

WAGNER NATURAL AREA NEWSLETTER

Volume 11, Number 1 May 1997

Newsletter of the Wagner Natural Area Society, Management Committee
and Volunteer Stewards of Wagner Natural Area, Parkland County, Alberta



Sign of Spring! Male inflorescence of Arrow-leaved Coltsfoot (*Petasites sagittatus*) opening in roadside ditch at Wagner Parking Lot.
Photo by P. Cotterill, May 3, 1997

No Service Road—It's Official!

On December 18, 1996 we received a letter from Premier Klein informing us that plans for the service road had been cancelled. We had heard rumors, well-substantiated ones, before this, but until it was official, in writing, we could not get our hopes up. We attribute this decision to abandon the project to the show of opposition to the road and concern for the integrity of the Natural Area expressed by many of our supporters, as well as to the efforts of Society executive. These were spearheaded by our President, Pat Clayton, and included our insistence that alternatives to the proposed location of the road be considered in the

environmental assessment study. (See President's Column, page 3, for more information.)

We wish to express our heartfelt thanks to all of you who took the trouble and time to write and call your local politicians on behalf of Wagner. We believe this was a graphic example of the power of ordinary people to make a difference!

Missing—One Summer Student!

For the first time ever since 1986 when we employed our first summer student, we have failed to obtain a grant for a summer employee. We applied to SEED as usual but lost out to other organizations who could afford to top up grant money to provide a more competitive wage. However, this summer we may be able to share the services of a student working for another naturalists' organization, and perhaps by next year we will have had time to explore other options. Some of our former students have expressed dismay at this loss of an opportunity for a student to gain valuable experience in the field.

Instead, Society executive will be taking it in turns to carry out minimum monitoring of the property during the summer months. As well, Jean Oh, our student from the latter part of last summer, has kindly agreed to help us out.

Please note that if anyone has any concerns or observations to report, they can do so by calling the numbers listed on page 2 of this newsletter.

Contents

Executive List/Membership Form	2
President's Column	3
Field Trips 1997	4
Executive Profile, Alice Hendry	5
Wagner Grapevine	7
Wildflowers of Wagner	8

Wagner Society Executive, 1997

President	Pat Clayton (456-9046)
Past President/Treasurer	Dave Ealey (422-0858)
Vice-President	Irl Miller (455-3866)
Secretary/Editor/Membership	Patsy Cotterill (481-1525)
Directors	Leota Cummins (447-4256); Alice Hendry (962-4836); Beth Jenkins (458-1794); Derek Johnson (436-8231); Edgar Jones (436-5327)

Membership in Wagner Natural Area Society

The membership year runs from January 1 to December 31. Please consider renewing promptly if you haven't already done so to support the Society and Wagner Natural Area. Fill out this form and mail it with a cheque payable to Wagner Natural Area Society. As a member you will receive two newsletters per year and an invitation to the Annual Members' Night in October. Field trips and other activities are organized from time to time for the benefit of members. Donations are tax-deductible. For more information, contact the Membership Secretary at 481-1525.

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

- Family/Organization \$12 Individual \$10
 Student/Senior \$8

In addition to my membership fee, I enclose a gift to support the activities of Wagner Natural Area Society for _____.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Mail to: c/o Membership Secretary, Wagner Natural Area Society,
 Box 11, Site 290, R. R. 2, Stony Plain, Alberta T7Z 1X2

Please Communicate!

To report concerns/observations for immediate attention, please call:

Wayne Holland, Land Resources Manager, Public Lands at 464-7955.

For general information relating to the Natural Area or the Society, or to let us know that you intend to lead a group tour, call our voice mail at 988-4477 and leave a message. We will reply within a few days. Also, please note our new mailing address: Box 11, Site 290, R. R. 2, Stony Plain, Alberta T7Z 1X2

President's Column

by Pat Clayton

Spring should always be a time of optimism and the season of 1997 is no exception. The Frontage Road issue is behind us for now—thanks in large part to the letters and phone calls made by you to politicians and officials. The Wagner Natural Area Management Committee now has *written* confirmation that the frontage road project has been cancelled. Cancelled at the same time was the environmental assessment that was to accompany the engineering studies. This last is a pity as it might also have confirmed the causeway effects that Highway 16X is having on the downstream flows of the Wagner fen.

An effect still to come (now that Highway 16X has been upgraded to a transportation corridor) is the closure of Atim Road at its junction with Highway 16X. Access to Wagner then will be only from the south end of Atim Road on Highway 16. We understand the road closure will take place this summer as Alberta Transportation endeavours to make Highway 16X safe for long-distance, fast-moving traffic.

