

WAGNER NATURAL AREA NEWSLETTER

Volume 22 Number 2 October 2008



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

Wagner Society will be holding its **Annual Open House** on Wednesday, **November 5, 2008**, at **St. George's Anglican Church** Auditorium, 11733 – 87 Avenue, Edmonton. Please join us! Admission is free and open to everyone. Doors open at 7:00 p.m. and the program begins at 7:30 p.m.

Our president, Dr. **Ben Rostron**, will give a brief overview of the Society's year. Our guest speaker, **Kris Kendell** will follow. Kris is an expert on amphibians and reptiles, with the Alberta Conservation Association. His presentation is entitled: **Accommodating our Cold-Blooded Neighbours: Reptiles and Amphibians.**

Kris writes: "Reptiles and amphibians are creatures renowned for their adaptability. In Alberta, many reptiles and amphibians are at the most northern part of their distribution and must cope with harsh climatic conditions. Nonetheless, they can be found inhabiting a diverse array of habitats throughout the province. Despite evolutionary adaptations acquired over millions of years, many of Alberta's

herpetofauna find themselves in a precarious situation as they struggle to coexist and adapt to modern day human impacts on their habitats and the ecosystems on which they depend.

Kris will give us a tour through Alberta's natural regions, revealing the herpetofauna found within and their many unique adaptations and life histories. We will learn how these groups of animals have overcome the dramatic environmental conditions of Alberta's northern latitude and how human impacts affect their ecology and biology. We will hear how we can become directly involved with the conservation of this fascinating group of animals. We will also learn what the ACA and other agencies are doing to help conserve the northern leopard frog and other amphibian and reptile species in the province."

Refreshments will be served. Subscriptions for Supporters will be taken.



Boreal Chorus Frog – Green Phase Photo: Kris Kendell

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The Wagner Grapevine



An Embarrassment of Biffies!

Visitors to Wagner will have noticed the appearance of two new pieces of infrastructure in the main field this season. One such building, on the east side of the field, is clearly a toilet duplex, government issue. The other is an attractive white shed that looks as if it might be more at home on the lawn of some gracious mansion than in a natural area. The latter was constructed for us by NAIT carpentry students and was intended to be our new unisex biffy, replacing the two outhouses that have now been demolished and their holes filled in. We had commissioned the outhouse building from NAIT and work was well under way when Alberta Parks kindly offered to provide the government toilets for us. Such amenities are not usually provided to Natural Areas but given the high usage that Wagner receives they felt it was justified. So when the NAIT biffy arrived, the question was, what to do with it and where to locate it? We could give it away (which some of us favoured), sell it (possibly unethical since it was funded by a grant from Esso Imperial Oil), or use it for some other purpose, such as storage of our maintenance and management equipment. We decided on this last. My guess is that this maintains Wagner's distinction of having the fanciest infrastructure (along with our sturdy picnic shelter) of all the Natural Areas! Many thanks to Parks staff, and Irl Miller and Jasper Keizer of Wagner Society for their work in connection with the NAIT outhouse.

Weed Control

Work continued this summer to remove Caraway from the Villeneuve and Atim fields, and these populations now seem to be under control. As well there has been some removal of tansy and perennial sow-thistle. The three plots set up in the main field north of the picnic shelter to test for three treatments for Canada thistle (herbicide with glyphosate, pulling, and mowing) were examined and thistle stems were counted. There appeared to be no obvious difference in number of thistles between any of them. No further treatment was done on these plots this year.

Fencing

The southern perimeter of Wagner is now almost completely fenced, clearly demarcating the protected area from cultivated lands to the south. Many thanks to **Irl Miller** for all his hard work with the contractor on this important project. The Board is now working on a plan for restoration of this southeast portion of the property, including seeking advice from

restoration experts. The conundrum is how best to set this disturbed and semi-natural land on a trajectory that will lead to the establishment of native vegetation in the future.

