

# WAGNER NATURAL AREA NEWSLETTER

Volume 9, Number 1 May 1995



Newsletter of the Wagner Natural Area Society, Management Committee  
and Volunteer Stewards of Wagner Natural Area, Spruce Grove, Alberta

## President's Report

*by Dave Ealey*

Since this is my first opportunity to write to you in my role as president, I felt it necessary to set the stage, from my perspective.

On stage right, we have in the Wagner Natural Area Society a strong, knowledgeable group of darn nice people. Over the years, the efforts made by members to promote and protect the Wagner Natural Area have been nothing short of remarkable. I hope that I can help to initiate and lead on other successes during my term.

On stage left, we have the specialists who have studied Wagner for many years, with the happy result that the natural area has become internationally renowned in scientific circles. I hope to continue to encourage that study and perhaps help to make some of that knowledge more generally available.

On stage centre, we have the general public who visit the site, who really aren't that general because most show by their comments and actions that they recognize the special value of Wagner. In addition, there are the neighboring residents and communities that surround the site. I plan to get to know as many of these very important people as I can, because their support will be crucial in anything we try to accomplish with the management of Wagner. We are all ambassadors in the larger human community—with your support, I hope to make the contacts as productive as possible.

In the stage pits are the traps and quagmires of the developmental and bureaucratic world. I go in with my eyes wide open.

These stage directions are all played against a backdrop of the natural beauty and special features that are the Wagner Natural Area. I am looking forward to acting out the role you have given me.

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## Editorial

*by Patsy Cotterill*

At the end of last year the Wagner Society lost a close friend and long-standing member of the executive, Barry Jenkins. As naturalists we have to be brave about death; it is part of the ecosystem, a necessity for life. But on the human, personal, side it shocked us that someone so close could be wrenched away from us. We were sad to know that nobody felt that wrenching away more than Barry himself who, in mid-life, was still full of interests and ambitions, still with his family around him, still deeply bonded to this dear old earth. The sympathy we felt was obviously general, as the generous donations to Barry's memorial fund testify. But these contributions also indicate a recognition of Barry's efforts and a wish to extend his interest in Wagner Natural Area that go beyond personal sympathy and have been very gratifying both to Barry's family and the Society.

Now, as spring rolls round again, I think all of us on the executive feel a bit differently: a little more grateful to be alive, and more determined—to make the most of our opportunities to learn and enjoy, and to do what we can when we can.

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I offer my apologies as editor for this shorter-than-usual newsletter and worse, one too late to advertise the two earliest events of the field season—the frog-and-toad walks and the annual cleanup in May. Anyone interested in joining Wayne Roberts on spring evenings to hear toads and frogs calling should remember that he leads these walks every year in the last week of April and the first two weeks of May. You can call any executive member for more precise information. Anyway, I'll try for better timing in the next issues. I blame my deficiencies on time constraints. That, and a primeval urge at this time of year to forsake the computer for the woods and wetlands! A rewarding, relaxing summer to all!

## Executive News

This was the year for changes in the executive. Derek stepped down as president to become past-president, and Dave stepped into the president's shoes. Pat Clayton become vice-president, a commitment to taking her turn at the presidency two years down the road. Congrats, Pat, on taking the plunge!

We thank Derek for his efforts during his presidential term. Besides regular presidential duties, he did his fair share of guiding and interpretive work and summer-student supervision in Wagner, despite busy summers of professional field work. Even these last few months when trying to complete *Plants of the Western Boreal Forest* on target, a field guide to be published soon by Lone Pine, he never missed a meeting.

Dave has already made his mark on the Society. He has changed the constitution with a by-law to indemnify directors (see below), and with the help of Peter Lee has revamped our Management Plan to make it briefer, clearer and easier to understand, as well as official. With Derek, Dave is pursuing the

finer points of the draft legislation on the proposed new provincial water management policy, in the hopes of securing Wagner's water supply (more on this in a later newsletter). Perhaps if Dave hadn't become an environmental editor he might have been an environmental lawyer; clearly he has the editor's penchant for precision and clarity along with the lawyer's desire to have things cut and dried!

