

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

WAGNER NATURAL AREA SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



The Wagner Natural Area signpost, the first greeting inside the public trail area of the park. Located across from the parking lot. Taken July 16th, 2022.

Photo courtesy of Sydney Cantu.

Upcoming Events:

Celebrating River Relationships in Edmonton

Who: Hosted by [The Edmonton River Valley Conservation Coalition](#) in partnership with [Swim Drink Fish](#).

What: An evening in the park to celebrate the natural diversity of Edmonton's River Valley and promote connection to nature within our local community. Featuring an interactive display from the WNAS!

When: Wednesday, August 3rd from 5:00 pm – 8:00 pm

Where: Solar Gazebo, 9231 100 Ave NW, Edmonton, T5H 0A4

How: Get more info and [register for free at https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/celebrating-river-relationships-edmonton-ab-tickets-377361206527](https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/celebrating-river-relationships-edmonton-ab-tickets-377361206527)

Wetland Champions Family Nature Night

Who: Hosted by [Nature Alberta](#)

What: Festival-style event for children ages 4-12 featuring nature-centred organizations from across the greater Edmonton area, including a WNAS station showcasing the biodiversity of our beloved Natural Area.

When: Wednesday, August 10th from 6:00 pm – 8:30 pm

Where: Lois Hole Provincial Park, 400 Ray Gibbon Dr, St. Albert

How: View the poster and other Family Nature Night events this summer at [Nature Alberta's website](#) or the Facebook event here: <https://fb.me/e/2K5CnvXiB>

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 accompanying 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 on-going research studies and surveys.

Please see page 11 for the donation/volunteer form.

SITE MANAGEMENT:

Summer Weed Pull

On behalf of the Wagner Natural Area Society, we would like to extend a very grateful thank you to all of the outstandingly eager volunteers who came out on both weekends of this year's Wagner Natural Area weed pull. Controlling all of the invasive plant species in the Natural Area is not a small task, as there are dozens of plants that require regular monitoring by our volunteer staff year after year. To have over a dozen volunteers come out to roll up their sleeves and get dirty just to help us preserve the beauty of the Wagner Natural Area has helped us accomplish our summer goals of targeting and removing certain weed species, such as wild caraway, pale yellow iris, creeping meadow foxtail, orange/meadow hawkweed and Manitoba maple.

And our biggest and most heartfelt thank you is in order for our star volunteer Brinley, who came out with her father to help out on three of the four days of our weed pulls this year. She was an exceptional help for us and was eager to learn about Wagner and its natural features, so much that she even took the time to research and write a report for us to share with you all on the following few pages!



Pictured above are two volunteers at the weed pull digging out the roots of a Manitoba maple sapling. Taken July 10th, 2022.

Photo courtesy of Chris Saunders.



Pictured above is the WNAS' own Chris Saunders, our invasive species specialist and board member proudly holding up a freshly dug Manitoba maple tree. Taken July 10th, 2022.

Photo courtesy of Chris Saunders.

EDUCATION:

Brinley's Volunteering Experience with the Wagner Natural Area by Brinley Pratt

On June 25, my Dad and I chose to volunteer with the Wagner Natural Area Society. I love nature and I wanted to learn more about it. Volunteering has given me more knowledge about invasive plant species and a new network of friends. Below are the weed pulls we took part in.

June 25th, 2022

Wagner Natural Area was once owned by a local farmer, William Wagner, and was popularly known as "Wagner Bog." This section of land was purchased by the Alberta Government and other interested parties in 1971 for the protection of the natural space. It officially became Wagner Natural Area in 1975. In 1983, the land began to be cared for by the natural area society's volunteer groups who have a recreational lease on the area with the objective to preserve the natural area.



Pictured above is Brinley, our weed pull volunteer at the pale yellow iris weed pull taken July 9th, 2022.

Photo courtesy of Brian Pratt.

Contrary to the popular local name, Wagner Natural Area is actually a fen, which is connected to a slow-moving ground water source that feeds into Big Lake located in St. Albert. The presence of nutrient-rich surface/ground water makes fens far more productive and biologically diverse than bogs.

We met Chris Saunders, Dave Ealey, and Sydney Cantu in Atim field on my first day volunteering for the weed pull. Chris was very knowledgeable in invasive species, like wild caraway and Manitoba maple. Dave gave us a tour of Wagner's Marl Pond Trail. Sydney, the summer student, introduced us to the iNaturalist app which helps citizen scientists to identify different types of plant species. We now regularly use this app on our walks to help us identify unfamiliar plants--it's really useful for us!

