



OUR MISSION

“To ensure the preservation of the character and biological biodiversity of Wagner Natural Area for Educational, Scientific and Research purposes.”

Friends of the Fen



*White-throated sparrows (*Zonotrichia albicollis*) are busy preparing for their breeding season in the Wagner Natural Area!*

Their sweet songs are a common sound in the area, and they can sometimes be spotted foraging close to the ground.

Photo courtesy of Lauren Schollie.

WAGNER NATURAL AREA SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Father’s Day Orchid Walk

The orchids, like many of our flowering plants, seemed to be delayed a couple weeks in their blooming. Now everything is looking good for our Annual Father’s Day Orchid Walk.

Join leaders from the Society on Sun. June 21, at 10 a.m., 11 a.m., or noon as we showcase these iconic plants. We’ll keep our fingers crossed for good weather to bless the photographers’ cameras.

RSVP your preferred time at info@wagnerfen.ca

2026 Activities

July 4: Toad, Moth and Bat Night Tour of Marl Pond Trail, led by AB Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy, AB Lepidopterists’ Guild and AB Community Bat Program: 8:30 p.m. to midnight.

**Weed Pulls: on Sat./Sun. from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.
July 11–12; August 8–9
Nature Conservancy Weed Pull: Wed. July 15**

Fall Clean-up Day: Sat. Sept. 26, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

For every activity, plan to meet at the Wagner parking lot. RSVP at info@wagnerfen.ca

Summer Student 2026

By Lauren Schollie

Hello, Friends of the Fen! My name is Lauren Schollie, and I am proud to introduce myself as this year’s Environmental Project Specialist at WNAS. I moved to Edmonton from Red Deer just this previous summer to attend the UofA, where I will be taking my second year of Conservation Biology this fall.

My history in this field is a bit unusual. I first obtained a Bachelor’s of Applied Arts in Animation and Visual Effects from Red Deer Polytechnic immediately after graduating high school. However, toward the end of this degree, I began to have thoughts of switching career paths. So, I made the leap, and now here I am. It’s safe to say that I haven’t regretted this decision for a single second! My passion for the environment grows stronger every day, and I’m never happier than when I’m outside. The natural world humbles and amazes me, and I love sharing the things I’ve learned with others and inspiring them to care for our planet. I especially love birds and have a goal of photographing every different species that I see.



This summer, I’ll be continuing the work started by Isabela Bernsdorf by monitoring our wildlife cameras. I also have a personal project I’ll be undertaking involving documenting and identifying the many different species of lichen within the natural area. By examining recently fallen trees, I’d like to see how the populations of lichens change based on height above ground.

If you see me on the trails, feel free to stop and say hi! I’ll either be staring at the

treetops trying to spot a bird or squinting at lichen.



Crew from first weed pull for 2026 (a volunteer + 3 summer students) proudly display a dispatched Manitoba maple.

Support Us!

The Wagner Natural Area Society welcomes new supporters, volunteers, and all people interested in natural history and the preservation of the ecological integrity of this delightful natural area.

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

DONATIONS

All donations help maintain the integrity of the Natural Area and its surroundings, provide educational material, enhance visitor experiences, and support ongoing research studies and surveys.

Visit our website for donation/member form.

Species Highlight: The Wonderful Wilson's Snipe

By Lauren Schollie

Oftentimes, when I'm walking the Marl Pond Trail early in the morning, I'll hear an unusual sound from somewhere in the trees. Writing out bird calls is always tricky, but here's my best attempt: "wohohoHOHOHO!" This sound is attributed to the Wilson's Snipe, *Gallinago delicata*, a small and stocky shorebird with an incredibly long bill.

These birds are widespread across North America, stretching from coast to coast, reaching as far north as Alaska during their breeding season and migrating as far south as Colombia to spend the winters.

Despite their abundance, it can be hard to spot a Wilson's snipe, as they spend most of their time in the cover of reeds and grasses at the edges of wetlands.

You may be surprised to learn that the sound I just described doesn't come from the Wilson's snipe's mouth or beak, as with most bird calls. Instead, the sound is created by air rushing over the outer tail feathers as the bird dives through the air with the tail feathers fanned out. This sound is called "winnowing," and it is done by both the male and female snipe as a courtship display, or to advertise or defend their territory.

