

*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



Marsh marigolds in flower along the Marl Pond Trail, 31 May, 2021.

*Patsy Cotterill*

## Upcoming events:

### Fall Clean-up

**When: Sunday, September 26  
10 a.m.—2 p.m.**

**What:** Trail and brush maintenance, litter collecting along service road and highway fence line, and sign installation.

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

Come prepared for weather—bring gloves!

**Please pre-register by emailing [info@wagnerfen.ca](mailto:info@wagnerfen.ca).**

In case of bad weather, backup is Saturday, October 2, at 10 a.m.

### 2021 Activities

Stay tuned for a possible Virtual Open House in November! Planning is at early stage.

We hope to be back to our normal events in 2022. Let us know what you would like to see for events next year! Send your ideas to [info@wagnerfen.ca](mailto:info@wagnerfen.ca).

Visit our website:

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

for more information on upcoming events at Wagner Natural Area.

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All content by Dave Ealey unless otherwise acknowledged.

# RESEARCH

## May Plant Count in Wagner Natural Area, 2021

*By Patsy Cotterill*

In total, 52 species were recorded as being in flower\* in Wagner Natural Area this year as compared to 58 species in 2020. A higher count does not necessarily indicate an earlier spring and vice versa because, of course, some of the earlier species will have already finished flowering after an early spring, a fact that applies particularly to sedges and some shrubs. However, the greater number of species with a higher proportion of flowers absent, in bud, or in a pristine state, suggested that conditions had been conducive to slightly later development and flowering this year compared to last. Again, lack of flowers, per se, does not necessarily imply lateness; subsequent visits in June are necessary to see whether peak flowering has occurred later or whether the species will show reduced flowering altogether that year.

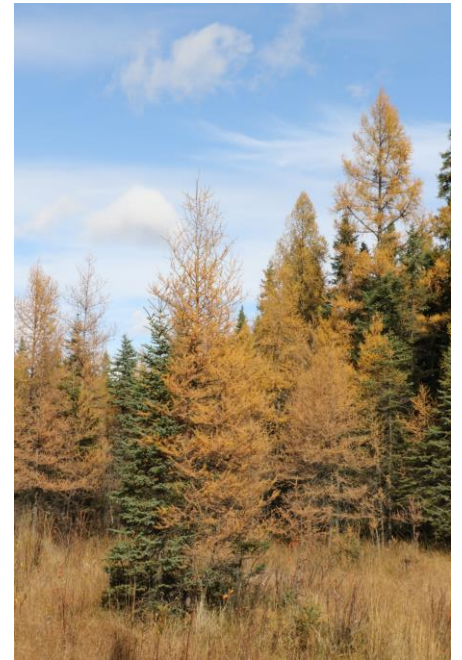
Simply recording presence or absence of flowering in a given species at a site does not allow for the subtler nuances of flowering phase to be determined year over year, and even using a scale of values indicating what proportion of a given species' population is in flower may not be more accurate than an observer's subjective overall impressions.

Possibly the most useful outcomes of a May Plant Count may therefore be as a reflection of floristics – the species present (as with the May Bird Count) – and the building of the observer's knowledge of the flora over a number of years.

Some species flower faithfully at the same time every year regardless of environmental conditions, for example, many species of sedge (see **sheathed sedge** next page), whereas others are better indicators of earliness or lateness. For example, star-flowered false Solomon's seal scored lower for flowering in two of the four sites examined than it did last year, although the lack of flowering was obvious by simple observation. (In fact, peak flowering of this species occurs in June.) Its relative – three-leaved Solomon's seal, a fen species – managed flowering in only one of the three fen sites, although in some years flowers can be plentiful. The abundance of flowering strawberries – both the woodland species and the common wild strawberry – is another good indicator, as they too tend to reach peak flowering in June.

*\*By "being in flower" I mean with flowers that are open and that have stamens with ripe pollen and/or stigmas ready to receive it.*

# Support Us



## VOLUNTEERS / MEMBERS

People of all talents and interests are desired and welcomed to become more closely involved with the Natural Area and the Society.

Email: [info@wagnerfen.ca](mailto:info@wagnerfen.ca)

## DONATIONS

All donations help maintain the integrity of the Natural Area and its surroundings, provide education material, enhance visitor's experiences, and support on-going research studies and surveys.