In addition to those of us who are "old school" (that is, date back to at least the mid-80s), there are some new, or relatively new, faces at committee meetings: Leota Cummins, photographer, site monitor and cinnamon-bun-maker; Jennifer Thompson, a recent environmental studies graduate; Irl Miller, a retired teacher and orchid specialist; Gloria Koogh; and Beth, Mike and Glenn Jenkins. We are also happy to welcome visitors from time to time and are always willing to receive new blood, even if that blood is, er, not so new, chronologically speaking.

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### Wagner Society Executive, 1995-97

President - Dave Ealcy (422-0858) 427-8636  
Past President - Derek Johnson (436-8231)  
Vice-President - Pat Clayton (456-9046)  
Treasurer/Membership Director - Janice Cantafio (963-3938)  
Secretary/Newsletter Editor - Patsy Cotterill (481-1525)  
Director/Public Relations - Alice Hendry (962-4836)  
Director - Edgar Jones (436-5327)

At the Annual Members' Night on October 20, 1994, Wagner Natural Area Society members present passed a motion to include in the Constitution a **by-law intending to indemnify directors** and officers of the Society against the costs of any civil, criminal or administrative action they might incur in the course of their duties provided they had acted honestly and in good faith with respect to the interests of the Society. Such a by-law should reduce the likelihood of a director being sued in addition to or separately from the Society itself in the event of such action. It is apparently a fairly standard precaution in organizations run by boards. Members were canvassed previous to the motion by mail and all those responding were in favor.

## Remembering Barry Jenkins



Barry in a favorite place. Photo by Beth Jenkins.

Barry was part of the "Wagner family," as Peter Lee put it during his eulogy at a memorial service for Barry Jenkins. On December 10 last year, many friends, true family and "Wagner family" gathered together at the Unitarian Church in Edmonton that cold winter day, for a service that was inspired, inspiring and very true to Barry's life.

Barry had been a member of the "Wagner family" ever since he attended his first meeting of the management committee on January 23, 1984 (his first meeting and the management committee's 15th and first annual general meeting—we are now on to our 124 management meeting!). He attended as the alternate representative for Edmonton Natural History Club. Alternates usually only attend a meeting when the rep is absent, but Barry wanted to get more involved and attended regularly. A year later, in January 1985, he became treasurer, taking over from Liz Stinson, our first secretary-treasurer. These were busy times for the management committee as we embarked upon all sorts of projects: developing the Marl Pond Trail, fencing the Area, building a picnic shelter, creating a slide show; tackling management issues such as snowmobiling and the management plan, and establishing the seasonal duties and events that were to become routine. As treasurer and an active member, Barry was heavily involved in all of these—as they required applying for grants, doing payrolls and generally keeping track of finances. Barry seemed particularly

to enjoy the site-development projects, probably because he was also a handyman and carpenter with a knowledge of hardware. At any rate, he volunteered to supervise fencing the perimeter of the site, beginning in May 1985. It was not a trouble-free summer, and Barry experienced some of the trials and tribulations of an employer as he endeavored to keep his workforce up to strength and up to snuff in the mosquito-infested bush. Nevertheless the work was complete by September of that year. Barry went on to do the payroll for, and assist in supervising the work of, several of our summer student employees.

In January 1989 Barry took over the traditional two-year presidency term from Alice Hendry, just as the "road issue" as we called it, was heating up. In or around May 1989 Rick Spencer's ecological consulting team began their field study of the environmental impact of the proposed alignment of an access road south from the proposed interchange at Highway 16 and Villeneuve Road, and Barry, in the hot seat, began to rack up the volunteer hours, both indoors and out. He represented the Society on the Wagner Study Advisory Group (WAGSAG), where he discovered he had a taste for negotiation, the cut-and-thrust of environmental controversy, the media attention. These were perhaps his finest hours, when he realized he could, at least with the support of a group, fight for something he considered important and make a difference. We will remember him perhaps at his most jovial and relaxed the night we all went out to a restaurant to celebrate our victory—or partial victory, at least. We had succeeded not in preventing the road but at least in getting the original alignment moved to the east of Morgan Creek, where it was less likely to affect the flow of water through Wagner.