Chris trained my Dad and I on how to properly identify wild caraway and how to best remove it while also getting its root system. Invasive plants are certain types of plant species that get introduced from one ecosystem to another. They may not have any natural enemies and therefore can cause overpopulation booms in their introduced ecosystems. Wild caraway is similar to common yarrow, another kind of flowering plant that is native to Wagner. The visible differences in these plants are the leaf shape and the stem colour. While pulling weeds, we came across spittle bugs that feed on various vegetation in the natural area and can feed on caraway plants.

On our tour of the Marl Pond Trail courtesy of Dave Ealey, we came across a patch of yellow lady's-slippers. This flower was chosen as the emblem of the Wagner Natural Area because of the flower's beauty and natural abundance. The characteristic "slipper" is formed by the lower petals of the flower with the purpose to entice and entrap bees for optimal pollination.



July 9th, 2022

When my Dad and I arrived at Wagner this morning, we went to the east gate of the Natural Area and our group hiked through the rugged terrain, navigating the steep banks of Morgan Creek. You had to watch your step! My favourite part of the hike was walking across the neat footbridge. Our goal for this day was to weed out pale yellow iris.

Pale yellow iris is an invasive species to Wagner Natural Area. The plant is a perennial aquatic plant native to Africa, Asia, and Europe but was likely introduced to North America as an ornamental plant with seeds that often travel by flowing water in rivers or creeks. When the water in these rivers or creeks rise, the seeds spread.

When weeding pale yellow iris, it is important to get to the plant's rhizome. The rhizome is connected to the stem and is the part of the plant's main root system that runs horizontally underground. If part

Pale yellow iris on the east end of the Natural Area targeted for the weed pull taken July 9th, 2022. Photo courtesy of Brian Pratt.

of the rhizome is left behind when weeding, it will have the ability to grow a new plant from it. The rhizome also stores nutrients that become useful for the plant when the new shoots are forming.

July 10th, 2022

Today, the volunteers were broken into two groups, the first was tasked with removing creeping meadow foxtail that was growing in the parking lot and along the Marl Pond trailhead, while our group worked on removing Manitoba maple along the trail.

As we walked the trail, Dave identified a Swainson's hawk soaring overhead. This species of hawk was named after William Swainson, a British naturalist. These hawks inhabit dry grasslands of western North America. We also came across the remnants of an American robin's egg on the trail. Most of it was intact, held together with a membrane.

Early in the weeding, we found a cluster of Manitoba maple saplings that were growing from a previously cut down trunk. Due to the high levels of rain this week, Chris Saunders advised us to pull out the maple saplings completely, including the roots. This technique ensured this invasive species would not grow back. The benefit of this work is so that more Manitoba maple does not spread, and that the native plant species are able to get more sun and nutrients.



Pictured above are the remnants of an American robin's egg taken July 10th, 2022.

Photo courtesy of Brian Pratt.

To conclude, Wagner Natural Area is a unique ecosystem that should be protected. The volunteer community plays a very important role in helping accomplish this. So come out and join us!



Pictured left are discarded snail shells found at Morgan Creek. Taken July 9th, 2022.

Photo courtesy of Brian Pratt.

RESEARCH:

Species Highlight of the Month – American Red Squirrel (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*)

While walking through Wagner's Marl Pond Trail, it is not uncommon to hear the chittering chattering of an American red squirrel yelling at you or another squirrel to leave its territory. It's protecting its food stores, which it will spend all spring and summer replenishing (Government of Alberta). These small solitary mammals are quite protective over their territory of about 0.5 to 3 hectares (about 1 to 8 acres) which they tend to defend over their lifetimes, if not chased away by a rival squirrel or other threats (Kananaskis Country).



Pictured above is an American red squirrel perched on a branch.

Photo courtesy of the WNAS archives.

This rodent, native to Alberta, prefers to live in and around mature coniferous trees, such as spruce or pine that produce their main food source of cones, which the squirrels feed on or stash for later food in the fall and winter months. However, red squirrels have an incredibly broad omnivorous diet and are known to eat dried mushrooms, flowers, insects, seeds, berries, and typically gnaw on bones or antlers found in the forest to get to the calcium (Kananaskis Country).