2008 Annual Volunteers Conference in Grande Prairie

Five people representing Wagner attended this conference September 13 and 14, which was completely paid for by the government, including transportation, accommodation and meals. It was an enjoyable experience with interesting field trips taking place in excellent weather, but one criticism was that not enough time was allowed for networking among stewards.

Heritage Trees

A plaque will be placed on the noticeboard at the start of the Marl Pond Trail indicating that Wagner contains one of the "heritage" trees recognized under this program. The tree, or rather trees, of interest are tamarack (*Larix laricina*) in the vicinity of Jones' Pond, some of which were found by coring to be in the order of 300 years old. Since these are inaccessible to the public, the plaque, and an explanation, will be placed at the trailhead.

Parks Planning Framework

Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation are in the process of revising this plan, which has been in the works for over a year. A version developed by Alberta Parks with an emphasis on conservation was changed by the Department of Tourism, Parks and Recreation to shift the emphasis to the utility of parks for recreation. Various stakeholders including ENGOs objected to the change, with the result that the Plan has now gone back to the Ministry for re-drafting. A further iteration is expected to be ready by early November, presumably with a short time span allowing for more stakeholder reaction.

Bog Adder's-mouth Orchid Survey

In mid-August Alice Hendry, Patsy Cotterill and Ben Rostron checked areas of Wagner's south-east fens where this rare orchid (*Malaxis paludosa*) has been previously found, and recorded a total of nine individuals in approximately two locations separated by only about 25 m. One other individual was found in similar fen habitat south of the original property line. In addition, one plant was found towards the south end of the Fath Property east of Wagner. A full search of WNA would require many more volunteers as this diminutive plant is difficult and time-consuming to find.

Wagner Bird Boxes and Banding Report (June 24, 2008)

Pat and Dick Clayton reported as follows:

There are 35 Boxes on fence lines at Atim and Villeneuve Fields.

Total young Tree Swallows fledged - 168

Total young Wrens fledged - 6

Total Tree Swallows banded - 99

Total Tree Swallows NOT banded - 69

The latter were either too large or too small, and we ran out of bands, and time. Unfortunately, **Eddie Jones** was unable to band this year, but we were fortunate enough to get **Bob Danner** to assist us. We are most grateful to him for stepping in and banding a major number of the fledglings on June 24/08.

Our Marl Pond Trail was 25 this Year!

by Patsy Cotterill



2008 marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the Marl Pond Trail at Wagner Natural Area. For those of us who've been around and paying attention since the early 1980s and before, it seems incredible: how fast a quarter-century has flown!

Wagner Natural Area was set aside as a protected area in 1975, in recognition of its wonderfully biodiverse complex of open sedge fens and marl ponds. But it wasn't until early 1983, with the incorporation of its volunteer steward group, the Wagner Natural Area Society (WNAS), that attention was turned to improving the Area's accessibility to the public and developing educational and interpretive programming opportunities.

By the summer of 1983 clearing of an interpretive trail, to be named with unanimous consent the Marl Pond Trail, had begun in the west-central portion of the Natural Area. If I remember correctly, Terry Thormin, then president of WNAS, Natural Areas Program staff and Julie Hrapko, Curator of the Botany Programme at the Provincial Museum, were responsible for choosing and flagging the route of the trail. It was designed to provide, in a 1.2 km loop, a representative sampling of Wagner's varied habitats: willow thicket, mixed deciduous-coniferous forest, black spruce forest, open and shrubby fens and marl ponds, a wet "successional" meadow and drier upland fields. The Alberta Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation (ARPWF) provided a grant of \$15,000 for construction of the trail, with smaller contributions coming from Labatt's Breweries and Northwestern Utilities. ARPWF's sponsorship is acknowledged on the main sign marking the trail head.