**Pale coralroot orchid** (left) in 2020 showed up to 25% flowering (a relatively low score) but this year was seen in bud in only one site, and not seen at all in some previously recorded sites. Flowers of the heart-leaved twayblade (orchid) were in prime condition but I found specimens much harder to find this year. Of the showier species, there were few saline shooting-stars in evidence, and relatively few flowering **bog violets** (below), although its flowering was recorded in all four sites examined (three with fens, and along the wet Cabin Trail). Paucity of flowering was noted in northern gooseberry, American black

currant, low-bush cranberry, bracted honeysuckle, and Arctic raspberry to name a few; species with more flowers at an earlier stage included dewberry, and the spectacular populations of **marsh marigold** (cover page) turning all the wet drainages and hollows yellow, a species at its very best at the end of May this year.



A good walk-about in Wagner always produces some interesting incidental observations. Red-osier dogwood appeared in particularly bad shape along the Marl Pond Trail, heavily browsed and with little healthy foliage. Canada buffaloberry was in a similar condition with respect to leaf loss. Browsing by an overpopulation of white-tailed deer may be the cause of dogwood decline, but that of buffaloberry is a mystery. A number of species made a poor showing this year. For example, I observed very few coltsfoot flowers, either of arrow-leaved or of the woodland subspecies palmate-leaved coltsfoot.

No flowers were seen on buckbean plants in the Buckbean Drainage east of Jones' Pond again this year but, differently in 2021, the leaves of only a single plant were spotted. The site needs to be revisited to determine if this is an actual decline in the population, its only known location in Wagner. (A population once also existed in the southeast fens.)

My attempt to mark the location of **alpine clubrush** (or alpine bulrush) [see below] last summer, when its white fruit heads are visible in the fens like wispy bits of beard, in order to help me record it in flower in May, did not pan out: I could not locate it at count time. Nevertheless, by mid-June the heads were evident again above the clumps of moss, so the plants had obviously been present even if indiscernible.

Surprisingly, the little white flowering heads of elliptic spikerush (*Eleocharis elliptica*) were present in the shallow marl pools at the end of May – surprising, because when this inconspicuous species was “rediscovered” several years ago it was flowering in the third week of June! Possibly this warrants further investigation, including a careful look at its fruits.

Wagner Natural Area is full of intriguing possibilities for research, including into phenology, plant population history and distribution, plant pathology, and management practices; and in the early years following Wagner's establishment as a protected area, it was a popular venue for studies. However, in recent years such research seems to have fallen by the wayside; moreover, the provincial government apparently has little interest in the ecological management of its natural areas.

Alpine clubrush  
(*Trichophorum alpinum*),  
South Boundary Fen,  
Wagner Natural Area



Sheathed sedge (*Carex vaginata*) showing male (top) and female spikes in flower,  
May 31, 2021.

## 2021 May Bird Species Count

By Dave Ealey and Sheila Hale

This year's count on May 29 covered three different locations within the groundwater wetland complex on and adjacent Wagner Natural Area (WNA): Marl Pond Trail (6:00 a.m.), Parkland County Environmental Reserve (8:00 a.m.) [extends east about a kilometre from the WNA's east boundary], and the southeastern corner of WNA (10:00 a.m.). As in past years, we recorded all birds detected (by sight or sound) during each survey (roughly 2 hours apiece), including birds flying over each survey area.

We detected 47 species combined for all surveys, but individual survey areas had fewer species (ranging from 27 to 32). Fourteen species were recorded in all of the survey areas, while 13 species were recorded in two survey areas and 14 species were recorded in only one survey area.

The diversity and distribution of species observed is not surprising, given the variety of habitats covered: marl ponds, deepwater pond, narrow creek, hayfield, deciduous forest, mixedwood, coniferous forest, and wet shrubland. The total number of birds detected was 348.

Future May counts will allow for comparison, with a different sequence of surveys to see if early surveys differ from those conducted later in the morning.