Even at this time of endless meetings Barry found time for non-politicking. He enjoyed giving talks about Wagner to such groups as the Junior Forest Wardens or promoting it to schools. He knew that environmental education was just as important as boardroom negotiations—and then again, he just liked talking about Wagner. Perhaps though, he was happiest of all when he was simply out in Wagner, birding or nature-watching, or else fixing things, puttering along with his tool crib, his wheelbarrow and his muscle power.

The last Wagner meeting Barry attended was on October 20, 1994, when he was presented with the Wagner Recognition Award—a Yellow Lady's-slipper

painted on a glass plaque, mounted on an inscribed wooden base—for his services to Wagner, the place and the “family.” He died December 6, 1994, approximately two years after he had been diagnosed with cancer.

Barry involved his family in his interest and love of Wagner: his wife Beth and sons Mike and Glenn. Indeed, Mike was a summer employee in 1989 and honed his interest in aquatic invertebrates in Wagner. All three continue their interest and support by attending meetings and various on-site activities and we are proud and pleased to have them in the “Wagner family.”

There has been a tremendous response to the Jenkins’ request that, in lieu of flowers or other tributes, donations be made to the Wagner Society, with over \$2000 collected to date. (Anyone still wishing to donate to the Barry Jenkins Memorial Fund can send a cheque so marked to the treasurer, Janice Cantafio, Box 3100, Stony Plain, AB, T7Z 1Y4.) Our immediate plan is to install a bench, suitably inscribed, on the Cabin Trail, one of Barry’s favorite haunts. We are also discussing setting up an endowment fund, to better provide for the future management and protection of the Natural Area.



## The Wagner Grapevine



### Summer-Student-Time

The Wagner Society has just heard that it has once again obtained funding for the wages of a summer student under the federal government’s Summer Career Placement program. This year we welcome Concordia College graduate Natasha Klingsh as our summer employee. If you see her strolling our trails, assisting with interpretation or studiously monitoring the wildlife in Wagner, please say hello and feel free to exchange experiences.

### Canadian Orchid Congress, June 3-4

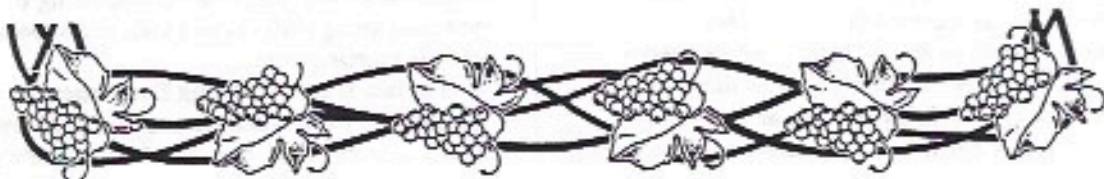
Edmonton will host this prestigious national show this time for the first time. It will be held at the Grant Macewan City Centre Campus (104 Ave. and 109 St. entrance) and will be open to the public on Saturday, June 3, from noon until 5:30 p.m. and Sunday, June 4 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Irl Miller, of the Orchid Society of Alberta and a leading organizer of the Congress this year, notes that this show will be quite different from the annual winter show at the Muttart. A wide array of orchids grown all across Canada, the Pacific Northwest and Brazil will be on display, and orchids and plant supplies will be on sale. There will be an exhibit of art featuring orchids as subjects. Of special interest to would-be orchid fanciers will be training videos running continuously throughout the two afternoons.

Admission is \$3 per person; children 6 and under are free.