Ongoing is the establishment of the eastern boundary of Wagner. Some of the land not required for the 1990 Villeneuve overpass still has to be legally turned over to the Natural Area. This is in process—somewhere!

This winter the Management Committee started in on updating its management plan—a fairly easy task as the original document was well thought out. What the plan needs is a slight change of emphasis from recreation and education to research to confirm that this is indeed a unique region and it is now a benchmark against which other areas, species and impacts can be studied. Also to be included in

the update will be a section on fire control; control of fires entering the area as well as fires originating within the fen land.

Then in what must have been a fit of early spring fever the Management Committee tackled some long overdue changes to the Society's constitution. Here again the objects of the Society remain the same. The housekeeping involves the change-over from corporate club membership to voting membership. The directors brought the recommended changes to the Annual General Meeting in April.

After all the government upheavals and departmental changes of the last few years the Management Committee was finally able to identify and re-establish contact with officials who have care of the natural area as part of their mandate. In fairness to the individuals involved, Wagner is a small part of their work but, as we all have cause to know, eternal vigilance is the only way to protect a sensitive area and it's nice to know who is there to share that load with us.

The winter of meetings, hearings, studies, is past. What kept up the spirits and optimism of the Committee is the thought of the spring counts of birds, mammals and flowers; the walks to hear toads and see orchids and insects; (believe it or not!) clean-up work parties and thistle-pulling bees; and welcoming the summer student. The students' enthusiasm has invariably been infectious when they too discover what a unique and special place is that "bog" called Wagner. Makes all the conservation effort worthwhile

Looking forward to seeing you all out on enjoying the boardwalk (alias the Marl Pond) trail.

"Clocks cannot be turned back. But pendulums may swing...." I quote from a recent issue of the journal *Nature*. Too often that cliché about clocks is designed to end discussion when someone is arguing that certain practices of the past, for example, a more sustainable way of living, were better than our profligate ways of the present. What better rejoinder then than, "Ah yes, but pendulums may swing ..."

—Ed.

Wagner Field Trips, Summer 1997

Annual Orchid Walk, Sunday, June 15

Meet at the main gate at 1:00 p.m.

This is our traditional midsummer walk to see Yellow Lady's-slipper orchids, Sparrow's-egg Lady's-slippers, Round-leaved Orchids, and more. Leaders will be **Derek Johnson** and other members of WNAS.

Annual Bug Walk, Saturday, July 26

Meet at the main gate at 1:30 p.m.

Join us for our late summer look at Wagner's wealth of insect fauna with bug expert **Terry Thormin**.

Editor's Note: My apologies that this newsletter has come out too late to advertise two of our earlier field trips. One of them was the "Get the Scoop on Poop and Early Spring Greens," on April 20. Judging by the popularity of this trip—only our faithful Wagner executive turned up—the taxonomy of poop isn't high on people's priorities' list. Obviously, though, our advertising leaves something to be desired—and maybe the wet weather had something to do with it too!

Yet an early spring field trip is a marvellous opportunity to take a look at some of nature's subtler manifestations, such as mosses and lichens and all kinds of animal tracks and signs, without all the clutter of lush vegetation and pretty flowers and endlessly warbling birds getting in the way. And a walk in early spring rain is especially delightful: it brings out the colours on those aforesaid mosses and lichens—which almost literally come alive when they are wet—and the barks of trees with their different shades and textures. And yes, even the poop glistens!

Savoring the beauty of our common aspen, leafless but with its trunk fulgent green from the rain, is surely one of the great joys of being outdoors in a natural area on the threshold of the summer season!

Pat Clayton describes her experience on the Frog-and-Toad Walk, held May 8.

A beautiful warm evening in the spring: frog and toad time!

Wayne Roberts met me in the Wagner parking lot and led the way to the marl ponds. He said that on his visit the previous week it had been cold with no signs of amphibian activity. He was hoping for better results this evening.

His hopes were realized when we heard a toad calling just as we left the shade of the black

spruce (at the north end of the Marl Pond Trail) and moved onto the boardwalk. But there was no sign of egg-laying in any of the marl ponds as we passed along the trail to the Morowitz bench. This is a great spot to stop and watch and listen. The light breeze was from the south so there was no traffic noise to disrupt the natural sounds of the woods and dried reeds. A white-tailed deer appeared across the pond, saw us, snorted, crashed through the underbrush and barked the alarm. There must have been others there as the barks echoed through the trees.