Breeding season begins once the snow has completely thawed and the trees begin to bud, typically around early March – April, with young being born around June (Kananaskis Country). A litter usually contains about 3-5 young, born completely naked and blind. It will be an entire month for young red squirrels to grow their fur and open their eyes, but they are still barely ready to venture out of their mother's nest (Nature Edmonton). By the time the snow flies in late November, young squirrels must be able to locate food and establish their own territory for the cycle to begin again the following spring (Kananaskis Country).



Pictured above is an American red squirrel running down a tree on the Marl Pond Trail near signpost 6.

Photo courtesy of Sydney Cantu.

Unlike their ground squirrel relatives, red squirrels remain active throughout the winter months. Their reddish fur coat becomes a dull grey and thickens to allow for adaptive camouflage in its new snowy environment and more effective insulation against the cold. They are also active only around midday when temperatures are at their warmest.

However, life for American red squirrels is not without its share of difficulties.

Despite their tough attitudes and swift climbing abilities, these squirrels are prey for a large share of Alberta's carnivore species. Owls, coyotes, hawks, weasels, crows and even housecats all feed on red squirrels (Nature Edmonton).

American red squirrels also face human-caused pressures as well. Increased urban development threatens the mature forests that

red squirrels reside in. Habitat loss is a very serious issue that almost all native Alberta species face now, whether it be squirrels, birds or even plants. Due to their rapidly decreasing habitat, American red squirrels often turn to urban areas as their last chance for survival, taking refuge in backyard trees or public parks. However, in doing this, these small rodents are typically viewed as pests in need of removal or relocation, which can be the only option for some, especially if the squirrels have taken a liking to your attic or shed (Strathcona County's Transportation and Agriculture Services). Always be sure to contact your county's Agricultural/Environmental services office or a private pest control agency to ensure that this is done correctly and humanely.

Works referenced:

Edmonton Master Naturalists (2013, August 27). *The Red Squirrel*. Nature Edmonton. Retrieved from <https://natureedmonton.wordpress.com/2013/08/27/the-red-squirrel/>.

Government of Alberta (n.d.). *Human-Wildlife Conflict – Red Squirrels*. Retrieved from <https://www.alberta.ca/red-squirrels.aspx>.

Strathcona County Transportation and Agricultural Services (n.d.). *Living with wildlife in Strathcona County*. Retrieved from <https://www.strathcona.ca/files/files/tas-squirrel-brochure.pdf>.

Recommended further reading: Edmonton Area Land Trust (2018, October 9). “Welcome to Squirrel Camp!” Retrieved from: <https://www.ealt.ca/blog/squirrel-camp>.



Pictured left is an American red squirrel peeking around a branch at its photographer on the Marl Pond Trail near signpost 6.

Photo courtesy of Sydney Cantu.

BOARD BULLETIN:

Letter from President Cheryl Johnson –

We are in mid-summer and the “livin' is easy,” as they say. With the abundant rain and sunshine, our wetlands and forests are green, green, green. Hopefully you have been out for a Wagner walk recently, and if not, I encourage you to get there. Please remember that we are a volunteer-run natural area and as such, we do not provide the same services as a park: no garbage pickup (please pack out what you pack in), no regular funds for benches and shelters, limited donations/grants for materials like signs and summer student staff. We do allow dogs on leashes, but please be courteous with your pets. Yes, it is fine to have a picnic with a family or group, but please pack out your garbage. It has been mentioned in our newsletters before, but as a reminder--Wagner Natural Area Society has three main objectives: public education and outreach, research and monitoring, and site management. We are “stewards” of the land; we do this work within our frugal financial restraints, and almost all of this is done with volunteers. When you see one of our volunteers on site, greet them, feel free to ask them questions, and thank them for helping to conserve an important part of our Alberta ecosystem.

Cheryl

Pictured right is a silvery blue butterfly (*Glaucopsyche iygdamus*) atop a clover flower.

Photo courtesy of Sydney Cantu.



MEMBERSHIP – WAGNER NATURAL AREA SOCIETY

Support / Donate / Volunteer

For more Information about Wagner Natural Area or the Society and about field trips and other activities, go to wagnerfen.ca.

Wagner Natural Area 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

Society's annual fee is \$10 for Supporting Members and \$15 for Voting Members. Voting Members are key to run WNAS; must qualify through nomination. See website. The Society's fiscal year is January 1 to December 31.

Annual fee (Supporting \$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 with 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 [June 2022]

LEPIDOPTERA OF WAGNER



Canadian Tiger Swallowtail (*Papilio canadensis*).



Polyphemus Moth (*Antheraea polyphemus*).



White Admiral (*Limenitis arthemis*).

Photos by Sydney Cantu.