The minutes of WNAS' 11th meeting on August 24, 1983, recorded:

"Trail: - access construction is finished
- the trail has been cleared by volunteers for about 403 m

- John Rintoul¹ will be hired for 4 days to lay 200 m of the penroad/gravel trail
- Pat Seymour has people at the Devonian [Botanic] Garden who may be available at the end of September/early October to build boardwalk sections
- The boardwalk section will be laid and postholes drilled in winter
- Terry Thormin, Alice Hendry and Peter Lee² will be on the Trail Construction Committee"

Covering the trail with a permeable geotextile called Penroad, overlain by gravel, was necessary to allow drainage of the considerable overland flow that took place. (Those years in the 1980s were wet!) However, in fact geotextile was used only on the first (northern) section of the trail to be built and because of the wet, fragile nature of the ground, it was hauled in only in the winter. The boardwalk was required for travel across areas of fen and marl pond, and it too would be installed during the winter.

Work on the trail continued throughout 1984. It had been decided early that the trail should be a self-guiding one, with numbered posts interpreted by means of a trail guide. On several occasions during the seasons WNAS members walked the new trail, selecting points of interest for interpretation, where the posts would be situated. By the spring of 1985 John Rintoul was reporting to the monthly WNAS meeting that "considerable work has been done on the trail by Land Management staff [then from the Department of Energy & Natural Resources], for example, grading, placing of culverts and painting of tree scars, with funds coming from government sources but with WNAS acting as the contractor. ... the boardwalk is finished. Planking is needed where the trail abuts on the marl pond, to confine the gravel."

Paul Cooper of the University of Alberta Devonian Botanic Garden built the boardwalk sections. By June, 1985, trail posts had been tamped into place and numbered, thanks to WNAS, staff of the Natural Areas Program and a fencing crew courtesy of the Alberta Environment Employment Program. Facilities consisting of two privies were situated in the northwest corner of the main field. Dave Person of WNAS took on the task of installing a box at each end of the trail to serve as dispensers for the trail guides. A draft trail guide booklet was being field-tested.

Continued on next page

¹ John recently retired from his long-held position as database manager with the Alberta Natural Heritage Information Centre, Parks Division, of the provincial government.

² Peter Lee now works for Global Forest Watch.

Spring 1986 saw a further flurry of activity as WNAS and government staff geared up for a trail-opening ceremony that morphed into a general natural area-opening ceremony, with political speeches and expressions of gratitude to our various financial sponsors and supporters of the trail and Natural Area. A picnic shelter, constructed by Rene Jones, went up in record time at the north end of the main field.

Dick Dekker, a local naturalist and graphic designer, was engaged to design the trail guide in its final, publishable form. Much of the text had been drafted by Patsy Cotterill, with considerable input from other WNAS members; Terry Thormin, Edgar Jones and Chris Miller created the illustrations. 500 copies of a "special commemorative issue" were printed off in time for the official opening on June 7, 1986. This first edition had a brown, heavy-stock cover featuring our signature view, a sinuous boardwalk crossing a marl pond amidst coniferous trees.

Needless to say, maintenance and development of the trail has continued to occupy a considerable portion of WNAS' volunteer time. Repairs to the boardwalk are a continual chore, as the supports sink into the marl and the surface becomes uneven. Guardians of the physical infrastructure of the trail in particular have been Dick and Pat Clayton, Irl Miller, the Jenkins family, and Alice and Andy Hendry. Every month of the year a designated "monthly monitor" includes in their reconnoiter of the Natural Area a walk of the trail to check for changes and damage (and enjoy a quiet

sit-down on any of the three commemorative benches that have been installed along the trail).

Natural environmental changes along the trail necessitated some tinkering with the trail posts and a new edition (on buff-coloured stock) of the trail guide in 1999. The simpler, winter guide to the trail has also been reprinted.

Over the years, we have been fortunate in suffering very little vandalism to the trail and the site in general. (However, one donation box was recently damaged and has been removed for repair.) We continue to practice weed control at various points along the trail and to cordon off the various informal trails that visitors create in pursuit of photogenic flowers or a more penetrating gaze into the amber water of our beautiful marl ponds. One serendipitous development over the years has been a natural one: the appearance of many yellow lady's-slippers in the meadow areas at the north end of the trail where there were none before.

