

Native Orchid News:

The Newsletter of Native Orchid Conservation Inc.

Volume 18 Issue 2 May 2016
ISSN 1499-5468



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Field Trip Schedule
Page 5

Plant of the Month
Sweetgrass
Hierochloa odorata

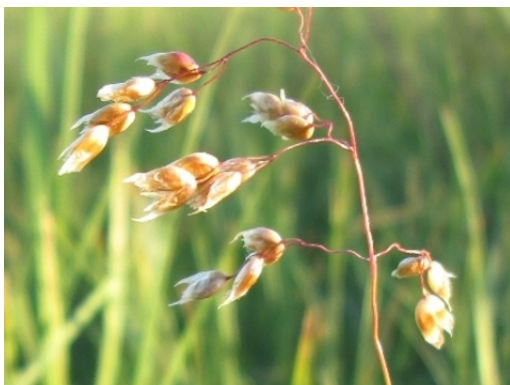


Laura Reeves



Ryan Wakshinski

Brokenhead Wetland Interpretive Trail



Laura Reeves

**Brokenhead Wetland
Interpretive Trail**

**Official Opening
Wednesday, June 22, 2016**

President's Report

By Peggy Bainard Acheson

The AGM on March 4th was a lot of fun for about 30 members and guests. We enjoyed Laura Reeves' presentation on 'Foraging - Using What's at Hand' based on her new book, *Laura Reeves' Guide to Useful Plants*. I think everyone enjoyed the wonderful pictures of her work and a display of some of her tools and items that she gathers and stores. Thanks, Laura for the great presentation and also for bringing some yummy muffins and Kombucha!

The four incumbents up for election (David, Rose, Mike, and Heather) were elected by acclamation and officers were elected at the first board meeting following the AGM as follows:

President:	Peggy Bainard Acheson
Vice-president:	David Toop
Treasurer:	Donna Krawetz
Secretary and Field Trip Coordinator:	Rose Kuzina
Membership Chair:	Heather Miltenburg
Member-at-Large:	Denny Smith
Member-at-Large:	Mike James
Member-at-Large:	John Perry
Member-at-Large:	John Dyck

The draft changes to the Constitution (Bylaws) were reviewed and all items were accepted and ratified by the Membership. Look for the new version of our bylaws on our new website in June.

A great big thank you to the NOCI volunteers who helped out at the annual Manitoba Orchid Society Show in March. It was great to see so many members visiting the Show as well. Volunteers included Heather Miltenburg, who made the display and presented on Manitoba's native orchids on the Saturday, John Dyck, Sandy and Kent Hayglass, Rose Kuzina, John Perry, Lise and Lawrence Reckseidler, Richard Reeves, Mary and Denny Smith, Wilma Sotas, and David Toop. We sold over \$600 worth of pins, books, and DVDs, and five memberships. In addition we sold two Bergman yellow lady's-slipper prints for Debwendon. We distributed hundreds of brochures, field trip schedules and other handouts.

On the same weekend as the Orchid Show, NOCI had a display at Gardening Saturday. This was also very successful; we sold about \$150 worth of pins and a membership! Thanks to Katherine Bergbusch, Florence McCoy, Mike James, and David Toop for helping out there!

I am happy and excited to share with you that as of the time of writing the 2nd edition of *Orchids of Manitoba* has gone to Richard Staniforth for the technical review. After that it will go to Paul Catling to write the foreword and then to the printer. We are looking forward to having it in hand about the middle of June!

I am also excited to share that the new Debwendon website is live and we invite you to visit the website and let us know what you think (www.debwendon.org). Now we are turning our attention to the NOCI website. We will send a notice when it is ready about the middle of June.

The Brokenhead Wetland Interpretive Trail is close to being completed and Debwendon is planning an official opening on Wednesday, June 22nd at 10:00 am. Please check the new Debwendon website for further details of the opening.

Field trip season will soon be upon us (see field trip schedule on last page). We have an exciting line-up of trips planned including three new ones. Why not consider inviting your friends, family, and co-workers to one of our field trips? This is a great way to share one of your interests and introduce people to our wonderful wild Manitoba orchids and other wildflowers.

Continued on next page

Upcoming events:

FIELD TRIPS! (See list and dates on the last page of this newsletter).

Opening of Brokenhead Wetland Interpretive Trail - Wednesday, June 22, 2016, 10:00 am at the trailhead.

