

# Native Orchid News

The newsletter of Native Orchid Conservation Inc.

Volume 19, Issue 2, May 2017  
ISSN 1499-5468



Richard Reeves



Richard Reeves



Richard Reeves

Seneca root (see page 4).

Native Orchid Conservation Inc.  
PO Box 40057 Lagimodiere PO  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R2C 4P3



[www.nativeorchid.org](http://www.nativeorchid.org)

For more information, contact:  
David Toop  
Phone: 204-223-8209  
Email: [president@nativeorchid.org](mailto:president@nativeorchid.org)

President's Report

Plant of the Month  
Seneca Root  
(*Polygala senega*)

2017 Field Trip Schedule

## Upcoming Events

Discovery Day at  
Brokenhead Wetland  
Interpretive Trail  
May 27

Native Orchid Conference  
June 4 - 8

Field Trips  
May - August

# President's Report

by David Toop

When I first came on a late season field trip seven years ago, I never imagined I might one day be asked to lead NOCI. I have found the transition to be daunting. Peggy had a huge workload. There are many responsibilities, but I look forward to good things this year with the help of our board. We have our long-serving board members and some new faces which will help us chart our path forward. Each person makes a valued contribution. We are looking forward to a great season this year.

As NOCI enters its 19<sup>th</sup> year, for the first time in its history the organization is without an original founding member as president or on the board. When Bud Ewacha assembled a small army of nature enthusiasts in 1998, no one could imagine that the people he brought together would still be together as NOCI two decades later. The group has numerous accomplishments and has left a lasting legacy. Doris Ames led the group for 14 years with unrelenting enthusiasm. Peggy Bainard Acheson led for three more years with perseverance and a determination for completing projects and setting a sound foundation for the future. As we welcome the new board, we would like to thank Denny Smith and Heather Miltenburg who have retired from the executive.

Our newly elected board of directors are:

President: David Toop

Vice-President: Jemma Harrison

Treasurer: Donna Krawetz

Secretary: Thomas Harrison

Field Trip Co-ordinator: Rose Kuzina

Membership Chair: John Perry

Book Sales Co-ordinator: John Dyck

Member-at-Large: Mike James

Member-at-Large: vacant

Our annual meeting on March 3 featured guest speaker Shirley Frohlich, a NOCI member and owner of Prairie Originals. She spoke on "Essential Native Plants for the Birds, Bees, Butterflies and Pollinators". It is important to know how we can help out our native pollinators and honeybees while beautifying our surroundings. Shirley propagates many valuable native species on her nursery near East Selkirk. I would like to thank Shirley for sharing with us. It is wonderful to have such talented members in our midst. Also, thank you to Mike James for organizing the roster for the Manitoba Orchid Society show in March and to all members who helped out with our booth. Our display once again won a ribbon thanks to some talented students, and we had a chance to showcase our work.

*(continued page 3)*

Visit us on Facebook

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

*(President's Report continued)*

Manitoba will be the location for the Native Orchid Conference which attracts native orchid enthusiasts from across North America. This will be the second time the NOC conference has graced our province. It is a reminder that people will travel for thousands of miles to see what we can too easily take for granted. NOCI will be participating in parts of the conference with a display and two field trips, and volunteers are welcome. I encourage our members to take part in this exciting event. More information is on the NOC website (<http://www.nativeorchidconference.info>) (see below).

Spring is here and already the crocuses are pushing up through the bouts of snow. While orchids will soon follow, it is always a thrill to see life emerging after a long winter. The field trip schedule is ready with some familiar and new places to explore and orchids to find. In addition to our traditional guided walks on Saturdays, we will also be on the lookout for some of our urban orchids on early summer evening excursions. There may be more informal offerings to search out new areas and forgotten ones. Be sure to keep up to date through our updated website, emails and Facebook page.

### **Brokenhead Wetland Interpretive Trail Discovery Day**

Debwendon Inc. is holding a fundraiser at the trailhead on Saturday, May 27, 2017 – drop in from 11 a.m. To 2 p.m.

Tickets are \$10 and include a bagged lunch and a guided tour.

Discover and enjoy the trail and boardwalk. Learn about aboriginal medicinal plants along with our native orchids and carnivorous plants while supporting this local initiative. Tickets available from Peggy (204-261-9179) or Carl (204-766-2847), or send an email to [info@debwendon.org](mailto:info@debwendon.org). Lunch will include a sandwich (ham, salami, bologna, or egg salad on white or brown) with celery and carrot sticks and a bottle of water. Canned drinks will be available for \$1.00 and cookies for \$2.00. Please indicate your sandwich and bread preference when you call or email.

Tickets may be purchased on site the day of the event, but if possible please order tickets ahead so we know how much food to order.

### **The Native Orchid Conference June 4 – 8, 2017**

NOCI is partnering with NOC for this annual conference, which is open to the first 100 registrants. The schedule includes presentations, sharing research, gaining knowledge, and exploring the orchids of Manitoba through field trips. There are many areas where NOCI members can volunteer. Please contact Dave Toop at [president@nativeorchid.org](mailto:president@nativeorchid.org) if you would like to participate.

[www.nativeorchidconference.info/conferences.html](http://www.nativeorchidconference.info/conferences.html)

# Plant of the Month

Seneca Root  
(*Polygala senega*)

by Doris Ames

The genus name *Polygala* comes from ancient Greek meaning “much milk” as these herbs were thought to stimulate milk production in cattle. “Senega” refers to the Seneca Indians of North America who used the plant to treat snake bites.

Seneca root is a perennial member of the *Polygalaceae* (milkwort) family found in southern Canada and the central and eastern United States. It grows in thin, gravelly or loamy, slightly calcareous soils on the edge of bluffs and semi-wooded prairies. It prefers full sun or partial shade.

