



PRAIRIE BREEZE

THE LIVING PRAIRIE MUSEUM NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2017

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SUMMER INTERPRETIVE CENTRE HOURS

Seven days a week,
10 AM to 5 PM

UPCOMING EVENTS

Monarch Butterfly
Festival

Thursday Theme Days

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Fawn season

It's common to see adult white-tailed deer out on the prairie, but it isn't often that we have the opportunity to see a fawn up close.

It's normal for a female white-tailed deer to leave her fawn alone for long periods of time. Newly born fawns are not very mobile, and are safer when left hidden in the tall grass. A spotted coat and the ability to stay perfectly still help the little fawn blend in with its surroundings. The doe will return to groom and feed the fawn, then leave again to forage for herself. Excursions by mom's side increase as the fawn grows and is able to keep up over greater distances.

The fawn that was spotted on the prairie was quite close to the main trail to the homestead. The only movement that could be seen were little breaths through tiny nostrils.

What's the best thing to do if you see a fawn on its own? Give it space and leave it be. The mother is probably feeding nearby and will return in time. It's also essential that dogs are kept on a leash, as they can find and potentially injure the young animals.



*A small fawn hiding in the prairie.
Photo by K. Lucyk.*

This little fawn eventually disappeared from its grassy hide-out, but it made us think about all of the young wildlife that must be hidden in the prairie this time of year. Meadow vole pups, savannah sparrow chicks, bumble bee larvae, tiny spiderlings, and so much more are busy using this grassland to grow. It's a reminder of the important role nature preserves can play in the cycle of life.

Restoration efforts: challenges and successes

The Living Prairie Museum is a little piece of many things - endangered habitat, history, local culture, artistic inspiration, refuge, and so much more. We work very hard to maintain this site so that it may continue to grow and thrive as it has for thousands of years.

A big part of prairie conservation is restoration. Our site is an example of remnant prairie. Only a small section on the east side of the preserve was turned over for cropland (and was restored in the 70s); the rest is intact and natural. But that doesn't mean that the prairie will always be safe from wear, changes in hydrology, and the unintended results of grooming or management. When we notice that the prairie needs a hand, we work to restore the habitat to as close as natural as we can. This can involve seeding, planting plugs, and what can be most difficult, changing human behaviour.

Unofficial Trails

Something that is a never-ending struggle is protecting our prairie from the scars of unofficial trails. It's in our nature to want to take a path of least distance when travelling through an area. This results in pedestrians cutting through the prairie from one official path to another. They may not think it does much to the landscape. What are one person's footprints going to do to 12 hectares? Over time, quite a lot.

Once one person begins to use a trail regularly, others follow suit. Eventually the soil becomes extremely compacted. Prairie plant roots and seeds have difficulty with this, but introduced weeds may not. This creates a source of contamination by weedy seedlings and rhizomes that encroach upon the surrounding prairie. The exposed soil becomes a beacon for more pedestrians who begin to think that the trail is in fact official, and use increases.

The result is a weedy trail devoid of prairie vegetation that is very difficult to restore.

We're attempting to make the public more aware of what trails should and should not be used. We have been installing stakes that say "Stop, Not a Path" to deter traffic. They can be an eye-sore, but the hope is that over time they will not be necessary as people change their use. Surprisingly, many have been resistant and routinely break or vandalize the stakes. This is certainly a challenge of managing rare habitat in an urban environment.

Trail Restoration

An unofficial trail at the west entrance of the preserve is being restored to native prairie. This trail was created for two reasons: One, pedestrians were making their own trail to get to the larger path to the homestead more quickly, and two, the trail was used enough that it was beginning to appear official, so was accidentally mowed by City staff. This combination of events left a small triangle of prairie cut off from the larger habitat, putting it at severe risk of infestation by invasive weeds.



Restoration efforts: challenges and successes

We roped off the access points to this trail in hopes of stopping its use. The ropes are spread out along the correct trail to help channel pedestrians towards the official pathway. The ropes also keep the trail from being trampled while we reintroduce native plants to the soil.

Work is under way, and we have planted native seedlings along the old walking path. These seedlings were grown at the museum using seed that was hand collected at LPM or Little Mountain Park. The local genetics make them hardy and very likely to survive. The plantings will be supplemented with native seed near the end of the summer.

It's encouraging to see the plants springing back up in the mowed areas. The mower may have created some compaction, but it also mimicked natural disturbance such as grazing or burning. The vegetation is resilient and responding well to being protected from trampling. We're hoping things will fill in nicely over the next two years.

Unfortunately, not everyone appears to be excited about the restoration. We still see trampled grass, footprints from humans and dogs, and have had the stakes broken or pulled out from time to time. We know it takes a long time for some to adjust, so we hope that our signage has helped explain this important task and will encourage public cooperation. We really appreciate everyone that has been respectfully avoiding this trail.

Reintroducing the Prairie Crocus

We receive many phone calls about crocuses every spring. People love to find places to enjoy the beauty of our provincial flower, and always want to know if we have crocuses blooming on our prairie.



Our Green Team and seasonal staff planting prairie crocuses.

Historically, there were dense patches of crocuses on this site. Older photos of the preserve show that the west side was a blanket of purple petals. The museum used to open with the blooming of the crocus and we would celebrate with Crocus Days. Now, even with a lot of searching, we never seem to find a crocus in bloom at LPM.

Habitat can experience many changes when surrounded by development. Soil moisture, seed dispersal, and the frequency of disturbance are all affected. We suspect that a combination of these factors has changed the habitat to the point that it is no longer ideal for prairie crocuses.

Despite this, we're making an attempt to help the crocus return. We planted 15 mature, native crocuses with full seed heads on the west side of the preserve this spring. They've been doing great, and we hope that the seeds will grow in the surrounding prairie. It's possible that we'll be able to enjoy crocuses on this site once again, but we'll have to be patient while we see if this reintroduction will be a success.

Thank you!

We had another session on ticks and disease this summer with Dr. Richard Baydack. It was great to learn about the risks associated with ticks, and to find out about MB Health's new online photo submission page.

Thank you for attending!

Volunteers Needed

We need a lot of help to make the Monarch Butterfly Festival a success. Let us know if you can volunteer!

MUSEUM STAFF

Sarah Semmler
Lois Grieger
Kelly Ferrand



Thank you for receiving your newsletter electronically.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Monarch Butterfly Festival

Join us for the Living Prairie Museum's 11th Annual Monarch Butterfly Festival on **Sunday, July 16 from 12:00 until 4:00 PM**, rain or shine!

This free, all ages event has many activities to enjoy, including presentations by local scientists, storytelling, displays of live monarchs, crafts, guided hikes, a native prairie plant sale with Prairie Flora, and more! Receive one free milkweed per family while quantities last, and be sure to bring a t-shirt to silk screen as a festival memento.

Special guests include Assiniboine Park Zoo, Monarch Teachers Network, Winnipeg Public Library, Insect Control Branch, and Manitoba EcoNetwork.

Thursday Theme Days

Learn all about the prairie this summer! Register for one of two sessions: 10:00 - 11:00 AM or 2:00 - 3:00 PM

Friends members may register at any time, and non-members may register one week before the program.

Programs are suitable for ages 4 - 12. Adult supervision is required.

July 13 - Clouds, Storms, and the Prairie

July 20 - To Bee or Not to Bee

July 27 - Up in Flames

August 3 - Life on the Prairies

August 10 - The Sense-ational Prairie

August 17 - Prairie-mon Go

August 24 - Worms



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