The Wilson's snipe uses its long bill to probe for insect larvae hidden deep in wet soil. They also sometimes eat snails, crustaceans,

and worms, and occasionally will eat larger prey like lizards, frogs, and fish.

These birds have an adorable, pudgy look to them, but don't let that fool you! With their powerful pectoral muscles, a Wilson's snipe can fly at speeds of up to 100 kilometres per hour!

If a predator draws close to the nest, the birds will try to distract it by pretending to be injured. They will flop on the ground and beat their wings dramatically, and once the threat has been successfully lured away, they will hop up and fly off, miraculously healthy once again.

So, the next time you go for a walk along the trail at WNA, keep your ears peeled for the haunting sound of a winnowing Wilson's snipe and scan the reedy beds of the Marl ponds carefully. If you're lucky, you may be able to see or hear this wonderful, charismatic little bird!



Photo courtesy of Sharif Uddin, from the Macaulay Library

Taking a Likin' to Lichens

By Lauren Schollie

Here, there, and everywhere, lichens are a staple of nearly every forested ecosystem in North America. In fact, they encrust a whopping 8% of the Earth's surface, more than global rainforest cover! Despite this, lichens are often overlooked. They simply aren't as charismatic as other life forms that grow in the forest. However, I would like to encourage everyone to stop and consider these fascinating and unique organisms.

A lichen isn't a plant at all. It isn't even one singular entity! A lichen consists of two separate organisms: a fungus and an alga. The fungus (called the "mycobiont") offers protection to the algae and provides it with minerals that it can mine from wood and stone. In return, the alga (the "photobiont") photosynthesizes, converting light and carbon dioxide into sugars, which feeds the fungus. When this "dual hypothesis" was first proposed in 1869, it was met with ridicule. How could it be that two different organisms had fused together into one? It was outrageous! But as time went on, this came to be accepted as fact. The term "symbiosis" was originally coined in order to describe this relationship between the fungus and the algae, and today, this term is used to describe all kinds of relationships in the natural world.

Another thing that makes lichens interesting is that they're both very durable and very fussy. They are extremophiles that can survive in arctic tundras, on hot volcanic rocks, and even in outer space! On the other hand, they are also very sensitive to air pollution. As such, lichens are often used as

indicator species for monitoring the health of an environment. "Where lichens abound, clean air is found; but where lichens are few, something's askew." They also provide food for many different animals, and humans have long used them as food, medicine, dye, perfume, and much more.

In Wagner Natural Area, many different kinds of lichens can be found growing along the Marl Pond Trail. Keep an eye out for bright splashes of orange attributed to the hooded sunburst lichen (*Xanthomendoza fallax*) or the soft hairs of the bristly beard lichen (*Usnea hirta*). If you search close to the ground, you may even spot the tiny and adorable trumpet lichen (*Cladonia fimbriata*), which as the name suggests looks like little green trumpets pointing at the sky.

This summer, as a personal project, I'd like to take inventory of the many species of lichen that can be found in the Wagner Natural Area. Knowing which lichens grow here, as well as in what habitats, on which trees, and how high up on a tree trunk, can tell us a lot about the air quality and available nutrients. Lichens have changed the way scientists think about ecosystems and evolution, and they remind us to slow down and appreciate all the layers of the ecosystem, even the small ones!



How many different lichens can you see in this photograph?

Photo courtesy of Lauren Schollie.

Project Forest Plants One Millionth Tree

By: Lauren Schollie

Recently, Project Forest hit an amazing milestone by planting their one millionth tree. This nonprofit organization partners with First Nations, conservation groups, and other funding partners to replant forests across Canada. As part of their Rewilding Program, they have worked with us to help restore sections of land in the Wagner Natural Area that were previously used for agriculture to a natural state. So far, over 40,000 native trees or shrubs have been planted across 21 hectares of the natural area. You can see some of the rewilding in progress as you walk the Marl Pond Trail through Central Field. For more information about Project Forest and Wagner's role in helping them reach this incredible milestone, visit projectforest.ca/projects/wagner-natural-area.



These signs are displayed at the entrance gate and near Central Field.

