



# PRAIRIE BREEZE

THE LIVING PRAIRIE MUSEUM NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2018

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## SPRING INTERPRETIVE CENTRE HOURS

Sundays, 10 - 5 PM  
May and June

## UPCOMING EVENTS

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Workshops

Prairie Plant Sales

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## Bumble Bee in Decline

Bumble bees are beautiful and fascinating. Their fluffy bodies and rumbling buzzes are a staple of any garden or natural area. As pollinators, they are an important part of natural ecosystems and agriculture, with their visits helping plants to produce fruit and seeds.

We have a variety of bumble bees that can be found in Manitoba - about 27 species, with some only ranging in the north, and some being quite rare.

A species that can be found in our prairies, and Winnipeg, is the yellow-banded bumble bee *Bombus terricola*. This bumble bee is a species designated as Special Concern. This means that it could become Threatened, or even Extinct, if work isn't done to limit its decline. Unfortunately, the abundance of this species has dropped by about 66% over the last 10 years (COSEWIC 2015).

The females are quite distinct from other species we might see in Winnipeg. Look for bumble bees with half of their thorax (section after the head) black, and a strong black-yellow-black pattern on the abdomen. They won't have orange or brown markings, and the yellow

bands won't be interrupted.



Photo by Sheila Colla

How can we help this bee? Habitat is key. Bumble bees need lots of wildflowers for gathering pollen and nectar, and they also need leaf litter or old rodent dens to use for nesting and overwintering. This kind of habitat can be found in natural areas, but it can also be created at home. Bumble bees are also susceptible to chemical pesticides, so limiting these products in areas with busy bees can help.

You can help bee researchers by reporting bumble bee sightings. Sightings help track declines, but they can also find new populations if they exist. If you see *B. terricola*, or other bumble bees this summer, post your photos on [bumblebeewatch.org](http://bumblebeewatch.org).

## Return of the Leaf Rustlers

Every spring, many songbirds make amazing migrations across the continent. Their journey takes them from overwintering grounds in the south to their breeding ranges in the north, with distances and locations varying by species.

Grassland songbirds will remain in our prairie for the summer, but birds that nest in forest will use the preserve as a stopover during their travels. There are a couple of these seasonal guests that make their presence known by a common clue: rustling leaves.

### Fox Sparrow

These sparrows are quite variable in colour throughout their range, but we typically get individuals with beautiful rusty, red-brown feathers. They have grey feathers above their eyes, blending into the back of the neck, with brown cheeks. The flanks and chest will be streaked with brown, with the chest streaks converging to make a spot.



*Photo by Evan Lipton*

One of the best ways to know if we have fox sparrows in the preserve is a walk in the homestead. If we listen for loud, persistent rustling in the leaf litter, we might just find a plump fox sparrow looking for seeds and berries.

Fox sparrows spend their winters in the south eastern U.S., but breed in boreal and mountain

forests in the Canadian north and Alaska.

Hear their song: [https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Fox\\_Sparrow/](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Fox_Sparrow/)

### Hermit Thrush

Thrush identification can be tricky, as the species we're likely to see are very similar in appearance. When compared to sparrows, they have longer beaks and legs, with spotting rather than streaking. When compared to other thrushes, look for a reddish tail that is brighter than the feathers on the back. If you're still in doubt, play their call on your phone. It can be really fun to see a little thrush bouncing around you, trying to find the other bird!

We can also find hermit thrushes by their rustles. Take a walk in the homestead, or along the aspen forest, and listen for their rustling as they search for insects on the ground.

Hermit thrushes overwinter in the southern U.S. and Mexico, with some going as far as Guatemala. They return to open forest areas in the western U.S., throughout Canada, and into Alaska.

Hear their flute-like song: [https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Hermit\\_Thrush](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Hermit_Thrush)



*Photo by Yves Gauthier*

Learn more: [allaboutbirds.org](https://www.allaboutbirds.org)

## Which Milkweed for Winnipeg's Monarchs?

Monarch butterflies are making their way north once again. They're going to need particular plants if their larvae are going to survive. The best thing we can do to help them out is provide the right plant for the job.

Monarch butterfly caterpillars are specialists, meaning that they only feed on a small group of plants - milkweeds. There are seven species of milkweed in our province, and all are good hosts for monarch larvae. However, some are more readily available as garden plants than others, and some can be so aggressive, or so rare, that they become too problematic to grow at home.

Our top recommendation for backyard milkweed is swamp milkweed, *Asclepias incarnata*. Don't let the name fool you! This plant can stand a variety of soil moisture conditions. It's a nice addition to flower beds because it forms a shrub-like clump over a couple of years, and doesn't spread by roots. It has elegant purple flowers and grows to be about 1 m tall. Give this plant some room to expand - approximately 2 ft<sup>2</sup> between plantings.

Another favourite is dwarf milkweed, *Asclepias ovalifolia*. Living up to its name, this little plant only gets about half as tall as swamp milkweed. The flowers are creamy to white, and the leaves are more rounded before coming to a point. This species doesn't seem to spread aggressively by the roots. We've found that it does take a little more work to grow from seed, as the plants can be quite small and delicate in the first year. But, once established, it makes a beautiful caterpillar buffet.

A third favourite is whorled milkweed, *Asclepias verticillata*. This is a small, dainty species, like the lace doily of the milkweed world. The leaves are little and thread-like and

the tiny white flowers are really eye-catching. This species gets to be about 30 cm tall. It will spread by the roots, but due to its delicate nature, doesn't readily overtake a wildflower planting.

We don't recommend that you plant common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) or showy milkweed (*Asclepias speciosa*), as both are very aggressive and are considered noxious weeds in Manitoba. They are best left to grow wild in natural areas where competition can keep them in check.

We also recommend that you stick to native species. Native milkweeds are those that are found in our province naturally. Native milkweed and monarch butterflies have coevolved in our region, and their life cycles are closely linked. Native milkweeds leaf out when monarchs are returning, and die back when they should be leaving. They provide appropriate chemical compounds to protect larvae from predators and disease.

An example of a non-native species is butterfly milkweed, *Asclepias tuberosa*. This milkweed is carried by many greenhouses because of its bright orange colour. Because it isn't adapted to the conditions in Manitoba, it may not be as hardy, or grow at appropriate times, to support monarchs effectively.

A final word of caution: Milkweed has "weed" in the name for a reason! These plants will spread readily by seed. If that's not what you or your neighbours would like, you can remove the seed pods by clipping them off before they open. The seed can also be collected to grow more plants.

You can find native milkweed seeds at LPM, or visit Prairie Originals or Prairie Flora.

## Save the Date

Our annual Monarch Butterfly Festival will be held on Sunday, July 15th!

This free, family event has crafts, guided hikes, booth displays, face painting, live butterflies, and more.

Hope to see you there!

## Volunteers Needed

Watch your emails for notices about volunteer seedling transplanting.

## MUSEUM STAFF

Sarah Semmler  
Lois Grieger  
Kelly Ferrand  
Jennifer Sparling  
Josh Pearlman



Thank you for receiving your newsletter electronically.



## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Prairie Planting Workshops

Instructor John Morgan (Prairie Habitats Inc.) will help you increase biodiversity in your back yard. Find out how prairie species can be included in your landscape designs, and why using native plant material is important for conservation. Our workshops guide you through site preparation, seed germination, and planting for flower beds or larger prairie restorations.

Tuesday, April 10th	6:30 to 9:30 p.m.
Sunday, April 15th	1:00 to 4:00 p.m.
Saturday, April 21st	9:30 to 12:30 p.m.
Thursday, April 26th	6:30 to 9:30 p.m.

### Managing Your Native Landscape

This new session targets those with existing restorations or native plantings. Learn how to maintain biodiversity and reduce invasive weeds. See management in action during an optional field trip to a native prairie site. The field trip may be in mid April if we have an early spring: register soon to get on the update list!

Saturday, May 5th	9:30 to 11:30 a.m.
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Call 204-832-0167 to register for a workshop.  
\$35 plus GST, \$25 for members. Field trip \$25 (date TBD)

### Prairie Plant Sales

Ready to create some habitat at home? Prairie Flora will be on-site to offer seedlings for sale. Select from a variety of native wildflowers and grasses to create your piece of prairie heritage. Great for pollinators and birds! See [prairieflora.com](http://prairieflora.com) for available species and pre-order information.

Friday, May 18th	3:00 to 6:00 p.m.
Saturday and Sunday, May 19-20th	10:00 to 4:00 p.m.
Sunday, May 27th and June 24th	10:00 to 4:00 p.m.

### Friends of the Living Prairie Museum

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<http://www.winnipeg.ca/livingprairie>

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