One could say that, metaphorically speaking, our beloved trail is a thread that winds through the lives of WNAS members and everyone else who visits the Natural Area frequently, binding us together. Nevertheless, after 25 years we are finding it is time to invite others to join, and perhaps to succeed, us in providing tender loving care to the Marl Pond Trail, and in looking for new opportunities to appreciate the experience of nature it offers.

(First published in *Partners in Preservation: A Volunteer Newsletter*, Spring 2008, Issue 16, pages 1 and 4)

Wagner Natural Area Society Board 2008-2009

26519 Highway 16, Spruce Grove, AB T7X 3L4 Visit our website at
<http://www.wagner.fanweb.ca>

Executive:

President Ben Rostron (434-3839)
Past President Alice Hendry (962-4836)
Vice-President Pat Clayton (456-9046)
Treasurer Pat Webb (458-3477)
Secretary/Editor/Membership Patsy Cotterill (481-1525)

Directors:

Pat Clayton
Patsy Cotterill
Alice Hendry
Beth Jenkins (458-1794)
Mike Jenkins (481-8695)
Irl Miller (455-3866)
Ben Rostron
Pat Webb

Other Responsibilities: Pat Clayton (Archivist); Jasper Keizer (Fire Warden): (962-2745);
Webmasters: Mike Jenkins & Pat Webb

In Memoriam – Jeanne Jones

Wagner Board members were saddened to learn of the death of Jeanne Jones, wife of Edgar Jones, earlier this month. We knew Jeanne as an ever-cheerful, feisty helpmate to Edgar, who was a founding member of Wagner Society and indeed was among the people who were responsible for the establishment of the Natural Area itself. We also remember the delicious baked desserts Jeanne used to serve up when we attended board meetings at the Jones' house. Eddie himself has resigned from Wagner activities owing to ill-health. We miss them both!

Changes to the Wagner Bylaws Affecting Membership

By Beth Jenkins

In 2007, the Wagner Natural Area Society amended its Bylaws to clarify the various categories of membership. There were also some amendments to allow for use of electronic technology in the conduct of meetings and to reduce the timeframes for notice of meetings from 30 to 21 days.

Members must be eighteen (18) years of age or older, and resident in Alberta.

“Members” are categorized as Founding, Voting or Honourary Members.

Founding Members

- are those people who signed to the original application for incorporation of the Society
- remain eligible for membership under these bylaws, so long as they are in good standing
- are entitled to voting privileges

Voting Members

- are persons who assist in the management and care of Wagner Natural Area, are in general agreement with the Objects of the Society and who are proposed for membership as described in the next bullet
- must be proposed as Voting Members by any two members in good standing with the Society, using a signed application that indicates the person’s consent to having his name proposed for membership in the Society. The form must be submitted to the Secretary, for consideration at the next meeting of the Board
- are entitled to voting privileges so long as they are in good standing. They must be members of the Society for one month before becoming eligible to vote at a general meeting or to be elected or appointed as a Director

Honourary Life Members

- are those people who have been, or would be, eligible for Founding or Voting membership, and who have been appointed by special resolution of the Board in recognition of service to the Society
- are not assessed or liable for entrance, membership or subscription fees
- are entitled to voting privileges. They must be members of the Society for one month before becoming eligible to vote at a general meeting or to be elected or appointed as a Director

The Bylaws have re-named “Subscribing Members” as “Supporters”, and clarified their standing as “Associates” rather than members. We also have “Patrons” as a category of “Associate.” Associates receive a newsletter and notice of / invitation to events of the Society.

Supporters

- pay a yearly subscription fee
- are not entitled to voting privileges

Patrons

- are appointed by special resolution of the Board in recognition of their efforts in achieving Objects similar to those of the Society
- are not assessed or liable for entrance, membership or subscription fees
- are not entitled to voting privileges

The Wagner Natural Area Society values all of its members, supporters and patrons and thanks all for their continuing support and involvement in taking care of the Natural Area.