WEED OF THE MONTH: Manitoba maple (*Acer negundo*)

By: Lauren Schollie

Overview: True to its name, the Manitoba maple is native to the prairie provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan, as well as into the eastern grasslands of Alberta. While it isn't officially classified as an invasive weed in Alberta, we treat it as one at Wagner Natural Area due to its invasive nature. These trees grow quickly and can spread over a wide area. With their large root structures and dense canopy, they can quickly outcompete native species. At the WNA, efforts are taken to control the population of Manitoba maple in order to give our native species room to grow.

Habitat: This tree is often found in sunny, disturbed habitats with ample water supply. It is a highly adaptable species that can tolerate a variety of soils and conditions.

Life cycle: This tree is dioecious, meaning there are male trees and female trees. Pollination is driven by wind, and the samaras, aka "helicopter seeds," produced by female trees are also dispersed by wind.

Invasiveness: Because the samaras are dispersed by wind, and can float great distances due to their winglike shape, Manitoba maple can spread rapidly and across great distances. One single tree can produce thousands of these seeds, further contributing to the problem.

Origin in WNA: Manitoba maple was likely brought to WNA by the wind. The seeds

from trees planted on nearby farms would have been carried to the ditches on either side of Atim Road, and from there, into the natural area.

Prevention/Control: The best way to control Manitoba maple, once it is established, is to dig up the tree at its roots, especially smaller trees. If cut down, new stems will sprout from the stump, so it is recommended to either dig up the stump or treat it with herbicide to prevent resprouting. In 2025, six mature, unistem Manitoba maples were girdled: a ring of bark was removed near the base in the hopes of killing the tree while still leaving it standing and continuing to provide shelter for wildlife. Unfortunately, upon reassessment this year, it was found that all six trees are now leafing out and the males are in bloom, clearly indicating that this method was unsuccessful.

Identification Features:

Size: 10-25 metres tall, with a trunk diameter of 30-50 centimetres.

Bark: Smooth, light grey-brown in colour. As the tree ages, the bark becomes darker and more deeply grooved.

Fruit: Only on female trees. V-shaped pairs of samaras, or “helicopter seeds,” hang in clusters on branches. The membranous wing allows the seed to travel on the wind.

Leaves: Different from other maples. Pinnately compound with 3 or 5 leaflets, coarsely serrate or lobed.

Flowers: Male flowers are long and form drooping clusters, red at the tips. Female flowers are drooping racemes by structures that look similar to the samaras.



Two girdled Manitoba maple trunks. Note the new growth from the base of the trees; the branches above have also leafed out.



Left: the leaves of a small maple. Right: a pair of samaras.



Left: The flowers of a male tree. Right: The flowers of a female tree. Female flower photograph courtesy of Chris Saunders, all other photos courtesy of Lauren Schollie.

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A young moose forages next to the Marl Pond Trail.
Photo courtesy of Lauren Schollie.



A tree swallow (*Tachycineta bicolor*) pauses to catch its breath during a busy morning in the nesting season.
Photo courtesy of Lauren Schollie.



The male flowers of ever-familiar pussy willow (*Salix discolor*).
Photo courtesy of Lauren Schollie.

Annual Report for 2025

(As presented at AGM, March 7, 2026)

By Dave Ealey, President

Phew...what a busy year!! Your Board has been active with so many initiatives, it's dizzying. But I think we're making headway as we try to build our capacity and modernize many of our practices, hopefully in a way that members, volunteers and visitors can appreciate. Everyone who is a true Friend of the Fen likely has a different reason to be associated with the Wagner Natural Area...for me, Wagner Fen is my place of spiritual nourishment.

Just after New Year 2025, we finally submitted an updated management plan to Public Lands staff in the provincial government. This document outlines the long-term management objectives we commit to for the future. And it lays the foundation for conservation initiatives, such as the rewilding of our old hayfields, so that the unique native species can persist.

The work of our Rewilding committee continued throughout the year, providing input to Project Forest on appropriate species to be planted, as well as where, on the different hayfields. Close to 40,000 seedlings of trees and shrubs have now been planted and monitoring has already begun.

The content and materials of our WNAS displays have been considerably enhanced thanks to a nonprofit grant from Parkland County. New opportunities for showing off the Society and networking with other organizations and publics have added to our outreach, as shown by the list of display events in the highlights below.

