



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



A Vibrant Prickly Rose (*Rosa acicularis*) photographed in Wagner Natural Area!

Those beautiful pink flowers with ovate toothed leaves can be spotted at the entrance of WNA and along the Marl Pond Trail.

Don't miss this Summer spectacle, come visit us!

Photo courtesy of: Andy Mueller

WAGNER NATURAL AREA SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Volunteering Opportunities Summer Weed Pulls

What: Volunteers to help in the mechanical removal of invasive weed species within the natural area.

When: Sat. and Sun. July 13th and 14th, Friday July 19th, and Sat. and Sun. August 3rd and 4th

Time: 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Where: Meet at the Wagner Natural Area Parking Lot

Weed pulls are important site management activities for natural areas surrounded by weed-prone developed areas. Invasive weeds have a significant impact on native habitats.

Where: Meet at the Wagner Natural Area Parking Lot

Gloves and rubber boots are recommended. Gardening tools will be available for those who don't bring their own. Dress for the weather. Snacks and water provided. Let us know you are coming out by sending an email to

info@wagnerfen.ca

Summer Student 2024

By Andy Mueller

Greetings, Readers! My name is Andy, and I am the Wagner Natural Area Society's new Natural Area Specialist. As a Summer Student, I am present on site frequently during the week, and those who visited Wagner recently have almost certainly seen me at some point. Don't be afraid to say hello!

I'm Canadian, born and raised in Edmonton, though I have made frequent trips to Austria during my life to visit my father's place of birth and my extended family there. I spent one year living in Salzburg when I was a baby and then spent a year in Linz when I was in grade 10 (during the pandemic). I am studying at the Augustana Campus of the University of Alberta, and I am working towards a Bachelor of Science degree with a major in Integrative Biology. My interest in biology came from my desire to understand the world better. I want to know more about life on earth, ecology, the connections between plants and animals, and how it all works together to create the world we live in today.

I am very grateful for the opportunity to work here over the summer, as it is a once-in-a-lifetime chance to learn more about nature, meet new people, gain hands-on experience, and improve my skills! This summer, I'll be working on a deadfall tree project, where I will collect and identify samples of lichens and mosses from a fallen tree, to learn more about what grows high up on the trees. Furthermore, I will be assisting Isabela with invasive plant management, writing the newsletters, representing WNAS at events, participating in activities and educational talks, and maintaining the Marl Pond Trail. I've already had a great time working and learning at Wagner, having met many kind people, and I am deeply thankful for this amazing experience!



Support Us!

Female Moose

Photo courtesy of: Andy Mueller



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

VOLUNTEERS / MEMBERS

People of all talents and interests are desired and welcomed to become more closely involved with the Natural Area and the Society. Email: info@wagnerfen.ca

DONATIONS

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

Please see website www.wagnerfen.ca for donation/volunteer form.

WEED OF THE MONTH

Wild Caraway (*Carum carvi*)

By: Andy Mueller

Overview: Wild Caraway is an invasive weed species native to Europe, Asia, and North Africa. Under the *Weed Control Act*, this species is designated as a Species of Concern. Formerly a spice crop, this plant has escaped containment and has spread rapidly across Alberta's fields, ditches, and prairies. Wild Caraway is an issue as it can easily outcompete native plants, depriving them of needed resources.

Habitat: Wild Caraway prefers full sunlight, and can tolerate many soil types, pH levels, and climates. Furthermore, this species is somewhat frost resistant, making it effective at surviving Alberta's harsh winters. Wild Caraway is unable to tolerate complete shade, meaning it will not spread through thick woodland with dark canopies.

Life cycle: Wild Caraway is of the Apiaceae (Carrot) family, meaning each specimen possesses a deep, narrow taproot that makes it difficult to remove. Wild Caraway is a biennial plant, meaning its lifecycle is divided into two year-long segments. In the first year of growth, Wild Caraway produces a low rosette of leaves, and in the second year grows a flowering stalk and develops seeds.