Western Toads started calling: at least five of them from distinct locations in front and behind us. Then silence again. Wayne, who has sharp eyes and a deep knowledge of such creatures, pointed out the mating pair of toads in the pond by the edge of the trail. The female was much larger and showed red markings on her legs and head and the smaller, dark male on top clung tightly to her back. They seemed oblivious to our watchful eyes and only moved to breathe. Wayne also showed me the two water spiders poised in attack positions while they waited for prey to come within striking distance. They may have had a long wait as there was still very little insect activity in the pond. (Mind you, mosquito larvae are numerous in the wet areas by the gate!) One lone male wood frog was in the reeds. There was no frog spawn to be seen and certainly no tadpoles. A very late spring season!

We left the main pond and returned to the boardwalk. There was a long string of toad spawn—freshly laid—in one of the marl ponds. Spring may be late but the toads of Wagner are doing their age-old thing to perpetuate the species. Let's hope we can continue to be successful in keeping such places safe for them.

My thanks to Wayne for sharing his knowledge and a perfect evening for a toad walk in Wagner.

Executive Profile - Alice Hendry



Alice in active mode.
Photo courtesy of Hendry files

Born in Chicago and raised in California, Alice believed she was destined to be an English teacher and prepared herself for this role in life by earning a BA in English. It was not long, however, before she knew her real interests lay in biological science. When she returned to the University of California to earn her teaching degree, she completed a second major in biological science. She began her teaching career in Winters, California, where she taught junior high science.

Despite her extensive interest in all forms of biology, Alice found herself at a disadvantage when she moved to the Edmonton area in the fall of 1972. She was familiar with the animal and plant species of California's redwood groves and oak forests but found herself struggling to identify the species of a very new and very different environment. When she arrived in Alberta, the only plants she recognized were weeds. With the dedication and enthusiasm typical of her nature, she set out to learn the make-up of her new environment. She studied field guides, took university extension courses,

and spent as much time as she could in the outdoors. Birds, pond life, flowering plants, insects, bryophytes and creatures of all sizes have captured her interest and enthusiasm. In 1983, she earned her MEd in secondary Education at the University of Alberta. Her teaching emphasis was on environmental education. This gave her the excuse to take courses in zoology, geology and botany.

Alice's first active participation in an environmental organization was with a San Francisco Bay Area group that maintained a phone fan-out to raise concern about illegal landfills in the Bay. When she arrived in Alberta, Alice soon became involved in leading a local effort to preserve the wooded area from which Spruce Grove takes its name. She has continued her environmental work in a consultant capacity with area school districts (teachers and students), the John Janzen Nature Centre, the University of Alberta and Alberta Department of Environmental Protection. She works as a substitute teacher for Parkland County where she particularly enjoys teaching biology to students in elementary classes.

Alice has lived within walking distance of Wagner Natural Area since 1979. The Hendry yard has a bit of boreal forest, including a few patches of Sphagnum moss, and is visited by many species of birds. Perhaps this last has something to do with the 10 bird-feeders Alice maintains! In addition to her bird-watching hobby, she also enjoys wild-flower photography, collecting (mosses, skulls and botany field guides), gardening, walking and bicycling, and reading (natural history magazines and books of several genres).

She has been a member of Wagner Natural Area Society since its organization in 1982 and has served on its Board of Directors since that time, representing Parkland Rural Residents' Association. She has held the offices of President, Vice-President and (briefly) Secretary, and has played an active role in resolving the many issues addressed by the society as it works to preserve and expand the natural area. An abiding and intense interest in the preservation of special places and all forms

of wildlife characterize Alice's commitment to her work with the Wagner Natural Area Society.

Editor's Note:

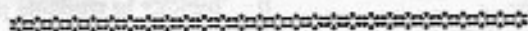
Alice prepared this article herself upon editorial request and, this being the case, there are one or two items that modesty did not permit her to mention. For example:

- At times, Alice has been dubbed "Mrs. Wagner" because she's a walking encyclopedia of the geography and history of the Natural Area and because of her absolute commitment to its welfare. Alice has an elephant's memory of all Wagner issues and recalls just about every promise (or threat) that any politician or bureaucrat has ever made with respect to Wagner!
- Her knowledge of Wagner issues and her experience teaching environmental education made her the ideal partner for Peter Lee (Natural Areas, Dept. of Environmental Protection), in role-playing sessions he master-minded, using Wagner's experience with the Highway 16X-Highway 794 overpass as an example,

at three workshops given to Provincial Parks staff in Hinton. Alice also teamed up with Peter for similar sessions presented to U of A environmental students in their course on management of small protected areas.