Starting with the AGM last year, we were able to finalize our updated bylaws...or so we thought! The provincial Registrar of Corporations had some issues with formatting and some language that we

had to correct and bring to our members at a Special Resolution in the middle of the summer. We were certainly grateful to get a quorum for our special meeting to accomplish that administrivia.

Somewhere in the middle of all this going on, we were able to hire our first part-time Executive Director, Tristan Folinsbee, thanks to funding from the Edmonton Community Foundation's Environmental Operating Grant. Looking back on it now, it is amazing what we were able to undertake over a few months: preparing a job description, seeking appropriate venues and organizations for advertising, evaluating resumes, selecting candidates, interviewing people, and speaking to references. We are looking forward to working with Tristan, implementing various initiatives to modernize WNAS, address site management concerns and, of course, research how to acquire funding for long-term support for the position.

In the same week in March that we were interviewing candidates for the Executive Director in the evening, the student candidates for our two summer positions were being interviewed during the day. Thanks to Canada Summer Jobs, the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association, and the nonprofit grant from Parkland County, we were able to hire Zen Hanrahan and Nathan Hempler. These young biologists were able to keep the Natural Area in good shape, give the invasive species a good scare, and produce some very fine newsletters, videos and plant species guides. Other details of the efforts of our summer staff have been presented in the past four newsletters.

Among their last tasks, both Zen and Nathan helped out on our second casino, which was held in August in St. Albert. Other members and associates contributed to our ability to staff the four shifts required to run the casino, ably coordinated by David Fielder, our Treasurer. Many thanks to David and other helpers for their willingness to give their spare time to help WNAS get the funding needed to manage the natural area.

Highlights and Activities 2025

- Jan. 26—WNAS display, Council of Canadians
- Jan. 28—Board meeting
- Feb. 2—WNAS display, World Wetland Day, Council of Canadians
- Feb. 20—WNAS display, Tri-Municipal Region
- Spring Info. Fair, Stony Plain
- Mar. 2—Board meeting
- Mar. 15—WNAS AGM, Percy Page Ctre
- Mar. 23—WNAS display, Seedy Sunday
- Apr. 3—Project Forest Partner Celebr'n, Edm.
- Apr. 4-6—WNAS display, Orchid Show, St. Albert.
- Apr. 22—Board meeting
- May 10—spring clean-up
- May 10—WNAS display at Lois Hole P.P., Migratory Bird Day
- May 24—WNAS display at Central Park, Spruce Grove
- May 24/25—Volunteer weed pull
- May 25—May species count plants
- May 30—Vertex wetland course
- May 31—May species count birds
- June 6—Bryophyte field course
- June 7/8—Volunteer weed pull
- June 10—Board meeting
- June 15—Orchid Walk
- June 16—first Tree Swallow young banded
- July 14—NCC-sponsored weed pull
- July 17—Project Forest executives field tour
- July 19/20—Volunteer weed pull
- July 12—Toad, Moth and Bat walk
- July 22—Special Resolution meeting (Bylaws)
- Aug. 5—Board meeting
- Aug. 9/10—Volunteer weed pull
- Aug. 12—work on pale yellow iris removal
- Aug. 15/16—St. Albert Casino shifts
- Aug. 20—WNAS display, Lois Hole P.P., NatureKids event, Nature Alberta
- Aug. 21—WNAS display, Tri-Municipal Region
- Fall Info. Fair, Sp. Grove
- Aug. 22/24—Agra Fair, Sp. Grove
- Aug. 24—WNAS display, Ed. Hortic. Festival
- Sept. 9—DU staff field tour
- Sept. 10—Project Forest site preparation
- Sept. 16—Board meeting
- Sept. 23—Champion Pet Foods community volunteers weed pull
- Sept. 26—UofA wildlife students tour
- Sept. 27—fall clean-up

- Oct. 16—Project Forest camera siting tour
- Oct. 23—4th Spruce Grove Scout group hike
- Nov. 1/2—WNAS display at Muttart with Orchid Species Preservation Foundation
- Nov. 22—WNAS Open House—Volunteer Appreciation Day, Pioneer Ctre, Spruce Grove
- Nov. 18—Board meeting
- Dec. 4—Community Operating Grant liaise mtg
- Dec. 16—Board meeting
- Dec. 17—Christmas Bird Count at Wagner

Legend: Display events, workbees & cleanup, weed pulls, field tours, research & citizen science.