Invasiveness: Wild Caraway spreads through seed, which can be scattered by wind, spread by animals, and sometimes seeds are present in hay bales, which can spread to wholly different areas if those bales are bought and moved elsewhere.

Origin in WNA: Wild Caraway reached Wagner by escaping from farmer's fields, and the seeds were transported by wind along ditches until it reached Wagner's fields. Additionally, the seeds have been spread deeper into the property by wandering deer, who feed on and brush against the plant. After coming in contact with the plant, its seeds will either fall off the deer, or be excreted along deer trails, where the seeds grow.

Prevention/Control: Wild Caraway should be hand pulled in the first year of their growth cycle whenever found. Preventing the plants from going to seed is very important, as the seeds can last for years, delaying germination until the right conditions present themselves. As such, it is recommended that you flag or mark areas around Wild Caraway that have been uprooted, and to regularly check them for new growths. If you live on a larger property, it is important to remember that the seeds can be carried around by animals, both domestic and not. Following animal trails off property to check for additional growths is strongly encouraged.

Identification Features:

Size: Stems can grow up to 60 to 90 cm tall.

Fruit: Crescent shape seeds, adorned with ridges. Approximately 2 mm long.

Leaves: Finely divided, alternate leaves. During the first year of the growth cycle, they bear a strong resemblance to Common Yarrow.

Flowers: White, occasionally pinkish flowers, which grow in groups atop the stem(s). Flowers are hermaphroditic and are capable of self-fertilization.



Roadside Rabbits!

By Andy Mueller

One of the projects the Wagner Natural Area Society is currently undertaking is the cleanup of the fence line along the Atim Road. While I was clearing away foliage and bushes that had grown past the ditch, I uncovered a den of baby snowshoe hares! Snowshoe hares are one of the rabbit species that are present at Wagner Natural Area, and they are common within North America. They derive their name from their large feet on their back legs, which prevent it from sinking in snow as it runs and hops. The official scientific name for the specific subspecies of snowshoe hares found in Alberta is the *Lepus americanus columbiensis*, and these hares are especially known for their seasonal variation, turning a rusty brown in summer, and white in the winter.



The den I found was located within a large bush, which reached around a metre in height, and approximately 2 metres in diameter. The center of the bush had been flattened down, likely by the parent, and the top was naturally covered by the long, winding branches. These shallow spaces are called forms, and as nocturnal and crepuscular animals, snowshoe hares spend most of the day here. During twilight and the night, they are far more active, and typically feed during this time. These hares care much more about cover, and the availability of food is less important to them when choosing a habitat, which makes Wagner, a (relatively) young forest with abundant, low height foliage a highly suitable habitat for these hares. Additionally, successional forests like Wagner are known to be rather abundant in hares in northern regions like Alberta.

When it comes to food, snowshoe hares feed upon a large variety of plant life, with succulent green vegetation being the primary food source during summer and fall, while twigs, evergreen needles, bark, and buds make up the majority of a hare's winter diet. Snowshoes are prey to numerous predators, most famously the Canada lynx, but also to most medium and large carnivores native to north America, including, but not limited to: the great horned owl, coyotes, wolves, bobcats, minks, and black bears.

A deep dive into Wagner!

By Andy Mueller

One of the services that the Wagner Natural Area Society provides is deeper incursions into the natural area, particularly to portions that are off-limits for regular visitors. These zones contain impressive and unique biodiversity and are some of the only places in the region where such a unique ecosystem can be found. As a consequence, ensuring these sites go unchanged by human interference is one of the primary responsibilities of the Society. The Society does, however, endorse guided trips into these areas, providing a safe and environmentally conscious way for interested parties to witness Wagner's natural beauty and rare plant life.

