



## Our Mission -

*"TO ENSURE THE PRESERVATION OF THE CHARACTER AND BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY OF WAGNER NATURAL AREA FOR EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND RESEARCH PURPOSES."*

# Friends of the Fen

WAGNER NATURAL AREA SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



## Upcoming events:

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Pale Yellow Iris Weed Pull Day

**Where:** Meet at Wagner Natural Area parking lot.

**When:** Saturday July 20th @ 10 a.m.

**Who:** Anyone who wants to volunteer is welcome; let us know you'll be there by emailing [info@wagnerfen.ca](mailto:info@wagnerfen.ca) and we can be prepared for everyone.

**Format:** Be sure to wear your rubber boots and work gloves. Come ready to go toe to toe with some Pale Yellow Iris!

### July/August 2019 Activities

**Wagner Walkabouts:** Come join Wagner leaders for a guided tour of the Marl Pond Trail to see what's new at Wagner! Every Saturday @ 10:00 a.m. this July & August (weather permitting). No need to register.

**Other Work Bees:** TBD

**For every activity, plan to meet at the Wagner parking lot.**

Visit our website:

[www.wagnerfen.ca](http://www.wagnerfen.ca)

for more information on upcoming events at Wagner Natural Area.

All Newsletter stories, unless otherwise noted, were prepared by Bob Underschultz, WNAS summer student

# Bats and orchids and toads, oh my!

## Why visiting Wagner matters



Conservation. Preservation. Two terms that are often merged together outside of the scientific community. For the general public, many see conservation as preservation and vice versa, though the two terms have an important difference when it comes to humans and the environment. Conservation is concerned with the proper use of nature while preservation seeks to protect nature from unnatural impacts. As a designated Natural Area in the Alberta parks system, Wagner Natural Area (WNA) plays host to both conservationist and preservationist practices. Public use of the majority of WNA is discouraged in order to help preserve the sensitive fen habitat. Protecting the WNA from human impact follows the preservation ethic. The Marl Pond Trail located in the northwest corner of Wagner is open to the public and we encourage public use in a way that respects and conserves the surrounding environment. Permitting but regulating human use of this area is how Wagner follows the conservation ethic. Ensuring both the preservation and conservation of WNA allows the unique Wagner environment to be protected in different ways.

Directly preserving Wagner's environment ensures its continued existence under Mother Nature's influence. Conserving the environment allows humans to experience Wagner, to develop a love and care for its natural beauty and ecological significance. Without this interaction, there is no human connection with Wagner and therefore no "place identity". Place identity is the meaning and significance of places for their inhabitants but also for their users. A life-long city dweller who has never spent time in nature will never develop an identity that understands the significance of nature and therefore the importance of its protection. By allowing and promoting the visitation of natural areas like Wagner, people can develop a nature-based identity, helping to ensure the future protection of nature. So please come by and visit Wagner, walk the Marl Pond Trail, and experience the significance of nature firsthand.

## Batman, mosquitoes, and pink elephants



Many thanks to Cory Olson and the Alberta Community Bat Program for hosting a wonderful evening full of interesting bat facts, listening to bat vocalizations, and spotting dozens of Little Brown Bats swooping down to catch the many mosquitoes we attracted. Thanks as well to Patsy and Derek for leading our annual orchid walks and expertly identifying the many wildflowers that call Wagner home (including the adorable pink Elephant Head). Last but not least, the WNAS would like to thank everyone who came out to participate in our Bat and Orchid walks this year. Your interest and appreciation of the WNA and its diverse wildlife helps to promote the significance of this beautiful area.



**Pale Yellow Iris Weed Pull**

Many thanks to all the volunteers who came out to the Pale Yellow Iris weed pull. The investment of your precious weekend time was most appreciated. The work of last year's weed pull put a significant dent in the iris population along Morgan Creek but unfortunately there were still many left to eradicate. We plan on hosting another weed pull day on Saturday, July 20<sup>th</sup>, at 10:00 a.m. All are welcome!

**May Plant Count in Wagner, May 26 and 28, 2019: Patsy Cotterill**

May Plant Counts have been conducted in Wagner Natural Area since the 1980s, so this year's was just another contribution to a long-standing tradition. A province-wide initiative begun in 1976, the Counts have as their purpose the recording of all species of vascular plants in bloom in Alberta during the last week in May. It involves determining the flowering stage (phenology) of each species in bloom using a standardized coding system. (A species is assigned a score depending on what proportion of its total population at that location is in a given flowering stage, e.g., in bud, 25% in flower, 50% in flower, full (100%) flower, fading, or finished flowering).