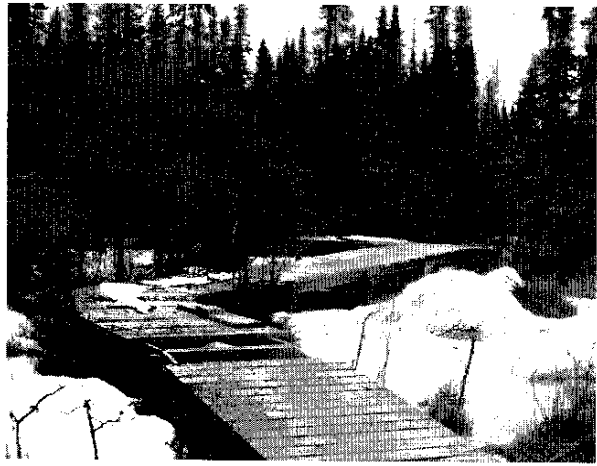
If you have any questions about the new bylaws, please contact Beth Jenkins, chair of the Bylaws Review Committee. Beth can be reached by e-mail to bethj@interbaun.com or by phone at (780) 452-6167.

For Art and Nature Lovers... An exhibit entitled “A Bird in the Hand” is taking place at Profiles Public Art Gallery, 19 Perron Street, St. Albert, from November 6-29, 2008. Artist Cindy Barratt will be featuring her work depicting scenes in Wagner Natural Area. Other artists exhibiting are Robert Dmytruk, Elaine Funnell and David Kerlake. An opening reception will take place on Thursday, November 6th from 7-9 p.m. Check the gallery website at www.artsheritage.ca for more information.