Seneca root is an erect plant 0-50 cm high with multiple stems growing from a thick horizontal root stock. The yellowish to medium green, lance-shaped leaves are alternate, short-stalked and 2-5 cm long with a prominent central vein. The lower leaves are scale-like.

The inflorescence is a terminal spike-like raceme of rounded, bud-like flowers, purplish near the top. The bottom flowers open first. The plant blooms throughout the month of June and small bees are believed to be the pollinators. The fruit is a capsule containing two hairy black seeds. It grows in clumps. Seneca root used to be fairly common in Manitoba and Saskatchewan but the roots have been harvested heavily for their medicinal properties and the plants are scattered now. Their habitat is also being lost to agricultural and urban development. Manitoba is known for having plants with bigger roots up to 15 cm long and 1.2 cm wide with purplish tops. The Interlake region of Manitoba still supplies three-quarters of the world's supply of wild harvested roots. Metis and First Nation people are the main harvesters of the plant.

The root has important medicinal properties used by the Ojibway to treat colds and coughs, especially as an expectorant and sometimes to treat diabetes. It is also used as flavouring in cough drops and syrups. It was first imported to Europe in the 1700s and was sold by pharmacists as a remedy for pneumonia. The Seneca may have used the root to treat snake bite because of the Doctrine of Signatures; i.e., if the root looked like a rattlesnake's tail, then it must be good for treating snake bite.

The roots contain oil of wintergreen and saponins and have a distinctive pleasant smell. The taste is vaguely sweet at first, like oil of wintergreen, but afterwards they taste soapy and bitter. They taste much better when processed. The saponins irritate the mucous membranes and encourage a productive cough. Smith Bros. cough drops used to have seneca root in them and we always especially liked the black kind when I was a child.

The roots should be harvested when the leaves are dried up but before the first frost. Some people harvest it in late June because it is easier to find when a piece of the flower spike is still present. A piece of the root should always be left on each plant in order to ensure next year's harvest. This has not always been done of late as the price has risen and the abundance has suffered as a result. Most of the seneca root used nowadays is from cultivated crops.

It may be possible to turn seneca root into a marketable crop in Manitoba as the plants can be cultivated by seeds or cuttings. The seeds require two months of cold stratification before planting. It takes four years to produce a plant large enough to harvest. Then the roots are dug up, washed and dried. One hundred and sixty roots yield approximately one kilogram of seneca; in 1999 one company was selling bulk-powdered seneca for US\$18 per pound. There is a demand for it in Europe, Japan and the United States. A moth caterpillar (*Phytometra rhodarialis*) feeds on it and other milkworts, but animals do not usually eat the plant because the foliage is very bitter.

## **2017 FIELD TRIP SCHEDULE**

### **Saturday, May 6**

Quest for the Crocus

Spring is definitely here when Manitoba's provincial flowers start blooming along with early spring wildflowers in the Sandilands area.

### **Saturday, June 3**

Rembrandt Wildlife Management Area

A new field trip for NOCI members, this WMA is home to a variety of orchid species, including the rare ram's-head lady's-slipper, making it worthy of protection.

### **Saturday, June 10**

Eastern Interlake area along the beaches

Explore the gravel and sand beach ridges of glacial lake Agassiz, habitat for lady's-slippers and other rare plants.

### **Tuesday "Around Town" evening, June 13**

A trek through Little Mountain Park with its groves of yellow lady's-slippers.  
No charge; open to the public.

### **Tuesday "Around the Province" evening, June 20**

Brokenhead Wetland Ecological Reserve

You've experienced the boardwalk during the day; now bring out the camera gear for evening shots.  
No charge; open to the public.

### **Saturday, June 24**

Portage Sandhills

Remains of the vast sand deposits of the Assiniboine Valley and the eastern edge of the Carberry sandhills, this Wildlife Management Area boasts the Brittle prickly-pear cactus (*Opuntia fragilis*) and pin-cushion cactus (*Escobaria vivipara*), along with other unusual species of flora and fauna.

### **Saturday, July 8**

East Braintree and Dawson Trail

Along the Brokenhead River in southeastern Manitoba, explore the river flats, forests, Canadian Shield and orchid bogs, plus visit the Midwinter Heritage School site celebrating its 100th anniversary.

### **Tuesday "Around Town" evening, July 11**

Wildwood Park Community Centre restored tall grass prairie  
No charge; open to the public.

**Saturday, July 15**

South Whiteshell Provincial Park and Lake of the Woods, northwestern Ontario  
Around the lakes, on top of the Precambrian Shield, and into the forests are many species of wildflowers and some of our lesser known later season orchids.

**Tuesday "Around Town" evening, July 25**

St. Vital Park

In 2008 the broad-leaved helleborine was discovered in Manitoba (previously its nearest recorded location was Itasca, Minnesota). We will explore how it is travelling through the province in this park.

No charge; open to the public

**Tuesday "Around Town" evening, August 15**

Henteleff Park

"Rooted in nature: a serene oasis for wildlife and people,"  
one of Winnipeg's newest parks.

No charge; open to the public.

Brokenhead boardwalk -  
Rose Kuzina



**Registration Information**

(after May 1, 2017)

An email will be sent with all the details and information required for the trips.

Email [fieldtrips@nativeorchid.org](mailto:fieldtrips@nativeorchid.org)

Phone 204-223-8209

Fees: Saturday trips are for members at \$10 per adult / \$5 per child under 18.  
(Membership is \$15 for 2017; you may join the day of the trip.)

Weekday evening trips are free and open to non-members.

Carpooling is in effect.

Depending on the weather, there is no guarantee what flora may be seen.

Dates may be altered according to conditions.

NOCI reserves the right to cancel or reschedule trips.