunny days and close by mid-afternoon. Flowers have three rounded petals and are usually purplish-blue but can be pink or white as well. Sometimes purplish-blue and pink flowers occur even occur on the same plant at Lauder. Each flower lasts only one day. Pollination is by sweat (Halictid) bees. Seed capsules are produced by fertilized plants about 3 weeks after flowering and fall to the ground near the parent plant so that the plants appear to grow in clumps. Plants reproduce both by seed and vegetative reproduction. Above ground shoots are produced in the fall and the plant overwinters in the vegetative state.

Western spiderwort numbers are dropping steadily. This is likely because seed production is low and because the highly specialized sandhill habitat this rare plant needs to survive is under threat. Threats include trampling by cattle and humans, ATV traffic, invasion by leafy spurge, petroleum exploration and climate change. In order to protect existing populations of this rare plant we need to be careful not to disturb the few remaining sites where spiderwort grows. This would require more fencing and a higher level of enforcement of restricted access on sites close to the highway and on private land owned by absentee landlords. We will need to increase the number of protected areas and the level of protection in areas that include the critical habitat, perhaps by the establishment of ecological reserves, if we want to see the population actually recover.

See references on page 3.

President's Report

By Doris Ames

Wasn't it a lovely, hot summer? And what a wonderful lot of flowers we got to see especially lady's-slippers. Unfortunately the extreme heat in August made everything go to seed quickly and now although we still haven't had a hard frost it seems nearly all the wild flowers except asters and dandelions are gone. There has been so much rain that the rivers and ditches are brimming with water. Animals seemed to have done very well too, Deer, skunks and coyotes are everywhere. I even had a flying squirrel visit our feeder at the cottage one evening. It's a great fall for mushrooms as well. My nephew collected samples of 25 different species last weekend.

We had terrific attendance at our field trips this year. 138 people attended our regular field trips and we also had an increase in our membership. John Dyck, our field trip coordinator, will tell us all about it on Members Night October 22 (see separate notice this edition). We will also have a digital slide presentation on wildflowers of the RM of Reynolds that Eugene Reimer and I prepared for the East Braintree Homecoming Festival in July. This area is extremely biodiverse and over the years many people have been fascinated by its beautiful wildflowers. For those of you who are familiar with the area this will refresh your memory about how lovely the flowers are and for people who have not been there then this is your chance to be introduced to it.

Come out and join us.

Continued from page 2

References:

Manitoba Species at Risk brochure on Western Spiderwort by Manitoba Conservation Wildlife and Ecosystem Protection Branch at http://www.gov.mb.ca/conservation/wildlife/sar/pdf/western_spiderwort.pdf

and

COSEWIC Assessment and Update Status Report on the Western Spiderwort by Bonnie Smith 2002 at <http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/Collection/CW69-14-260-2003E.pdf>

Membership Fees in NOCI to Increase in 2011

As a small volunteer conservation organization we are amazed and grateful for the continued interest in and support for our mission and objectives. Without that underlying foundation we could not begin to accomplish our goals. As our President, Doris Ames, outlined in her President's report at the 2010 AGM, we have been working hard over the past year on many of those goals. In addition to the huge responsibility of running the organization, here are some of the highlights from last year that NOCI board members and volunteers have been busy with:

Public education:

Led and interpreted 11 field trips in which 138 people participated

Attended events such as Seedy Saturday, Gardening Saturday, Reel Green Film Festival, MB Orchid Show, etc. where our display boards attracted the public and we talked to hundreds about orchid conservation and biodiversity.

Presented PowerPoint slide shows to Selkirk Horticultural Society and Nature Manitoba

Numerous (>15) survey trips to scout for new orchid hotspots and collect seeds. Locations included Portage Sandhills, Lauder Sandhills, South Junction, Contour, Nopiming Provincial Park, Bird's Hill Park, Cowan Bog near Swan River, Jackhead and Fisher River, St. Vital Park.

Wrote and published 4 newsletters.

Presented a photo clinic (another one in May 2010)

Put on AGM, February 2010

Put on Members' Night, October 2009

Continued with Seedbank Project – collected and submitted orchid seeds from 18 species for the Plant Gene Lab in Saskatoon.

Attended Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Conference in Winnipeg in February 2010.

We apply for and receive grant money for survey projects; however, with current economic conditions these grants are increasingly harder to get. Because of the increasing costs of running the organization, and plus the fact that we have not raised our fees since our started twelve years ago, after much thought and discussion, we felt it was time to raise them. At the February 2010 Board Meeting it was unanimously agreed to raise individual membership fees.

To soften the blow we agreed to raise the fees \$5 in 2011 with a possible further increase of \$5 in a couple of years. Thus fees will increase from \$10 to \$15 in 2011 and possibly to \$20 per person in 2013. Despite a 50% increase, we still feel that these fees are incredibly low compared to other non-profit organizations.

Thank you all for your wonderful support over the past 12 years. Please know that we appreciate your confidence in us and we hope that you will show it by continuing to renew your memberships and donate generously.

Peggy Bainard Acheson

Membership Secretary