### “Road Issue” a Case Study

The “road issue” of the late 1980s—the environmental impact assessment and the subsequent location of the north-south access road from the Villeneuve interchange on Highway 16 came up again recently—this time as a case study. On February 6-10 at the Environmental Training Centre in Hinton Environmental Protection Provincial Parks ran a course on conservation for parks staff aiming to make them to be more aware of the ecosystem approach in management. Alice Hendry and Peter Lee presented the Wagner study for the better part of one day and got a good response from the participants. Alice and Peter have also presented the case study to University of Alberta students in environmental education.

... And speaking of Parks people, a crew from Wabamun Lake, under the direction of Kyle Clifford, Parks District Manager for West Yellowhead, did some maintenance work in Wagner in early spring. It seems to us all sorts of subtle changes in the administration of parks and natural areas are going on, and we watch with interest ...



## Spiders in Wagner

by Terry Thormin



Crab Spider (*Misumena viata*) on Stickseed (*Hackelia*) sp. Photo by Terry Thormin.

On August 20 last year I led an insect field trip in the Wagner Natural Area. As we proceeded through the field and into the wetter areas the trip gradually evolved into a "mostly spiders" walk. This suited me just fine as I find these creatures fascinating. Apparently so did the other participants on the field trip judging from the number of questions asked.

As I recall, the first spider we encountered was the Yellow Crab Spider (*Misumena viata*), also known as the Goldenrod Spider. Typically this species sits on yellow or white flowers (in this case the flowers of Canada Goldenrod) and waits in ambush for any insect that might come in to feed. It is quite capable of taking very large bumblebees, but also takes flies, butterflies and moths. This is one of the few North American spiders that can change its color without going through a molt. It changes between yellow and white to suit the color of the flowers the spider is sitting on.

The next spider we found was the Shamrock Spider (*Araneus trifolium*). This is a large, handsome spider, with numerous large white spots on an orange abdomen. It is an orb-weaving spider and builds the classic web that most people picture when they think of spiders. Its hunting technique is to sit and wait in the web until an insect flies in and gets trapped. It then makes a quick dash at the prey and bites it, injecting it with poison designed to paralyze or kill. The spider then wraps its prey in swathes of silk. The victim may be eaten then or saved for a later time. We located the Shamrock

Spider and several other species of orb-weavers in the tall grass of the picnic shelter field.

When we entered the wet mixed-wood swamp area, we found our first long-jawed spiders. Several species of this group occur in our area, although the most common one is probably Striped Long-jawed Spider (*Tetragnatha versicolor*). Individuals of this group are easily identified by their webs which look very similar to the webs of typical orb-weavers. The obvious difference is that the webs are usually at about a 45-degree angle to the ground and sometimes almost horizontal. The spiders themselves are much slimmer than orb-weavers and have quite long jaws. They usually sit lengthwise on a twig or grass blade with the legs held parallel to the perch and let their camouflage colors protect them.

In the same wooded area we found many webs of sheet web spiders. The one or two spiders we located proved to be the Hammock Spider (*Pityohyphantes costatus*). Webs of these spiders are quite distinctive, consisting of a large flat sheet guided with a tangle of lines both above and below the sheet. The lower guy lines are just for structural support, but the upper ones, which are usually longer, also act as aerial barriers. Any insect that flies into the barrier is likely to fall to the sheet below. Here the spider waits, hanging from the bottom of the sheet, to inflict its poisonous bite. In this type of habitat, a careful search may turn up a close relative of the Hammock Spider, the Filmy Dome Spider (*Prolinyphia marginata*). Its webs look similar to those of the Hammock Spider, but the sheet portion of the web is much finer and is arched in a high dome.