A May Count is not the same as creating a species list for a site, it merely provides a snapshot of annual development of a flora in the same place(s) and at the same time each year. However, a concerted series of observations across the province does yield insights into plant distribution, spread of non-native species, and possible responses to variations and long-term changes in climate. Most importantly, it vastly increases the observers' knowledge and appreciation of the local flora – as

well perhaps some of the challenges of plant identification!

Wagner board member Derek Johnson was a conscientious compiler of May Counts for the whole province for many years, followed by Elaine Gordon (also based in Edmonton) and Suzanne Visser (Calgary). This year botanists from Nature Alberta and the Alberta Native Plant Council will be compiling and publishing the results sent in by individual observers or teams.

In Wagner we follow the same routes, usually trails, year after year, including the Marl Pond Trail, the Cabin Trail and some that provide access to the southeast fens. We "bushwhack" into a north-central area for some species not seen or well expressed elsewhere.

Flowering, by the way, means that stamens in the flower must be open and shedding pollen, and the stigmas (the female part that connects to the ovary) must be fresh and ready to receive pollen. This means that a sample of the flowers should be examined carefully. Wagner presents a challenging count because the Natural Area is home to some 29 species of sedge (*Carex* species), of which upwards of 25 could potentially be in flower. Checking those tiny flowers is therefore quite a lot of work and, needless to say, scoring becomes a bit subjective and extrapolative! The small flowers of several other species need to be examined too.

So how did the Count go in Wagner this year? We recorded 49 species in flower in one stage or another, compared to 63 last year, generally indicating a "late" spring. (Remember, though, that while later-flowering species won't be recorded, earlier-flowering species will still be in flower in a late season.)



The marsh marigolds stood out this year as being particularly beautiful. Although we recorded 25% in flower to full flowering, depending on site exposure, they were clearly at their best, compared with last year when the majority were fading. The current species that we regularly record in flower along the Marl Pond Trail, e.g., American black currant and northern black currant, were also at an earlier flowering stage (and therefore more photogenic; photographers in particular should be sensitive to phenology!). We found bog violets in flower along the Marl Pond Trail and elsewhere, but those of us familiar with Wagner know that many more are likely yet to flower, the best displays occurring in June. We saw a single yellow lady's-slipper in flower, which was good news, as it means this orchid will be in

good shape for the Orchid Walks on June 16th. The same is probably true of the pale coralroots, of which we found only a couple in flower on a dry, exposed site. The tiny, delicate yellow flowers of bishop's-cap, a major woodland ground cover, were also few and far between this year. Labrador tea, whose flowering I always consider marks the end of spring, was in bud only.

Nevertheless, many species do not appear responsive to preceding weather or ground conditions; they flower pretty much at the same time every year and can faithfully be found in bloom or developing fruit by the last week in May. Examples include most willows and several sedges. Bastard toadflax, more recognizable by its orange fruits than its shy, yellow flowers, is invariably in flower, as is the spring ephemeral, moschatel, both forest species. The pink-bellied bog rosemary is reliably in flower in the fens, although the number of flowers it produces seems to vary. Most later-flowering species never make it to the May Count, including most grasses and members of the Aster family (with some exceptions).

Flowering or not, it is always interesting to track the fortunes of our plants in their natural habitats, and nearly every expedition throws up a mystery or a pleasant surprise. Although the majority of our native species are perennials, their longevity is not guaranteed; they can disappear and then as suddenly reappear in a different spot. Fens are our most stable habitats; riparian habitats those most likely to change with fluctuating water levels.

A low count is no cause for lamentation: it means that Wagner Natural Area should be ablaze with a diversity of flowers in June!

## A letter from the WNAS President: Dave Ealey

In my other role at Wagner—citizen-scientist—the end of May brings the opportunity to reconnect with our feathered friends. On May 25, thanks to the help of four collaborators, I recorded the following species during three separate hikes in the habitats around the Marl Pond Trail and forested areas around the Villeneuve field near the NE corner of the natural area. Most birds were present in low numbers (fewer than 5 detected during a hike); others I considered common (5 to 10); and finally, abundant (greater than 10), for a total of 42 species. All results are posted in eBird.

**Present:** Canada Goose, Trumpeter Swan, Blue-winged Teal, Mallard, Common Goldeneye, Wilson's Snipe, Ring-billed Gull, Great Blue Heron, Red-tailed Hawk, Hairy Woodpecker, Least Flycatcher, Blueheaded Vireo, Blue Jay, American Crow, Common Raven, Boreal Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, House Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, American Robin, Purple Finch, Dark-eyed Junco, LeConte's Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Ovenbird, Common Yellowthroat, Orange-crowned Warbler, Rose-breasted Grosbeak

**Common:** Black-capped Chickadee, Chipping Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Brown-headed Cowbird, Yellow Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler

**Abundant:** Franklin's Gull, Tree Swallow, Clay-colored Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow