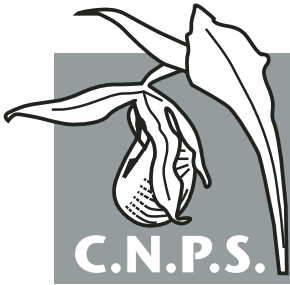


Showy Lady's Slipper



Conserve Native Plants Society Inc.

The Showy Lady's Slipper has stout, hairy stems bearing ovate opposite leaves that are light green and hairy, as well. The plants may have one to numerous blossoms, depending on environmental conditions.

The flowers vary in their colour intensity and striping, sometimes even on the same plant! The light-pinkish lip of the plant is often over an inch long. Combined with the white sepals and petals, the entire flower reaches an inch and a half in length. The many-seeded pod is elongated and round, and easily recognizable.

Their preferred habitat is the open shade of coniferous bogs or wet, grassy areas where the soil is calcareous. The Showy Lady's Slipper is generally in flower during June and July, although an early spring in Manitoba may have initiated an earlier display this year. Its height, ranging from 2 to 3 feet, and the fact that it frequently grows in clusters, makes it easy to spot for orchid lovers.

Unfortunately, its popularity also poses a problem for this stunning plant. Many plants are removed from their delicate habitat to grace city flower beds, where they may succeed, if for only a few years. Over-harvesting has led to the Showy becoming nearly extinct in Saskatchewan.

Awareness can make a huge difference in the salvation of this flower (and others). Recently, Bud Ewacha of CNPS was able to seal an agreement with the provincial conservation officer at Ochre River, with the intent of setting aside 80 acres in that area for habitat preservation. It's possible!



Showy Lady's Slipper
Cypripedium reginae
Photo by Bud Ewacha

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**Please remember to renew
your membership.**

Are Our Heritage Plants Really Protected?

On Thursday, July 6, 2006 an article appeared in the Winnipeg Free Press in regards to an incident that occurred in the municipality of Stuartburn earlier that week. The story, also covered by other media outlets such as the CBC, was titled, 'Endangered Orchids Removed by Workers.' It disclosed that, during the first week of July, a provincial maintenance crew inadvertently mowed down about 100 orchids lining a roadway ditch – plants that are “protected” under endangered species acts.

Concerned local residents brought the situation to the attention of Conservation Manitoba, who, through spokesman Jim Duncan, assured the community and other plant enthusiasts that only a small percentage of that plant population was affected. Furthermore, although the flowers were in bloom when they were cut, provincial biologist Jason Greenwall was quoted as being confident that these plants will rebound in coming years. He also stated that even though “about 100 plants were damaged, between 2,000 and 20,000 can flower in any given year.”

The Western Prairie Fringed Orchid reproduces almost entirely by seed. A requirement for propagation of this plant is contact between the minute seeds and a certain soil-dwelling mycorrhiza, common to the wet calcium-high soils found in few areas of Manitoba. Seedlings can then take several years before their first true leaves push up through the soil. The Western Prairie Fringed Orchid thrives in only a small, select area of Manitoba and Canada, and accordingly is listed as endangered, both provincially and federally in Canada, and as threatened in the United States.

Considering that 2004 was a particularly bad year for seed propagation, Conserve Native Plants Society is concerned that the loss of 100 plants is 100 too many. Although there are measures to preserve the fragile habitat of the Western Prairie Fringed Orchid, by both Nature Conservancy of Canada and the provincial government, it seems that this incident may show that the province was remiss in educating its own employees regarding protected species. In this case, deemed an accident, no penalties will be imposed, and the provincial government has committed to step-up efforts to alert maintenance crews and area residents to the endangered status of these plants.

CNPS members urge that the province makes good in its intent. For the Western Prairie Fringed Orchid, habitat preservation is of the utmost concern. This particular orchid is still at risk of disappearing because of agricultural encroachment. It is only because of measures such as the establishment of the Tall Grass Prairie preserve and the purchase of individual land tracts that its chances of survival are enhanced. Unfortunately, plant poachers still present another hazard.

Members of CNPS hope that those with the power to protect our natural heritage are not paying lip service to the critical cause of habitat preservation, ... for present and future generations to come.