At the edges of the marl ponds we located several individuals of the Six-spotted Fishing Spider (*Dolomedes triton*). This is a very common spider of wetlands where it can often be found dashing out across the surface of the water to escape from danger or to search for prey. It hunts for flying insects that get trapped on the surface of the water, but will regularly dive under the water to take aquatic insects and even tadpoles or small fish. A study conducted by the Provincial Museum of Alberta at Wagner in 1984 turned up a close relative of the Six-spotted Fishing Spider, the Striped Fishing Spider (*Dolomedes striatus*). This was the first record of this species west of eastern North America and as such was a major range extension.

The 1984 Wagner invertebrate study produced a list of 52 species of spiders for the area. Because this study only covered two habitats, the open fen/marl ponds and the black spruce forests, many species were undoubtedly missed. As more work is done in

other habitats this list will grow. Future insect walks will also add more spiders to this list. If you don't have a bad case of arachnophobia, join us for the next insect/spider field trip on July 15 this year.

## St. Albert West By-Pass

Are planners people of vision or victims of tunnel vision? One has to wonder at times. On April 26 several Wagner executive attended a public meeting in St. Albert on the proposed St. Albert by-pass. The plan: to build, at an initial cost of \$10 million, a road—eventually to become a six-lane freeway—to join Villeneuve road in the northwest to 184 Street south of 137 Avenue in Edmonton. The object: to relieve congestion on Highway 2 and cater for a putative population growth of St. Albert to around 70,000 (presently ca. 40,000). The problem: the proposed alignment has the highway crossing the Sturgeon River just east of Big Lake, an area that is prime real estate for wildlife and for humans who enjoy it.

This current road plan ignores the fact that in 1989 the Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission produced the *Big Lake Plan*, endorsed by the City of St. Albert, recognizing the environmental sensitivity of that area and recommending it be designated for "natural conservation," precluding the construction of permanent buildings and/or structures. There was no mention of a road. Since when, asks Bob Lane, president of Big Lake Environment Support Society (BLESS), has a highway not been a permanent structure? In keeping with the earlier plan, the City of St. Albert has since developed the popular Red Willow Park trails system along the river for recreation and nature enjoyment. The trail's western limit is also the closest access to Big Lake on foot for viewing waterfowl.

Big Lake is recognized as a provincially significant moulting and staging area for waterfowl. On the north bank of the river east of the outlet there are also prehistoric habitation sites. Imagine what a six-lane highway would do to all this . . . !

Encouragingly, the meeting was unruly, with the consultants trying desperately to stick to their agenda of "scoping" issues amidst constant opposition to the project or calls for background information. Even the hallowed "growth ethic" was repeatedly questioned. Perhaps if you don't build it they won't come?

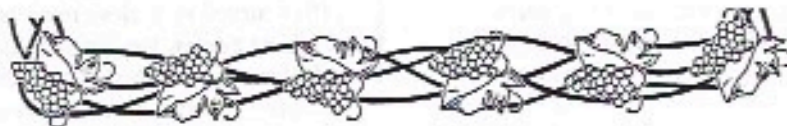
BLESS has developed a position paper on the issue. If you would like a copy, or to become more involved, you can write BLESS at P.O. Box 65053, St. Albert Centre, St. Albert, AB T8N 5Y3.

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Have you got your copy of *Nature Walks and Sunday Drives 'Round Edmonton* yet? Published this spring by the Edmonton Natural History Club and Fish and Wildlife Services (Wildlife Management Division) of Alberta Environmental Protection, this is a handy guide to over 25 of the best nature venues known to naturalists in and around the Edmonton area. A nice feature is its inclusion of three auto tours, ranging as far as Wabamun Lake in the west and Miquelon Lakes in the east, with clear directions to the best short-stops, for birding or otherwise, along the routes.

Similar in concept to the earlier *Alberta Wildlife Viewing Guide*, it includes simple roadmaps to these destinations and is perfect for planning your weekend or evening excursions. You should also take it with you into the field for quick reference to the specific features you might expect to see in any given site. The text is by Henry Saley, with input and, *er, field-testing*, by a host of other naturalists. Harry Stelfox, of Fish and Wildlife Services, has steered the whole project from start to finish. The guide retails for \$8.95 from the usual outlets.