- Alice has spent many an hour, often incurring loss of income, conducting tours of Wagner for out-of-town visitors, journalists, schoolchildren and students.
- Alice was a member both times of the Organizing Committee for the provincial Volunteer Steward Conferences held in 1990 and 1993.
- Alice has worked diligently with our summer students over the years, instructing them, helping them and just plain providing them with companionship as they went about their duties.

In the fall of 1995 Alice's efforts were formally acknowledged when she was given the Wagner Society's Recognition Award.



Club members who host meetings at their homes will know the problem: what to serve with the mandatory tea and coffee? We thought it would be fun to share some of the things we

eat at Wagner meetings (recipe-wise, that is). We'll kick off with Alice's recipe, since we were meeting at her house when the idea came up—and it's seasonal.

Alice's Rhubarb-and-Raspberry/Cherry/Strawberry Cake

Bottom:

2 cups flour	½ cup sugar	3 tsp baking powder	1 tsp salt
2 tbsp margarine	1 cup milk	1 egg	

Mix flour, sugar, baking powder and salt. Work in margarine. Add milk and egg. Spread in a greased 8" x 12" pan.

Middle:

4-5 cups of fresh, diced rhubarb 1 3-oz (85 g) packet of raspberry, cherry or strawberry jello.
Spread rhubarb over bottom layer in pan and sprinkle box of jello powder over rhubarb.

Topping:

½ -1 cup sugar	½ -1 cup flour	½ tsp cinnamon	½ tsp nutmeg
3-4 tbsp margarine	½ cup chopped nuts (optional)		

Mix together and crumble over middle layer.

Bake at 350°C on middle oven rack for 35-45 minutes until golden brown and rhubarb is bubbly.



The Wagner Grapevine



Alberta Amphibian Monitoring Survey

Despite not having its own summer employee, Wagner will receive some attention from eager young students this summer. Two summer students employed by the Edmonton Natural History Club to work on the province-wide Amphibian Monitoring Survey, Christie Dean and Melanie Ostopowich, will be visiting Wagner from time to time as part of their duties to identify the amphibians—frogs, toads and salamanders—present in the Edmonton area.

May Count of Plants in Flower

Eight people participated in the annual Wagner Count which took place on 25th May. Approximately 42 species were recorded from the Natural Area proper, with Alice Hendry adding an additional 8 species, from her property in Osborne Acres. This total was slightly higher than last year's 37, last year being a notoriously late spring. Even so, many of our species were only just beginning to flower.

Fire Management Plan

Recently the Society has made further efforts to complete its Management Plan for the Area, for ratification by the appropriate authorities. It will now include a Fire Management plan, and to develop this Derek has been working with **Wes Nimco**, a Forest Protection Technician operating out of Athabasca. **We are looking for a local resident to volunteer to be the contact person providing information on the plan in the event of a fire which threatens the Natural Area.**

Changes to the Constitution

At our annual general meeting held April 29 at the Percy Page Centre we notified of various constitutional changes we propose to file, particularly with regard to membership. We have scrapped the category of corporate members and replaced this with the category of voting member. (To become a voting member a person must sign that he or she agrees with the objects of the Society and must be nominated by two existing voting members.) Directors (executive) will be elected from among the voting members. Members at large will now be

called supporting members. The subscription structure will remain unchanged, however. Another change is that the terms of the Board of Directors will now rotate.

As always, we are looking to enlarge our membership, both of voting and supporting members!

Volunteer Stewards & the Government

As Pat outlined in her President's Column, the changes in provincial government departments over the last few years have made us unsure of whom we should turn to for help as volunteer stewards managing Wagner Natural Area. As lessees of Wagner we have considerable latitude as managers, but since the site is crown land we also have responsibilities and entitlements (to assistance). At a meeting on January 20, Wayne Holland of the Public Lands Service, Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (day-to-day management of the land) and Andy McCracken, Natural Resources Service, Alberta Environmental Protection, (administration, resource for technical information, etc.), clarified their respective roles in relation to the Society.

Bouquets

- To all our members who renewed memberships and thereby expressed support. An extra thank-you to the many of you who included donations with your subscriptions!

- To all of you who wrote your local politicians or Premier Klein expressing opposition to the service road plan. This includes the Grade 8/9 Class in Environmental Ed. of Ms. Marianne Rogers at High Park School, Stony Plain. Many of these students must have been taking their first step in environmental activism!

- To Patsy Cotterill, latest recipient of the Wagner Recognition Award. It was presented to her on Annual Members' Night, last October 24.

New Members

A big welcome to new members **Pamela Allan** and **Pat Wishart**. Pat, energetic field-trip leader and co-author of the "Knee High Nature" books for children, is already an enthusiastic Wagner-user. We hope Pamela enjoys it too!