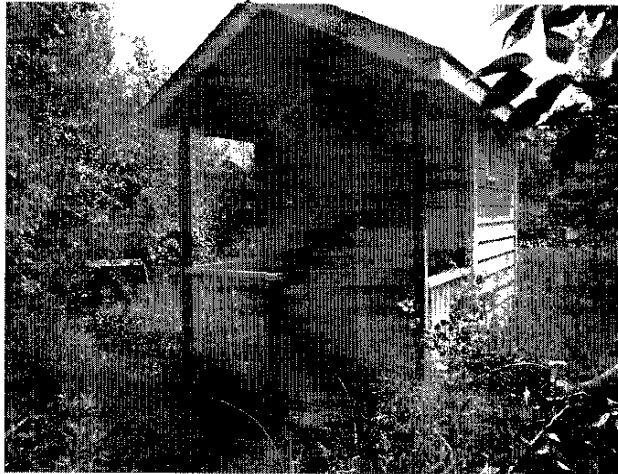
Images of the Marl Pond Trail



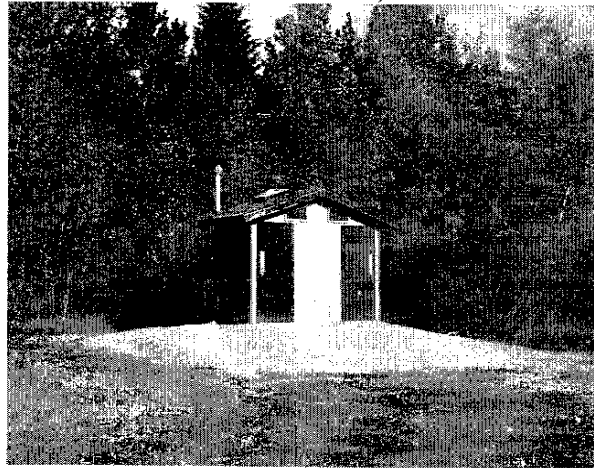
View of main marl pond in winter



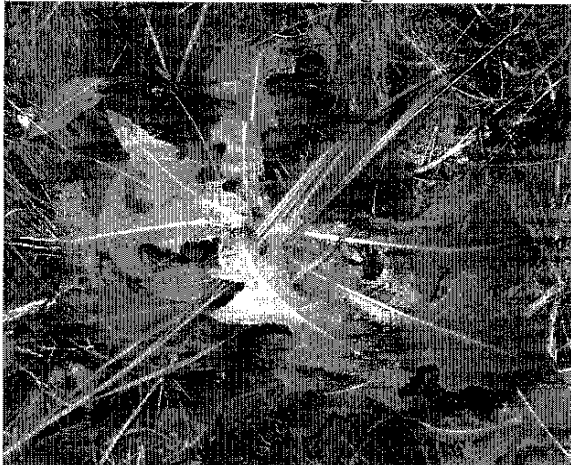
Boardwalk under construction, 1984



NAIT's handiwork; now a storage shed



Our new outhouses, courtesy of Alberta Parks



Perennial Sow-thistle along the trail; Alice Hendry and Pat Clayton went after these weeds with a vengeance this summer



White spruce cones – a red squirrel's winter larder

Wagner Profile

Dr. Ben Rostron, President



Ben first became aware of the Wagner Natural Area in 1989 at an Orchid Society of Alberta meeting when a request was made for help with a planned interchange/road through the marl ponds. At that time, Ben was finishing a Master's degree in Regional Hydrogeology at the University of Alberta, so with his undergraduate training in Geological Engineering he was able to make sense of pages and pages of technical information relating to geology, groundwater, and Civil Engineering in the Spencer Environmental Impact Assessment report.

Little did he know that he would still be fighting for groundwater at Wagner some 20 years later!

After finishing an MSc in 1990, Ben went into a PhD program in Petroleum Hydrogeology at the University of Alberta, spent a lot of time working in Texas, and then got a job (1994) as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Geological Sciences at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon. In 1997, the UofA offered him a position back in the newly created Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, where he still works today.

Soon after his return to Edmonton, his orchid-friend Irl Miller recruited him as a voting member of the Wagner Natural Area Society in 1999. That eventually led to his becoming Vice-President in 2003, and President in 2006. Along the way, Ben's main contribution to the Society has been to use his technical knowledge of regional groundwater flow to both further understand groundwater at WNA and to protect the groundwater flow field in and around the it. His "adventures in groundwater" include a couple of lawsuits, numerous public hearings, copious letter writing, un-countable numbers of meetings, phone calls, etc., records of which now fill several file boxes in his office at the UofA.

Ben has been an active promoter of getting others interested in the Wagner Natural Area. He was instrumental in starting up a co-operative effort with NAIT to run part of their Groundwater Technology field school at WNA. He has been involved with several other professors at UofA (Doug Schmidt, Martyn Unsworth) using Geophysics (seismic, and resistivity) to understand the geology beneath the Natural Area. With his colleagues Carl Mendoza and Kevin Devito, he forms the UofA hydrogeology group that has supervised two Masters students (Heather Von Hauff, Catherine Hydeman) working on WNA, along with numerous other summer students and volunteers. After years of work in the field collecting and analyzing data, the UofA hydrogeologists have put Wagner on the world stage, presenting talks at international meetings about their favorite field site.

In his "spare" time, Ben grows a small collection of orchids, travels to "hunt" and photograph native orchids in situ, and is a student judge in the American Orchid Society. Ben is supported in everything he does by Catherine, his wife of 19+ years, and his two children Alex (10) and Sarah (9).

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## Plants of Wagner No. 30

### *Lepidozia reptans*

(Family Lepidoziaceae)

by J. Derek Johnson

*Lepidozia reptans* is a small leafy liverwort in contrast to the large, thalloid types such as the common green-tongue liverwort (*Marchantia polymorpha*). The plants are light-green to olive-green and form leafy shoots about 1 mm wide. The stems are usually prostrate, weakly attached to the substrate, about 1.5-3 cm long, with numerous pinnate (to bipinnate) branches. The branches sometimes end in flagelliform (whip-like) tips. The leaves are alternate, distant to overlapping and spread away from the stem. Each leaf appears as a small club-shaped hand with three (or four) fingers curled downward, hence the common name “Little Hands Liverwort.” The leaves are dissected by the three lobes about half way. Large, four-lobed underleaves are present throughout.