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## Coming Events in Wagner—Summer 1995

### Saturday, May 27 and Sunday May 28: Annual May Count of Species in Flower in Wagner

Meet at 10:00 a.m. \* both days. Patsy will lead these trips (call 481-1525 for more information). Anyone is welcome, but come prepared for wet ground and some difficult walking through thick bush. Bring lunch if you're coming for the whole day.

### Sunday, June 11: Annual Orchid Walk

Derek, Terry and Irl will lead hikes to take in our best natural orchid shows in Wagner, starting at 2:00 p.m. Call Derek at 436-8231 if you need more information. Come appropriately equipped for mosquitoes!

### Saturday, July 15: Annual Bug Walk

Terry will lead this walk, starting at 2:00 p.m. Call him at 482-1389 for further information or if the weather is inclement.

\*Note: All walks start from the main gate to Wagner Natural Area.



Common Butterwort,  
*Pinguicula vulgaris*

Drawing by Sandra Tober

### Membership in Wagner Natural Area Society

The membership year runs from January 1 to December 31. Please consider renewing promptly to continue your support of the Society and Wagner Natural Area. Fill out the membership/renewal form below and mail it with a cheque to Wagner Natural Area Society. Do the same thing if you are joining the Society for the first time. As a member, you will receive free copies of the newsletter (2 per year) and an invitation to the Annual Members' Night in October. Field trips and other activities are organized from time to time. Donations are tax deductible. For more information, contact Janice Cantafio at 963-3938 (evenings).

Please include me as a member of the Wagner Natural Area Society!

\_\_\_\_\_ Family \$12      \_\_\_\_\_ Individual \$10  
\_\_\_\_\_ Student \$8      \_\_\_\_\_ Senior \$8

Besides my membership fee, I enclose a gift to support the activities of the Wagner Natural Area Society: \_\_\_\_\_.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Town/City \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone No. \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to: Janice Cantafio, Treasurer/Membership Director, Wagner Society, Box 3100, Stony Plain, AB T7Z 1Y4

