

## ORCHIDS IN THE WHITESHELL

By Doris Ames

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There are many wonderful things to see in this 2,700 square kilometre park, not least among them wild orchids. The park is full of nature trails. The Whiteshell Section of the Trans Canada Trail alone will be 115 km long. These well-maintained trails are perfect for pleasant hiking and plant photography. Interpreters are available on some of these walks during the summer and the signage is good.

Along with the Park Guides, there are several interesting guidebooks available that have information about where to find plants and wildlife of all kinds in the Whiteshell. One that I find useful is "Pelicans to Polar Bears" by Catherine Senecal.

Late May to late June are the best times for botanizing. Even before you enter the park from the west you are treated to the sight of Showy lady's-slippers (*Cypripedium reginae*) and Yellow Lady's-slippers (*Cypripedium parviflorum* sp) growing along the sides of Highway No.1. They continue all the way to the Ontario border and in many locations throughout the park.

The delicate fairy-slipper orchids (*Calypso bulbosa*) can be found in shady, black spruce/ balsam/ cedar forests and bogs throughout the Whiteshell. They are hard to spot and fairly rare these days but the single, pleated leaf is very distinctive. For years, they could be seen in the vicinity of West Hawk Lake around the end of May or early June. They can be found in the Mantario region as well. The main requirements are shade and cool soil. I know of some additional locations in the nearby Sandilands Provincial Forest. Sometimes you may be lucky enough to find the rare ram's-head lady's-slipper (*Cypripedium arietinum* ). Ram's-head is our smallest lady's-slipper with an intricate, brownish-purple and white, fuzzy flower the size of a dime. It often continues blooming in shady forests until nearly the end of June and sometimes can be found growing alongside the fairy-slippers and the small round-leaved orchid (*Amerorchis rotundifolia*).

Moccasin-flowers or stemless lady's-slippers (*Cypripedium acaule*) are widespread and can be found blooming in mature Jackpine forests with sandy soils, or in burned-over areas, around the third week in June. Large populations though, are no longer as common. Sometimes you can be lucky enough to see the rare Hooker's rein-orchid (*Platanthera hookeri*) along with them, as you can in Mantario. Last year I saw moccasin-flowers near the south shore of Falcon Lake. The ski hill is worth looking at in summer as it contains many beautiful wild flowers.

McGillivray Falls Trail is another place where you can find moccasin-flowers and what a wonderfully scenic route it is at any time of the year! Ladies'-tresses orchids (*Spiranthes* sp.) can

sometimes be seen accompanying the moccasin-flower in the Jackpine ridges along the edge of the trail. Their delicate white flowers on the twisted flower spike stand out against the green of the forest floor.

Coralroots are strange and bright-coloured orchids that appear in the park mid to late May. There are three species, the early coralroot (*Corallorhiza trifida*), the striped coralroot (*Corallorhiza striata*) and the spotted coralroot (*Corallorhiza maculata*). They grow in dry to moist, mixed coniferous-deciduous forests with layers of leaves and other organic matter on the forest floor. They have no leaves or real roots and are saprophytic. That is, they derive their nourishment from decomposing organic matter.

In the rough tamarack bogs and remote wilderness areas of the park you can see some of the rarer orchids such as the red to magenta- coloured dragon's-mouth (*Arethusa bulbosa*). In the same kind of habitat you can also sometimes find the shining-white and heavily-scented White bog-orchid (*Platanthera dilatata*).

Last year we found blunt-leaf rein-orchid (*Platanthera obtusata*) and round-leaved rein-orchid (*Platanthera orbiculata*) in a mixed coniferous-deciduous forest in the southern edge of the park. A marshy area nearby contained green bog-orchid (*Platanthera hyperborea*). Moccasin-flowers were growing on a nearby rock outcropping. Large clumps of spotted coralroots were growing along with yellow lady's-slippers in a mossy hollow between the edge of the rock outcrop and a large stand of black spruce. This rich habitat was in a timber sale area and was slated for clear cutting. We were able to notify the Department of Forestry and have their habitat set aside to protect these rare plants.

In the fall, Jackpine ridges often contain some of the rattlesnake-orchids (*Goodyera* sp). They are noted for their beautiful green and white, mosaic-patterned leaves.

The beautiful and rare orchids in the Whiteshell deserve our protection. Native Orchid Conservation Inc. (NOCI) works to protect rare native plant species and their habitat. We do this by conducting surveys of timber sales in southeastern Manitoba in the winter to locate potential habitat. When we find some we mark out the area and notify the Department of Forestry so they can work this information into forestry management plans. If indicated they can exempt the area from the cut. In the summer we use our GPS coordinates to locate the area once again and survey it for rare plants. If we find sizeable populations we notify the Conservation Data Centre so they can add it to their database and it can be exempted from the cut. We also view peat-harvesting areas for significant orchid populations. We have set aside many hectares of bush and bog habitat in southeastern Manitoba over the past two years as a result. The Federal and Provincial governments, SunGro and Premier Horticulture, the Brokenhead and Buffalo Point Ojibway First Nations, the C.P. Loewen Foundation and other private funders have funded this Timber Sales Survey project. We have other ongoing projects.

In the summer along with our survey work, we conduct field trips to see rare orchids in areas adjacent to the park. During the spring and fall we hold informational displays in the shopping centres, at horticultural meetings and other places where we can meet the public and educate them about the need to preserve biodiversity and protect these plants for future generations. Members of our group are presently writing a book about Manitoba orchids. We plan to publish it in November of 2004.

Please remember not to pick or transplant native orchids into your garden. Picking deprives the plant of leaves that it needs to perform photosynthesis in order to store food. It also prevents the formation of a seedpod that the plant needs to reproduce. Most transplants eventually fail and even if they don't their genetic information is removed from the larger gene pool. This results in a reduction in biodiversity. Clumps of lady's-slippers, for instance, that are only able to spread by root propagation will eventually fail as the plants weaken and die. This is a shame because many of the large clumps can be as much as 50 years old.

We are lucky to be able to enjoy one of Canada's finest parks. Let's protect the Whiteshell so that future generations can enjoy it as we do.

If you would like to join our organization and accompany us on the field trips we run to see native orchids, please contact our field trip coordinator at 204-223-8209 or email [fieldtrips@nativeorchid.org](mailto:fieldtrips@nativeorchid.org). For other information about native orchid species or NOCI please view our website at [www.nativeorchid.org](http://www.nativeorchid.org) or contact the President at [president@nativeorchid.org](mailto:president@nativeorchid.org).



Fairy-slipper (*Calypso bulbosa*)



Ram's-head lady's-slipper (*Cypripedium arietinum*)



Showy lady's-slipper (*Cypripedium reginae*)



Small Round-leaf Orchid (*Amerorchis rotundifolia*)



Striped Coralroot (*Corallorhiza striata*)