

Tales from the Tall Grass . . .

A wonderful time was had by all who embarked on the International Prairie Tour 2001, August 10-12. At our first stop at Lake Bronson State Park, Minnesota, we saw great tall grass prairie conservation and restoration efforts in full swing. There was a lot of excitement when several **northern prairie skinks** were sighted. This lizard can readily break off its tail when seized by a predator. The detached tail will twist and writhe vigorously allowing the skink a chance to escape. The juveniles, with their shiny, bright blue tails were a remarkable sight, indeed! (In Manitoba, skinks are only found in the Carberry Sandhills area.) We also visited a private farm, which boasts the highest sand dune in the Red River Valley. This dune was used as a popular vantage point by Native peoples and the surrounding area is littered with Indian artifacts. It was fun to imagine what the Natives would have seen as they looked across what, at one time, was a vast expanse of tall grass prairie.

Our second stop was the Manitoba Tall Grass Prairie Preserve. Early risers enjoyed a very peaceful bird walk, sighting some of the first migrants to pass through the Preserve on their way south. Afterwards, we had a chance to get up close and personal with the Preserve's weird and wonderful world of insects. The "plant identification walk" was all but dry. In fact, it was so wet that many people opted to remove their footwear and go barefoot, taking the level of enthusiasm found on this tour one step higher. A detailed description of the area's soils kept the crowd captivated.

Our last stop along this tour was Icelandic State Park, North Dakota. Here, we started the day off by sampling cattail pollen and saskatoon pancakes. We were saddened to find out that this state has virtually no original tall grass prairie left. However, there are programs in place that encourage farmers to include native seed in their hayfields and pastures and we visited a site which had been reseeded with native prairie plant species. We also received an exciting account of the geological history of the area including the Pembina Gorge

and Walhalla Mosasaur Site where almost every piece of shale we picked up contained a fossil of some type!

We would like to thank everyone who helped to make this International Prairie Tour such a memorable event.

Scent-sational!

As the sweet smell of the "peach grass" (a.k.a. prairie dropseed) fades, the **Great Plains ladies'-tresses** come into bloom – a sure sign that fall is on its way. The heavenly smell of these inconspicuous flowers is a definite indication of their presence, for they are often smelled before they are seen. If you notice a sweet almond-like aroma in the air, look around your feet for the small white flowers that spiral up around the stem of this wild orchid. Although these flowers are quite common in Ontario and the U.S., there are listed as endangered in Manitoba where they reach the extent of their range.

A B Cs, Birds and Bees

September promises to be another busy month for the School Program. This program, which offers classroom presentations and demonstrations as well as field trips to Grades 4-6 students, has become quite popular since its inception in 1998. Many schools are making repeat requests to receive the Program.

Rock Bottom

As predicted, buck moth populations have crashed after a two-year population explosion. (See the August 1999 Prairie Ponders.) It is remarkable that in only one year, sightings of both the caterpillars and moths have gone from unavoidable to infrequent.

Little Grouse on the Prairie

It is interesting to watch how different animals prepare for the winter months. Grouse will spend most of the time on the ground foraging on the seeds of the wild licorice and swamp birch (also known as "buck brush"). As winter approaches,

they grow a dense covering of feathers on their feet that no doubt helps to keep their feet warm, but also has the same effect as a pair of snowshoes, helping them to stay on top of the snow.

Making Trails

The Preserve is open to visitors year-round. This winter, feel free to strap on a pair of snowshoes or cross-country skis and enjoy the muffled peacefulness of freshly fallen snow, or the sparkling beauty of hoar frost that covers the landscape on clear, crisp mornings.



We'd Like to Hear From You . . .

If there is a topic that you would like to see covered in an upcoming edition of the Prairie Ponders, please let us know by calling Preserve Headquarters at 425-3229 or send us an e-mail: tgpphq@escape.ca. Back issues are also available upon request.

The Preserve was established to protect and conserve the native species found there.

Please do not pick, dig or collect any of the plants or animals.

The use of ATV's is prohibited on Preserve property.

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Manitoba Tall Grass

Prairie Preserve

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