## Wildflowers of Wagner (7)

### *Petasites sagittatus* Arrow-leaved Coltsfoot

### Family Compositae

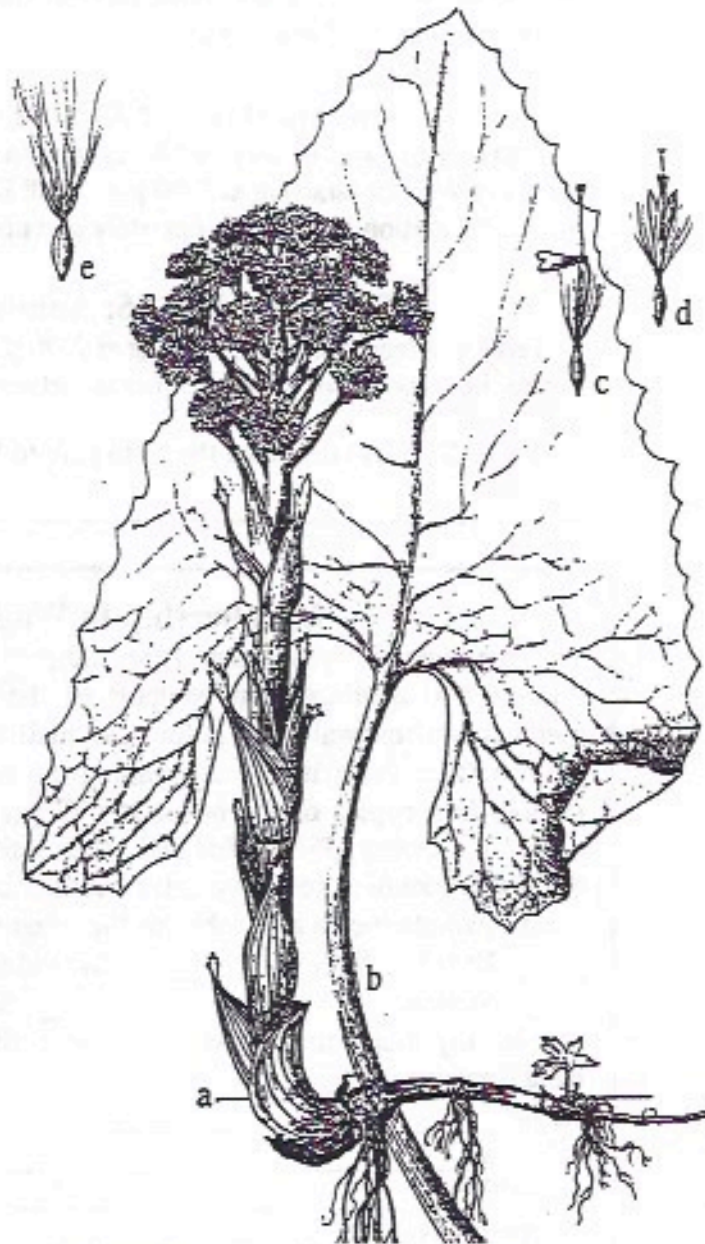
Arrow-leaved Coltsfoot is among the earliest of spring bloomers, the first flowering stems pushing up bravely through the dead thatch of marsh or ditch vegetation in late April and early May. As the flowers wither or turn to fruit, the large, stalked, arrowhead-shaped leaves, characteristically white-felty beneath, start to expand. They will photosynthesize all season, building up the food reserves in the plant's thick underground rhizomes that will allow the next year's crop of flowers to get a similarly early start.

These flower stems (technically *scapes* with their lance-shaped modified leaves or bracts) are stout but hollow (the lack of any strengthening tissue allows them to grow rapidly and they do not need to last long). They carry clusters of creamy-colored flower heads that are fragrant—hence the common name of the genus *Petasites*, Sweet Coltsfoot. Each flower head consists of many tiny flowers or florets, of the tubular type, which are either pistillate (with pistils only) or hermaphrodite, with stamens encircling the pistil in a sort of cylinder inside a tiny, upturned bell-like corolla. The florets of any given plant will be either predominantly pistillate, in which case they will set viable seed, and the stamens in the few central hermaphrodite florets will be non-functional; or they will be staminate, having only hermaphrodite florets (except for a marginal row of ray florets, which have reduced pistils only) and producing functional pollen but not setting seed. The pistillate scapes look recognisably different from the staminate ones with their narrower heads and somewhat fuzzy look due to the numerous white styles; the staminate heads, by contrast, are broader and showier with longer ray florets. By mid to late May the staminate scapes have turned brown and withered whereas the pistillate ones have lengthened noticeably (often reaching 30–40 cm high); the copious white pappus on the fruits gives the heads the appearance of tufts of white cotton in the ditches.

Arrow-leaved Coltsfoot occurs sporadically in wet places in Wagner and is not common in the fens. There is a population of staminate plants (or perhaps a single plant) on the east side at the end of the Marl Pond Trail and a population of pistillate plants (or one with an extensive rhizome) outside the gate.

Two close relatives of *P. sagittatus* occur in wet woods in Wagner: *P. palmatus* (Palmate-leaved

Coltsfoot) and *P. vitifolius* (Vine-leaved Coltsfoot). The flowers of all are similar but the three species can be told apart by the lobing of their leaves (none in *P. sagittatus* to deeply lobed in *P. petasites*).



a, flowering scape with bracts and inflorescence of several heads each consisting of many florets, arising from rhizome and roots; b, true leaf; c, ray floret of a pistillate plant; d, tubular hermaphrodite floret; e, fruit (achene) with pappus of hairs. Drawing x 1/2

Drawing courtesy of John Maywood