The Wagner Natural Area Society has a number of expectations for any visiting group, which are detailed in the field trip form that can be found at wagnerfen.ca/for-educators/. Beyond the basic expectations, such as respect for the natural area, proper outdoor clothing, and the proper disposal of garbage, it should also be kept in mind that traversing deeper into Wagner is both difficult and wet. Once sufficiently off the trail, dry, stable land becomes a rarity, and wading through marshland while also dodging fallen trees, deceptively deep ponds, and moss-covered hollows can prove rather challenging, even for those with waterproof footwear. Furthermore, the marl ponds that Wagner is known for can easily fool people, as while they appear shallow, the marl at the bottom will scatter and lead to sinking far deeper than you would expect, acting almost like underwater quicksand.



While the difficulties described above are significant, you should not be deterred. Wagner Natural Area Society nonetheless encourages interested groups to sign up, so that they might have a chance to witness the incredible biodiversity typical of parts of Alberta's northern boreal forest. Even in the most extreme cases, all groups will be accompanied by at least one guide experienced in navigating Wagner's restricted areas, ensuring that the groups have someone to guide them through the worst Wagner might throw at them, and lead them to the best sights it has to offer! For any aspiring explorers, please remain on the trail unless accompanied by a member of the WNAS, as exploring alone is hazardous to both people and plants. Thank you for reading!

Summer Orchid Walk!

By Andy Mueller

The Summer Orchid Walk is one of the main events for Wagner Natural Area, and it is an opportunity to be guided along the Marl Pond Trail by one or more experienced biologists familiar with Wagner's local flora. Visitors will get to see and learn about the rare plant life, observe beautiful flowers, and enjoy a wonderful summer day. Most of these guided walks take place in groups made up of interested visitors led by a few volunteers or WNAS members. I was fortunate enough to accompany two such groups during this summer's Orchid Walk, and I learned a great deal about the life cycles of each flower, their special properties, and how to identify them.

The day started off as bright and sunny, and I met several WNAS members who arrived before any of the visitors. We waited for enough visitors, which didn't take long, and then we introduced ourselves, before splitting into two groups. Each group went in a different direction, with my group going clockwise around the trail, and the other group counterclockwise. This meant my group started in the forest and got to see some of the orchids right away, including several that I had, up until that point, never realized were orchids at all. We learned that many orchid species, including Yellow Lady's-slipper produce seeds that do not have their own food stores, and therefore require nourishing fungi and moist soil to grow successfully.

As we continued along the trail, we identified and learned about a number of additional plants, including Marsh Marigold, Bog Violets, Shooting Stars, Bunchberries, Wild Roses, and more! The first group seemed to have had a great time, and I was happy to accompany them! The second group came a bit after lunch, but unfortunately it began to rain not too far into the trail, so most of them left early. Those that remained got to see the sights, and I even pointed out some of the things that I had learned! Overall, despite the rain interrupting the second trip, I had a blast, and I invite any readers to come next year!

Images below: (top) bog violet—*Viola nephrophylla*;
(bottom) tall lungwort—*Mertensia paniculata*



Wildlife Camera Project

By Isabela Bernsdorf

I am thrilled to announce the launch of the first videos from my summer student project, featuring wildlife recorded by our trail cameras at Wagner Natural Area!

These videos offer a glimpse into the diverse wildlife that inhabits our area, showcasing their behaviours and interactions in their natural habitat. This initiative intends to encourage community involvement and support local wildlife conservation efforts.

The footage, captured in May 2024, includes interesting findings, such as a deer with an antler growing downward, a moose scaring mallards, and a white coyote!

We invite you to subscribe to our channel, share the videos, and engage with us by leaving comments and questions. To watch the videos, visit our YouTube channel,

Wagner Natural Area Society, or our website at <http://wagnerfen.ca/wildlife-cameras/>.



BOARD BULLETIN

By Dave Ealey, President, Wagner Natural Area Society

It's already midsummer and time for an update about the Board activities so far this year and some activities to come. If you had the chance to read the Annual Report for 2023 in the 2023-2024 Winter Newsletter, you'll realize the significant diversity of tasks and opportunities that your Board undertakes to manage, promote, and monitor Wagner Natural Area. This year is shaping up to be even busier!

