

Fringed Phenomenom

Many exciting things have occurred on the Preserve this summer. The display of endangered **western prairie fringed orchids** was astonishing. In some areas, the proliferation of flowering plants resembled a carpet, the air around them filled with their wonderful fragrance.

There is an interesting mystery associated with these plants. Despite several plant collection trips through this area made by botanists at the time when these orchids would have been flowering, there is no record of this orchid's existence here prior to 1984. It seems unlikely that these spectacular flowers were overlooked, so where did they come from and how did they get here?!

To add to this mystery, experts remain stumped by this year's discovery of pink fringed orchids on the Preserve. With the individual flowers being half the size of the western prairie fringed, there is debate as to whether these flowers are a new previously unrecorded species, a hybrid between purple and white fringed orchids, or simply a strange mutation of the western prairie fringed orchid. Genetic testing will likely be used to verify the identity of this new find.

Biological Control Success

In 1996, leaf-tier moths – a biological control for leafy spurge – were obtained from the Piney and Stuartburn Weed Control District and released on the Preserve's largest patch of leafy spurge. The moths have done very well since then and have been found on spurge patches as far as 3½ miles from the release site on both Preserve and private property. The larvae of these moths help control the spread of leafy spurge by tying up the growing leaves and florets, thereby impairing plant growth and preventing flowering and seed development. This is great news, as attempts at establishing populations of the root-eating leafy spurge flea beetle have repeatedly run aground.

Reflections of a Prairie Year

I'm sitting on top of a hill overlooking a large marsh. It's a marsh I know well because I lived beside it for an entire summer. It's a marsh I know well because I've walked through it a few times and can put both a common and Latin name on every plant I see. I know where the deepest spots are because that's where the cattails grow. Within the cattails I have found many red-winged blackbird nests, their pink eggs splattered with various colours.

It's a year later and I'm sitting on the same hill, overlooking the same marsh. It's a marsh I never really knew until last year, when I discovered a powerful herbal headache remedy growing thick in its water. It's a marsh I never really knew until last year, when I made a thatched hut from its long sedges and watched their awesome water-shedding abilities. (The inside of this hut remains dry despite 12 inches of spring rains.) It's a marsh I never really knew until I used the tall grasses found along its edges to make a mat to insulate me from the cold, wet ground – the grass bundles tied together with rope I made from the strong fibers of the marsh's Indian hemp. It's a place I never really knew until I trusted the grasses to keep me warm on a clear, -26°C night when I didn't have a sleeping bag. It's a place I never really knew because I never bothered to learn more about it. My eyes fill with tears. No words can describe the splendor that surrounds me, nor the connection I now feel to this place. I look at the grass stems that stretch high above me and I see far beyond their physical beauty. Aboriginal people often speak of their feeling of connection to the land and the Creator and I think I'm finally starting to understand. A Garden of Eden surrounds us, if we only choose to look.

Prairie Day 2003

Join us for our annual Prairie Day Saturday, August 9!

Admission: \$3.00 per adult; children free!

Gates open at 10:00am.

This year's line-up includes demonstrations, workshops, guest speakers, guided walks and activities for kids. A home-style barbeque and refreshments will be available.

*Find out how and why song birds are being banded on the Preserve!

*Learn about wild edibles and make your own rope from wild prairie plants!

*Roast your own bannock over an open fire!

*Hear Russ Reisz from The Nature Conservancy in Minnesota and Cary Hamel of the Manitoba Conservation Data Centre talk about joint efforts to preserve this endangered ecosystem in both Canada and the United States.

*Kids can have their faces painted and try their hand at capturing and identifying grassland and aquatic insects.

Summer Events

Guided Walks Available by request throughout the summer. Contact the Preserve Headquarters at 425-3229 or e-mail tgpphq@escape.ca

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

Manitoba Tall Grass

Prairie Preserve

Prairie Ponders

Summer 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.