The plants are bisexual (both male and female inflorescences are produced on the same plant), but sporophytes are produced infrequently. They mature in late spring or early summer. The small plants are quite brittle, breaking easily, and this probably aids in vegetative propagation. The genus is also sometimes called “Mickey Mouse Hands,” likening the three-lobed leaves to the three fingers on Mickey Mouse’s hands. “Reptans” in Latin means “creeping” and refers to the plant’s habit, likely accentuated by the leaves’ resemblance to reptilian feet.

The finger-like lobes of the tiny leaves, the pinnate branching of the plants and the frequent presence of root-like branches emerging from the undersurface of the main shoots are distinctive characters. There are few local liverworts with which it can be confused. The only common species that could be confused with it from a distance is the naughehyde liverwort (*Ptilidium pulcherrimum*), also commonly found in the WNA, but this has many-lobed leaves with narrow, finger-like teeth, and a much more “feathery” appearance than *L. reptans*.

The genus is widely distributed in the world, reaching its greatest abundance and diversity in foggy forests in the tropics and subtropics. There are three species of *Lepidozia* in North America, but only *L. reptans* is found in Alberta. The other two species occur near the coast in areas of high precipitation from BC to Alaska.

*L. reptans*’ distribution is circumboreal. It is common throughout the coniferous forests of the province, growing in patches or mixed with other liverworts and mosses on rotting logs, stumps and wood in dampish sites. It favours rotting wood in an advanced stage of decay. It will occasionally grow on moist soil or rock, but I’ve not seen it on these substrates in Alberta. It is a common liverwort

### Little Hands Liverwort

intertwined with other species, but unless it forms a large patch, most people wouldn’t pick it out at all, much less see it as the distinctively shaped liverwort it is. However, it is truly an attractive liverwort if you look at it under the microscope.

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2. Schofield, W.B. 2002. Field Guide to Liverwort Genera of Pacific North America. University of Washington Press, Seattle, Washington. Pp. 132-133.
3. Schuster, R. M. 1969. The Hepaticae and Anthocerotae of North America. Volume II. Columbia University Press, New York, New York. Pp. 23-29.
4. Vitt, D. H., J. E. Marsh, and R.B. Bovey. 1988. Mosses Lichens and Ferns of Northwest North America. Lone Pine Publishing, Edmonton, Alberta. Pp. 147.



Approx. x 15



Leafy shoot as seen under the microscope



**WAGNER NATURAL AREA SOCIETY**

**Support / Donate Form**

Wagner Natural Area Society welcomes Supporters, Volunteers, and Friends.

For information about Wagner Natural Area and the Society, and about field trips and other activities organized from time to time for the benefit of all friends of Wagner, go to the Society's website at: [www.wagner.fanweb.ca](http://www.wagner.fanweb.ca)

The Society's yearly subscription fee for Supporters, which Includes a: Family, Organization, Individual, Student, senior, is \$10.00. The Society's fiscal year is January 1 to December 31. Supporters will receive copies of the Society's Newsletter.

Wagner Natural Area Society is a Registered Charity. Donations to the Society will help maintain this very special area. Donations over \$20.00 will be receipted for Income Tax purposes. CRA B/N 119287522 RR 0001

Supporter Yearly Subscription (\$10.00): \_\_\_\_\_

Donation for Wagner: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL PAYMENT: \$ \_\_\_\_\_**

I / We would like to Volunteer to help the Society with maintenance of the Natural Area: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail this Form / Cheque/Money Order to: **Treasurer, Wagner Natural Area Society,  
26519 Highway 16, Spruce Grove, Alberta T7X 3L4**

Oct'08



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