	Marl Pond Trail	Parkland County Environmental Reserve	Southeastern Corner, Wagner Natural Area
Canada Goose	--	Few	--
Blue-winged Teal	Few	--	--
American Wigeon	Few	--	--
Mallard	Common	Common	Few
Green-winged Teal	--	Few	Few
Wilson's Snipe	Few	Few	--
Spotted Sandpiper	--	Few	--
Solitary Sandpiper	Few	--	Few
Franklin's Gull	--	--	Few
Red-tailed Hawk	--	Few	--
Pileated Woodpecker	--	Few	--
Alder Flycatcher	--	--	Few
Least Flycatcher	Few	Few	Few
Warbling Vireo	--	--	Few
Blue-headed Vireo	--	Few	--
Red-eyed Vireo	Few	Few	Few
Blue Jay	--	Few	Few
Black-billed Magpie	Few	Few	--
American Crow	Few	Few	Few
Common Raven	--	Few	Few
Black-capped Chickadee	Few	Few	Common
Tree Swallow	--	--	Few
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Few	Few	--
Red-breasted Nuthatch	Few	--	--
White-breasted Nuthatch	Few	Few	Few
Brown Creeper	--	Few	--
House Wren	Few	Few	--
American Robin	Few	Few	Common
Purple Finch	Few	--	--
White-winged Crossbill	Abundant	--	--
American Goldfinch	Common	--	Few
Chipping Sparrow	Common	Common	Common
Clay-colored Sparrow	Common	Few	Common
Dark-eyed Junco	Few	Few	Few
White-throated Sparrow	Common	Common	Common
LeConte's Sparrow	--	--	Few
Song Sparrow	Few	--	Few
Lincoln's Sparrow	Few	Few	--
Baltimore Oriole	Few	--	Few
Red-winged Blackbird	Common	Common	--
Brown-headed Cowbird	Common	Common	--
Ovenbird	--	Few	--
Tennessee Warbler	Few	Few	Few
Common Yellowthroat	Few	--	--
Yellow Warbler	Common	Common	Common
Yellow-rumped Warbler	Few	Common	Few
Western Tanager	--	Few	Few
Total Species	31	32	27
Total Numbers	133	119	96

Few: 1 to 5 birds; Common: 6 to 19 birds; Abundant: >20 birds

**MEMBERSHIP --- WAGNER NATURAL AREA SOCIETY**

Support / Donate / Volunteer

For information about Wagner Natural Area or the Society and about field trips and other activities, go to [www.wagnerfen.ca](http://www.wagnerfen.ca).

Wagner Natural Area Society is a Registered Charity. Donations will help maintain this very special area; \$20 or more are receipted for Income Tax purposes. CRA B/N119287522 RR 0001

The Society's annual fee is \$10 for Supporting Members and \$15 for Voting Members. The Society's fiscal year is January 1 to December 31.

Annual fee (Supporter \$10/Voting \$15): \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Donation: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

May the Society CONTACT you by: EMAIL: Yes / No

PHONE: Yes / No

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

If you can VOLUNTEER to help the Society with maintenance of the Natural Area (circle): Yes

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail this form with cheque/money order, payable to Wagner Natural Area Society, to:  
Treasurer, Wagner Natural Area Society,  
30531-118 Ave., Acheson, AB T7X 6M5

Or scan the completed form and pay online. Submit your membership/donation by Interac bank transfer to:  
Treasurer@wagnerfen.ca  
Mav 2021

**Site Management: Haying**

Part of the Natural Area's landbase includes residual hayfields along Atim road, near the Villeneuve overpass, and in Centre Field. These fields are hayed annually to maintain open areas for the visitors to use and for a Tree Swallow population that requires an open landscape next to their nestboxes.

In addition, regular haying is required to reduce fire hazard under the Wagner Natural Area Fire Management Plan. We get cooperation from local farmers to ensure the haying is done properly, with minimal impact on wildlife and native vegetation.

**Letter from President: Dave Ealey**

Spring was exhausting this year for the WNAS Board as we researched bylaws, documented impact, and prepared for and attended on June 21<sup>st</sup> a (virtual) hearing of the Parkland County, Subdivision and Development Appeal Board. Our task was to object to an attempt by a new landowner in the Osborne Acres subdivision to install an industrial-level business. The potential for other similar projects along our southern border inspired us to make a solid case for showing the inappropriateness of such an industrial development masquerading as a home-based business. We also felt a need to support other residents of Osborne Acres who objected to the development as contrary to the residential subdivision land use bylaw.

We were pleased to learn that on June 30, the SDAB agreed with the objections brought forward and denied the development permit.