Reminders:

Check out our Facebook page and LIKE us if you haven't already done so, or leave a comment:

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Native-Orchid-Conservation-Inc/642374452483045>

Check out the new Debwendon website: www.debwendon.org.

Don't forget to use the Air Miles card that was included in your February newsletter. It helps us earn free prizes for the AGM and Members' Night. If you didn't get one, please contact Heather at Heather.Miltenburg@gmail.com.

How to help us conserve orchids and other rare plants

Are you interested in helping us with our conservation work? You can help us out and the Manitoba Conservation Data Centre (MBCDC) at the same time by submitting reports of rare orchids and other plants. Below is a link to the MBCDC where you can report a rare species online, or you may download a PDF version of the form to take with you in the car which will help make sure that you record all the required information. The form should be completed by the person who made the observation and is for reporting first-hand on-site field observations. Complete one form per observation. <http://www.gov.mb.ca/conservation/cdc/report.html>. Keep a couple of copies of the form in your pack or car for just such instances. Return the completed form to Peggy (NOCIpresident@gmail.com) or to Chris Friesen at the MBCDC (chris.friesen@gov.mb.ca).

When you're out looking for that elusive, rare orchid in your travels this summer, you may also encounter other plants that you are unfamiliar with. If you are not sure what species it is, here is a link to an article by the Native Orchid Society of South Australia that describes in detail how to take pictures for identifying orchids, and other plants:

<https://nossa.org.au/2016/04/15/what-orchid-is-this-how-photos-can-help-part-one-of-two-parts/>.

If you are still unsure you can send low resolution pictures to Peggy and NOCI will attempt to identify it; alternatively send the pictures to Chris Friesen at MBCDC. NOCI uses the information for keeping track of populations and species ranges as well as for plant surveys and field trips. The CDC uses the reports for their own databases for planning purposes and to gauge the health of ecosystems.

When photographing orchids and other plants, remember to always:

Avoid kneeling or placing a tripod near the roots of the plant;

Use a long lens if possible;

Tie back surrounding vegetation temporarily if necessary; don't remove it;

Help to educate others.

and never:

Step backward; turn around so you can see where you step.

As an incentive, for each completed form* of a rare sighting submitted to NOCI (NOCIpresident@gmail.com), you will be entered in a draw for a large orchid pin to be drawn at the NOCI Members' Night in October. We will also put this information on our new website (in June).

*Reports must be for truly rare orchids or plants, not just the ubiquitous yellow lady's-slipper or ox-eye daisy.

Plant of the Month

Sweet Grass (*Hierochloa odorata*)

By Doris Ames

The genus name *Hierochloa* comes from the Greek words *hieros* meaning “sacred” and *chlōe* meaning “grass” in reference to its use as a strewing herb on the porches of churches in Europe especially on saints' days. (The diacritical marks in *chlōe* are omitted in *Hierochloa* according to the Code of Botanical Nomenclature.) The common name comes from the sweet odour of the grass when crushed or burned.

Sweet Grass is a hardy, circumboreal, perennial member of the Grass Family (Poaceae) able to grow to the Arctic Circle. It grows in moist meadows and prairies, salt marshes, stream banks and disturbed ground. Sometimes it is found along roadsides where it benefits from the de-icing salt runoff. It doesn't usually grow naturally in patches but rather mixed in with other grasses. It does not compete well with broadleaf weeds and European grasses.

The upright, hollow stems, coming from long, spreading rhizomes, are 30-60 cm tall. The leaves don't have rigid stems and grow out horizontally to 100 cm. The stems often have purplish or pinkish sheaths at their base and are usually single. The long, narrow leaves are a glossy deep green and catch your finger when rubbed backwards. They give off a beautiful vanilla-like scent when rubbed or crushed. The odour comes from coumarin.

Sweet Grass is easiest to spot when in flower in early June. The tiny 3-flowered spikelets are golden yellow and are found in pyramid-shaped clusters. Like most grasses they are wind-pollinated.

Seeds appear in July. The fruit is a small single seed fused to the ovary which is called a caryopsis in most grass species. Seed set is often low or absent. The plant has developed a habit called apomixis which allows the ovule to develop into a seed without being pollinated but even then it takes 4-5 years for a seed to develop into a small plant the size of a plug. Apomixis also provides for very little genetic variability so Sweet Grass is also sensitive to environmental change.