Volunteer Hours -- Wagner Natural Area Society

- Meetings, admin. -- 744 person-hrs
- Site management -- 641 person-hrs
- Research & monitor --186 person-hrs
- Communicating Environmental Conservation; Parkland County grant. --172 person-hrs
- Education/outreach-- 193 person-hrs
- Updated mgmt plan -- 14 person-hrs
- Casino support -- 250 person-hrs
- Total Volunteer Time -- 2200 person-hrs**

Summer Student Time

- Site management -- 153 person-hrs
- Weed strategy -- 348.5 person-hrs
- Research & monitor -- 77.5 person-hrs
- Special projects --357.5 person-hrs
- Education/outreach -- 232.5 person-hrs
- Admin. & mentorship -- 111 person-hrs
- Total Employee Time -- 1280 person-hrs**

Executive Director Time

- Meetings, admin. -- 78 person-hrs
- Site mgmt & monitor--212 person-hrs
- Research -- 7 person-hrs
- Education/outreach -- 75 person-hrs
- Fundraise dev'ment -- 87 person-hrs
- Mentorship -- 5 person-hrs
- Total Executive Director Time -- 464 person-hrs**

Board update from AGM

By Dave Ealey, President

In addition to reporting on annual activities and financial business, our AGM included welcoming a new Board member.

Mike Jenkins is a new Director and, immediately following the AGM, was voted by the Board as **Vice President** of Wagner Natural Area Society.

Some current members and associates of the Society may not be aware of Mike’s longstanding connection with the natural area. Mike was one of our earliest summer students and the son of two of our past Board executive members: Barry and Beth Jenkins. Mike is regularly visible in many of our Wagner display photos either doing maintenance work on the boardwalk or helping out on a cleanup day.



From 2018 on Cleanup Day, Mike Jenkins in his trademark Wagner Working Outfit helping Megan Edgar, summer student and now Board member.

It is perhaps in his role with the City of Edmonton as a pest management expert, mosquito wrangler and senior scientist, that readers of the newsletter will be familiar with Mike’s considerable reputation as an advocate for Integrated Pest Management principles. Those principles support a scientific approach to understanding the place of insects in our environment. And are behind the designation of Wagner Natural Area as a control site (i.e., no-spray zone) within the Capital Region.

Mike has been a Board member before, but I certainly want to welcome him back to the Board.

In addition to Mike, we continue to have Larissa Clayton as **Secretary**, David Fielder as **Treasurer**, and **Directors** Chris Saunders and Megan Edgar.

Carolyn Vanderveen continues to be our liaison with the Osborne Acres community, but has withdrawn from the Board.

As readers can see, we are a small but mighty Board. With the responsibilities and obligations for running our organization increasing in recent years, we look forward to other Friends of the Fen joining us. **Many hands make light work!** And you don’t have to wait until the next AGM to join us, just drop an electronic line and let us know you are interested in helping out: info@wagnerfen.ca.



School Talk in Erskine

By Dave Ealey

Part of supporting Wagner Natural Area is communicating with a broader audience about its special features and the values of maintaining a Conservation Area as an undisturbed site.

Past Board members and others familiar with our small environmental gem have talked at display events, classrooms and



outdoor groups for many years. Since 2018, thanks to a nonprofit project grant from Parkland County, we have been promoting an opportunity for groups and

school classes to have a speaker attend meetings to talk about Wagner.

Most opportunities are within Parkland County or the Capital Region; however, this



past winter we got a surprise invite from teacher Elise Singh at Erskine Hutterite Colony to come to their school to present on

environmental themes.

As luck would have it, the WNAS received an end-of-year donation from the McIvor Kent Endowment Fund. This provided funds for gas and other expenses for a late January road trip to this community near Stettler.

It had been many years since I visited a Hutterite Colony, so it was a thrill for me to visit and talk about Wagner’s orchids, wetlands, birds, groundwater cycle and conservation of natural habitats.

When I was a young student, many classes were in schools with combined grades, in rural Ontario or in private schools in London, England. It was an interesting experience for me to come back to that kind of setting as an



instructor.

The students were very polite and attentive and seemed to enjoy learning about Wagner Natural Area. Many had stories to share



about wildlife and plants in habitats near the colony. Teacher Singh kindly provided some pictures of the event.