Wildflowers of Wagner No. 11

Crowberry Crowberry Family

The common name of this low evergreen shrub refers to its berry-like fruit, which is green as it matures and dark purple-red or black when it is ripe. The "berries" last longer and are much more readily spotted than the small crimson flowers hiding under the uppermost leaves. To see them you must look carefully, very early in the season, from late April to mid-May.

The trailing, branched stems of Crowberry form a sparse cover over moss hummocks in peaty coniferous forests. The leaves are like minute flattened, glossy cigars, about 5 mm long, flat on the upper surface and convex below, their rolled-under edges joined beneath to form a white "seam." They are dark-green and suffused with wine-red immediately after winter but green up as the season advances. They alternate along the stem but are also somewhat clustered and the blades spread at right angles to the stem; altogether this gives a heath-like aspect to the plant. The stems are covered with a fuzz of beige or whitish hairs but, especially in young stems, the leaf bases form prominent smooth ridges giving the stem a reddish color. New growth occurs in spring from the branch tips above the flowers.

Empetrum nigrum L. Empetraceae

The flowers, which are about 3 mm long and 2 mm wide, appear in the axils of the upper leaves. Each has 3 pale erect sepals inside which alternate 3 dark pink petals which have their tips bent back. Inside the petals (protruding when ready to shed pollen) are 3 wine-red stamens. In the centre of the flower is the pistil, consisting of a dark crimson 6-9 ribbed disk-like stigma, a short style and the ovary. Flowers may have both male and female parts (that is, are perfect), or just one or other set (unisexual). The round fruit, really a drupe containing about 6 nutlets each with a single seed, is about 7 mm across, juicy and edible.

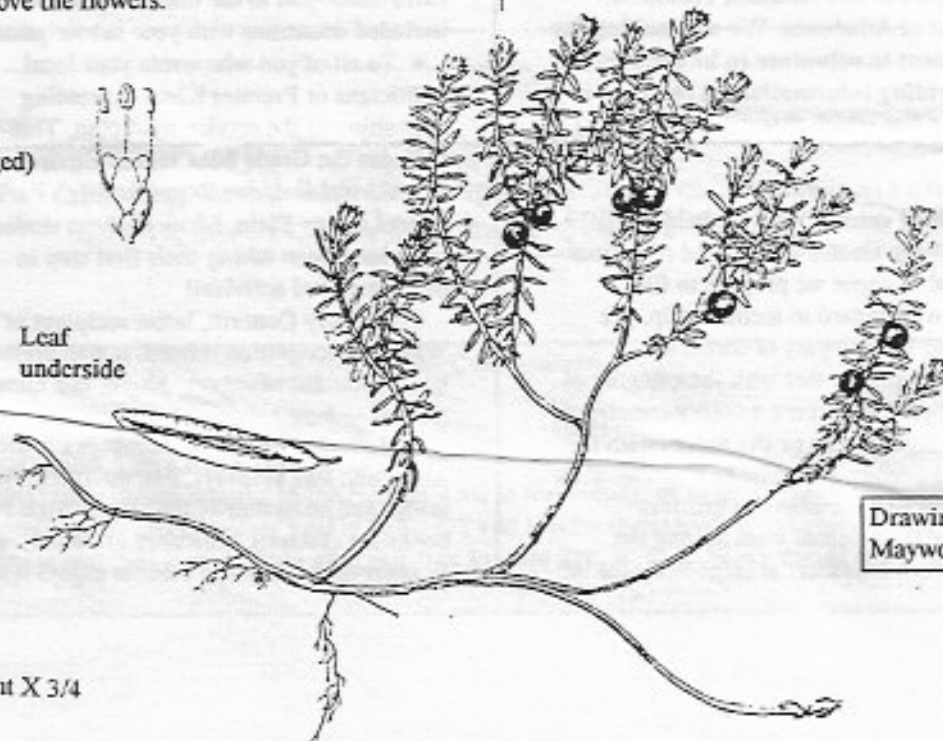
In Wagner, Crowberry can be seen in small amounts in the black spruce forest at the north end of the Marl Pond trail, but is much more common amid the black spruce and tamarack in central parts of the property, e.g., around Jones's Pond. In Alberta, Crowberry occurs in northern and central Alberta and the mountains.

With characteristics of evergreen, drought- and cold-resistant plants, Crowberry is well adapted to harsh winters as befits its circumpolar distribution.

Flower
(enlarged)



Leaf
underside



Drawing by John
Maywood