At the Annual General Meeting held April 13, we completed the usual business of reporting on finances, presenting the Annual Report, electing the Directors for 2024. Following the business items, our speaker Mike Toffan from Project Forest provided a summary of a number of rewilding initiatives that their group has been implementing in Alberta and across Canada. The Board hopes to be able to work with Project Forest and the provincial government's Public Lands division to move from small eco-islands projects on some of our weed-prone hayfields into more extensive reforestation.

The Board has undergone some changes already over the first few months of the year. We are sad to report that Cheryl Johnson-Dempsey, our former Secretary, has had to resign from our Board due to personal issues; we will miss her experience with the Parkland County schools and her enthusiasm for connecting with children among our visitors, and for improving recognition of supporters of WNAS.

Directors continuing on the Executive include Melissa Chisholm as Treasurer, Larissa Clayton as Secretary, and myself as President. The Vice-President position is vacant at the moment.

Other Directors on the Board include the following: Beth Jenkins, a long-time member who has held a number of executive positions and has extensive knowledge of our bylaws and history; Claudia Palylyk, who is a professional agrologist and has guided our efforts on FireSmart and wetland evaluation; Chris Saunders, an invasive species specialist who is spearheading our Weed Management Strategy, and Megan Edgar, a recent addition to our Board and a former summer student (2018) on Wagner Natural Area. Appointed Directors include the following: Carolyn Vanderveen, who continues to help us liaise with the Osborne Acres residents; and Eagle Willier, who is our connection with Nature Conservancy Canada.

This year we have been fortunate to get funding to help us hire two summer students, who have been doing the newsletters, and of course much work along the trail and fenceline. Maintaining payroll and working on employment-related policies and practices is necessary when you take on the obligation to hire summer students; for a volunteer Board, such work is a challenge. But we are glad to be able to train young biologists and to encourage their future career plans. As with many organizations, we face ups and downs in organization membership and in Board members. We encourage people to join the Wagner Natural Area Society as members; even better, we could use help filling Board roles. There are two openings available for Director positions on our Board. Contact us through the info@wagnerfen.ca email. We look forward to welcoming you as one of the Friends of the Fen!

The Things You Notice When You Pull Weeds

By Dave Ealey

Since 2018, we've been coordinating weed pulls to deal with a number of invasive species on the Wagner landscape. The last three years have been even more extensive with more sites and more species being targeted as we have learned more about how to properly manage weeds and, frankly, get more effective at doing so.

Volunteers are hard to recruit for such tasks as not many people seem to want to spend their weekends weeding, especially when the weather is nice. There are a lot of good reasons to make the effort and volunteer:

- You get the satisfaction of knowing that you are contributing to the protection of a special area;
- You can become a better botanist by learning how to tell similar plants apart and knowing what to pick and what not to pick (e.g., distinguishing Wild Caraway from Common Yarrow, a native plant, will save a lot of effort from picking the wrong plant!);
- You can help the WNAS maintain its status as the Volunteer Steward and Recreation Leaseholder for Wagner Natural Area, by ensuring there is a diligent effort to remove Prohibited Noxious and Noxious Weeds as required under the *Weed Control Act*;
- You can get to visit parts of the natural area that are not open for public visitation.

But the number one reason for me to spend some quality time methodically scanning areas and removing weeds is the following:

- **You will notice things that you likely would never have spotted otherwise.**

Because of my efforts scanning our tiny Morgan Creek on east Wagner Natural Area for eradication of specimens of Pale Yellow Iris, I spotted a mass of breeding earthworms floating in the water column! (Unfortunately, all I could capture was a rather grainy video.) And while on my hands-and-knees looking under shrubbery, around the edge of Villeneuve Field in NE Wagner, for Wild Caraway plants to uproot, I found three different masses of hundreds of baby spiders tucked as tiny globes among spiderwebbing (see below).

I'm not sure what I'll get to notice the next time I'm getting some exercise while eradicating weeds in a beautiful area. I do know that it will likely surprise me and make me think a bit about the benefits of doing a little volunteering for a special place.

