

Marvelous Mushrooms

Fall is upon us and what a wonderful season! There's a distinct smell in the air that never fails to bring back childhood memories of jumping into a freshly raked pile of leaves, or of wandering through the woods in search of great edible mushrooms. It's amazing how many different kinds of mushrooms are present in the soil, silently waiting for the perfect conditions to send up their spectacular fruiting bodies. And what a marvelous show they put on this fall! More than a few dinner tables were graced with honey mushrooms (pidpanki), boletes (koseri), giant puffballs, ink caps and shaggy manes this year. What could be better than pan-fried puffballs or pidpankis smothered in rich cream sauce? Yum!

The Best Defence is a Strong Offense

At this time of year, certain animals become more visible as they prepare for the long, cold winter ahead – most notably, skunks. Skunks are slow and deliberate – their top speed is estimated at 14km/h. They are about the only animal that will allow a person to approach and observe them at close range, though they will certainly let you know when you have invaded their personal space! They are fun to watch as they hunt for grubs and small mammals. During the winter, skunks hibernate in community dens with up to a dozen or more individuals, often usurping the dens of woodchucks or cottontail rabbits. By spring, females lose 10-30% of their body weight while the males, which tend to wander and feed during mild spells, will lose only 10%. It is unfortunate that their diet, consisting of 7-43% grasshoppers, grubs and beetle larvae (depending on the season), 20% mammals (voles, mice, cottontails, shrews and chipmunks), and 27% fruit does little to counter the bad reputation they've gained by their very effective defense mechanism and penchant for digging grubs from lawns under the cover of darkness.

Prairie Day Success

A great time was had by all at our annual Prairie Day celebration on August 9. A big thank-you goes out to each of our organizers,

volunteers, and guests who made this day a memorable one. Visitors had fun making rope from wild plants, roasting bannock over an open fire and testing their skill at skull identification. Kids had a great time catching and identifying insects with Dr. Terry Gallaway of the University of Manitoba, having their faces painted and taking part in the scavenger hunt. Special thank-yous go out to guest speakers Dr. Phil Gerla and Russ Reisz from Minnesota and Cary Hamel from Winnipeg. Also, to the Manitoba Naturalists Society and Native Orchid Conservation Inc. for their excellent displays. We are already planning more great activities for next year's event. Hope to see you there!

Visitors

It is great to see so many people enjoying the Prairie Shore Interpretive Trail. Both local residents and visitors from as far as China agree that a walk around this trail is a truly wonderful way to spend a day. We would like to thank everyone who signed our guest book and took the time to add their comments and suggestions. Your feedback is appreciated.

In addition to our regular guided walks, special tours were given to University of Winnipeg Forestry students, the University of Manitoba Ecosystems Management class as well as a number of journalists and orchid enthusiasts.

Several schools took advantage of our outdoor classroom to gain first hand experience with this endangered ecosystem. Where else can students run through grasses taller than they are, or touch an endangered species?

Did you know . . .

- a skunk's greatest natural enemy is the great horned owl?
- the Manitoba Tall Grass Prairie Preserve and surrounding region is home to 21 provincially or nationally rare plant species? Species like the western prairie fringed orchid, adder's

tongue fern and wild geranium are not known to exist anywhere else in Manitoba!

- the Preserve is open to visitors year-round? Strap on your snowshoes or skis, pack a thermos of hot cocoa and enjoy the peace and tranquility of the Manitoba Tall Grass Prairie Preserve on a crisp winter day!

Those M-M-M-Marvelous Mushrooms

S M P M A D G I
 A P I S P O R E S R L
 I D L L A B F F U P O H T
 N D C O L L E C T I B L E S K
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Cap
 Collectible
 Damp
 Gill
 Edible
 Identify
 Stalk
 Spores
 Toadstool

Ink cap
 Meadow mushroom
 Pidpanki
 Poisonous
 Puffball

Manitoba Tall Grass

Prairie Preserve

Prairie Ponders

Fall 2003

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. Remember motorized vehicles are prohibited.