

The Whiteshell Wakes Up

By Doris Ames

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As I write this, pussy willows are out and the sap is rising in the Manitoba Maple trees. Even though there is wet snow on the ground the sun is strong and we are advancing rapidly towards spring. Sparrows are twittering loudly in the trees near my feeder as they bask in the bright sunshine. It's almost as if they are shouting, "Spring is on it's way".

April is a wonderful month, a time of rebirth and renewal. The geese return in large numbers in early April. Warm in their downy feathers, they search out tender sprouts of green grass poking out through the melting snow. Fuzzy, mauve Prairie Crocus (*Anemone patens*) burst into bloom in many an exposed, sunny patch on the side of the road. Early in the morning, or on cold and windy days, they close their warm petals around them like a fur coat. When it warms up, they open wide once again to reveal their bright yellow centres. If you plan to do some flower photography while hiking in early spring, it is best to go in the early afternoon when the sun has warmed the air and the flowers open up. Warm, cloudy days are especially nice for getting good shots of pale flowers like crocuses. This is also a good time to photograph the early over-wintering butterflies. The familiar Mourning Cloak butterflies, with their velvety brown wings edged in creamy yellow, will wake up in the sun and start to fly about, looking for places to lay their eggs. By the end of the month, stately Sandhill Cranes will return to the fields while pairs of Mallards and croaking frogs will be found in every swollen ditch. Cheerful dandelions occupy every sunny place especially near the side of a building.



Photo 1: Prairie Crocus

May brings out wildflowers in profusion. The tiny Early Blue Violet (*Viola adunca*) and the Northern Bog Violet (*Viola nephrophylla*) bloom everywhere, mixed with strawberry flowers, anemones and pussytoes. A lucky few will see the rare trailing arbutus (*Epigaea repens*) hiding its sweetly scented flowers under shiny, green leaves in the pine and spruce forests. Sometime after mid-month, our first native orchid comes into bloom, the fairy-slipper orchid (*Calypso bulbosa*). The plants can often be recognized by the distinctive single pleated leaf even before the flowers are out. Their delicate pink flowers can be found growing in the moss carpet of cool, shady cedar bogs. The flower is unusual because of its dainty shoe-like lip with a yellow bristly beard. Morel mushrooms come out at the edge of poplar forests or on the side of the road around Mother's Day, especially when a few hot days follow a warm spring rain. They provide a gourmet treat for those lucky enough to find them and to be able to make a positive identification.



Photo 2: Trailing Arbutus



Photo 3: Fairy-slipper

By the end of May, Nature is in full swing. Suckers are running in the creeks and rivers and fishermen are gearing up for another season on the lake. Marigolds, Coltsfoot and Cowslips or Hoary Puccoon are now blooming. If it's an early spring like last year, the moccasin-flowers (*Cypripedium acaule*) could be already blooming in the pine forests, black spruce bogs or on granite outcrops in the Whiteshell. Check out the Falcon Lake Ski Trail or the Foresters Trail near Betula Lake. Other orchids such as early coralroot (*Corallorhiza trifida*) and the small yellow lady's-slipper (*Cypripedium parviflorum*) will soon follow. Some of the first yellow lady's-slippers to bloom are those in the ditches along Hwy#1 East. Native Orchid Conservation Inc. (NOCI) runs field trips for its members beginning around the first of May. We travel to many places in southeastern Manitoba to find native orchids and other rare plant species. Please consider joining us on some of these outings.

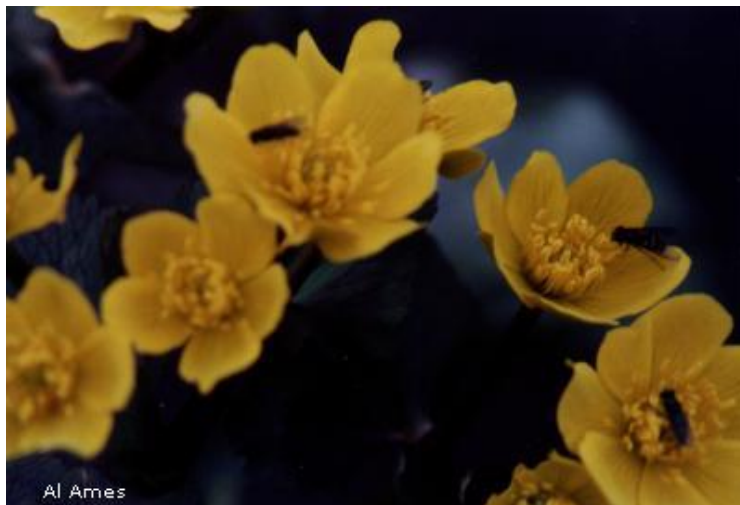


Photo 4: Marshm marigolds



Photo 5: Moccasin-flower



Photo 6: Yellow lady's-slipper

By June, summer has begun and I invite you to come with us on a special field trip for Whiteshell cottagers, on Sunday, June 13th at 10:00AM. We will meet at the trailhead of the Forester's Trail west off Hwy#307 near Betula Lake. Members of Native Orchid Conservation Inc. will be there to lead you on the 2.4km moderately easy hike along the trail. Come and see and photograph the wild plant species we find there including tree species. The hike will take approximately 2 hours leaving plenty of time for photography and to enjoy the flowers. We will try to answer your questions and, if you have a field guide, bring it along and give us a hand. The cost will be \$20 per person, \$10 for a membership in Native Orchid Conservation Inc and \$10.00 for the field trip fee. Junior memberships are free so children under 18 need only pay a \$5.00 field trip fee when accompanied by parents. Please telephone our field trip coordinator, ~~Bob~~ Joyce at 256-8113, if you plan to attend this or any other of our field trips. If there is a cancellation due to weather, we will make every effort to contact you and reschedule the trip. Please dress for the weather with suitable footwear for climbing on rocks. A hat, sunscreen, bug repellent and bottled water are strongly recommended for this trip. There is a picnic area at the end of the trail. Why don't you bring a sandwich and have lunch with us there after the trip so you can get to know us better?