

The Best Time of Year

This is my favourite time of year. As I look around, I see many seed pods bursting forth with new life – a reminder of spring’s first beauties which offered such relief from a long, cold winter. (Spring has always been my favourite time of year. It is so full of mystery as to what is yet to come. And what could be better than the sweet smell of balsam poplar wafting through the air after a warm spring rain?) To the casual observer, these spring wonders have all but disappeared – lost amongst the ever-growing stems of big bluestem and forgotten as a new rainbow of colours has appeared - the red prairie lilies (with their most wonderful smell!), black-eyed susans, harebells, purple prairie clover. . . Around me, the stems of the late-flowering plants are beginning to bolt and, with sadness, I realize that this rainbow will soon fade. I think ahead to August and September when I will have to reach up and pull down the stalks of the wild sunflowers to smell their chocolate-scented blossoms. To when the big bluestem will be tall enough to get lost in and I can take my friends’ kids off of their hands to play hide-and-seek in the tall grasses under the guise of doing *them* a favour. I soon find myself awaiting this time of year with great anticipation, for I realize that it is my favourite time of year.

An insect invasion of a different kind . . .

Defoliation by forest tent caterpillars was noticeably reduced from last year, contrary to earlier predictions. Field observations found that many caterpillars succumbed to a fungal parasite that effectively stopped them dead in their tracks, turning them into powdery white caterpillar-shaped masses. Tachinid flies have also played a large role in decreasing caterpillar numbers. (These large, striped flies may be remembered as the “friendly” flies that would land on people in large numbers and “lick” them to the brink of insanity.) The flies lay their eggs on the caterpillars and, once they hatch, the larvae proceed to feed on the caterpillars, consuming them from the inside out.

Be Our Guest

Guided tours of the Preserve continue to be requested. This year, Americorps student labourers from across the U.S. visited the Preserve while they were stationed at Lake Bronson, Minnesota. Entomologists (insect enthusiasts) from the University of Manitoba came out to study the insect life and share their knowledge with Preserve staff. A bus tour was organized by the Manitoba Woodlot Association and Manitoba Forestry. This group received the full compliment of the area’s natural and cultural history. All visitors greatly enjoyed their tour. On August 15, the tall grass prairie will be “going” to Vita in the form of a slide presentation, for the third year running, as part of the Vita Seniors Activity Program.

Summer Events

Guided Walks – available by request.

Summer Day Program – July 31. For kids aged 9-12. Join Preserve staff for a day of nature oriented activities including hikes, wildcrafting, bird, insect and edible plant identification, games and more!

Prairie Day 2002 – August 10. Get creative with wild edibles, soar with the eagles, learn the latest *buzz* words and find out what’s happening on the tall grass prairie while you’re sleeping! Kids activities, barbeque lunch and prizes to be won! Gates open 10:00 am at the Prairie Shore Trail, 2 miles east of Tolstoi.

Phone 425-3229 or e-mail tgpphq@escape.ca for more info.

For more information about the cultural history of the Preserve area, visitors may wish to stop by the Gardenton Ukrainian Museum and St. Michael’s Church. Phone 425-3072.

Hey Kids! Check out the black-eyed susans and see what kind of neat bugs you can find on them! If you take the time to look, you will see all kinds of weird insects like ambush bugs or crab spiders that sit on the flowers waiting to attack pollinating insects such as bees, hover flies and butterflies.

What colour are the insects that lie in wait and why are they that colour? Do you know what happens when two crab spiders find themselves on the same flower? Why do those worms stick straight up like that when you bump the flower? Watch from a distance and then look up close.

These flowers are platforms for all sorts of activity! Check it out and let us know what you find! E-mail us (tgpphq@escape.ca) or give us a call (425-3229).

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.

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Manitoba Tall Grass

Prairie Preserve

Prairie Ponders

Summer 2002