Sweet Grass has been used by people worldwide as a spiritual herb for thousands of years. In the past it has been used for medicinal purposes and sometimes for tea, but indigenous people today use it principally as a spiritual healing plant. Braided and burned in a cleansing smudge it is also used to remove negativity and take prayers to the spirit world. It is one of their four sacred herbs or medicine plants, the others being tobacco, sage and cedar.

The leaves can be harvested from mid summer until around the first week in October before the first hard frost, sometimes more than once. Cut off the leaves rather than pulling the plant up so you don't damage the plant's roots and so it can grow back the next year. Most of the scent is lost after exposure to frost so make sure to harvest it before temperatures drop too low. The grass is then moistened, a bunch is divided into three sections and braided. Then the braids are tied off and hung up to dry.

Sweet Grass is also used in basket making and weaving, for stuffing into pillows, and sewing into clothing. When dried the scent can last for 3 years or more if re-moistened or burned. It is also added to some kinds of pipe tobacco. Coumarin is toxic to animals and grazers probably avoid it because it tastes very bitter.

There is potential for increased cultivation of Sweet Grass for native culture and soil stabilization. This grass is an excellent soil stabilizer due to its long, creeping rhizomes. Its ability to tolerate moisture makes it useful to control erosion by water. It grows well in fertile soil enriched with humus, in sun or partial shade. Some people add a bit of salt (NaCl) to the soil to help it grow as it often prefers marshy areas. Under cultivation, plants grow very quickly by rhizome reproduction. A one inch plug can develop into a 10 foot square mass in one year. Plants and growing instructions are available at local wildflower nurseries.

2016 Field Trip Schedule

(Depending on the weather, there is no guarantee which orchids or other plants may be seen.
Dates may be altered according to conditions.)

Saturday, May 28

Sandilands area - last of the early spring flowers like three-flowered avens, cowslip, marsh marigolds, sand cherry, and coltsfoot. Orchids - possibly coral-root, ram'shead and yellow lady's-slipper. NEW

Saturday, June 4

Blueberry Rock Trail near Lac du Bonnet, Agassiz ski trails on Pit Road, marsh area - yellow lady's-slippers, moccasin flower and coral-root. NEW

Saturday, June 18

Foresters' Footsteps Trail and the goose sanctuary trail in central Whiteshell Provincial Park - moccasin-flower, coral-root, lesser and checkered rattlesnake-orchids, and yellow lady's-slippers.

Wednesday, June 22

Official opening of the Brokenhead Wetland Interpretive Trail at 10:00 AM at the trailhead. Please see www.debwendon.org for further details including a map and any updates prior to driving out. This is not a NOCI field trip, and registration is not required. Tours provided after the opening program.

Saturday, July 9

Brokenhead Wetlands Interpretive Trail and the Libau Bog in the Mars Hill Wildlife Management Area - rein-orchids, white bog-orchids, green bog-orchids, grass pink, slender ladies'-tresses, rattlesnake-orchids. This later date highlights different orchids in Brokenhead than on June 22.

Saturday, July 16

Carrick-Badger and Woodridge Road area, then Buffalo Point in southeastern Manitoba - rattlesnake-orchids, fungi, Indian pipe and the rare purple fringed-orchid. Due to the distance, this is an all-day trip.

Saturday, August 20

Bird's Hill Provincial Park - along the southern border of the park are late summer flowers like the wild pink onion, Western silvery aster, dotted blazing star, white and purple prairie clover, Indian bread root, giant hyssop, lead plant, bouncing bet and slender agalinis. NEW

To register for a field trip, email NOCI at nocifieldtrips@gmail.com or phone 204-223-8209 after May 1, 2016. Please include a phone number for contact purposes on the trip day. Registration may be limited to a small group of participants to minimize damage to the more sensitive habitats. The cut-off date for registering will be the Wednesday just prior to the particular trip.

There is a charge of \$15 per adult or \$5 per child under 18 to help to cover costs. You must sign the liability waiver and be a NOCI member to join these trips. (You may become a member on the day of the trip - annual membership fee is \$15). Please dress suitably for the weather as we go rain or shine. Hats, drinking water, a bag lunch, sunscreen and insect repellent are recommended. We will meet at a location in Winnipeg that is on a bus route. Car-pooling is done for efficiency and environmental reasons, so be prepared to pay a share of the gas expenses. NOCI reserves the right to cancel or reschedule trips due to weather conditions or insufficient volunteers to lead trips.