

# Iowa Native Plant Society Newsletter

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## Iowa Woodlands and Forests Initiative Takes Root in NE Iowa

*submitted by Michele Mork, NE Iowa Field Coordinator/Forester, Trees Forever*



*Hepatica acutiloba*

Something new and exciting is happening in NE Iowa; an ongoing project that will set standards statewide. This project is the Iowa Woodlands and Forests Initiative (IWFI) and it is proving to be an innovative approach to assessing and reestablishing plant diversity in Iowa's woodlands.

IWFI came about as a side result of a migratory songbird study introduced by Iowa State University in 1994. The purpose of this study, in part, was to better understand habitat selection by songbirds. Fragmentation of woodlands and inappropriate land use practices have decreased certain songbird habitat, as well as diminished the diversity of woodland plant species. In response to these issues, the IWFI was put into motion. Trees Forever, The Nature Conservancy (Iowa Chapter), Iowa State University Botany Department, and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources have joined forces on this project to ensure the survival of Iowa's naturally diverse woodlands.

How is this being accomplished? Through a number of activities including: educational field days aimed at professionals and landowners, research conducted by ISU, and hands on projects designed to increase the understanding of our woodland plant species.

Late last summer, a group of volunteers from The Nature Conservancy and Trees Forever created the first IWFI demonstration plot. With permission from IDNR, several woodland plants were moved from Yellow River State Forest to a private woodland to assess the effects of transplanting. A planting grid within the woodland was created with plots identified as "less competitive" (fewer plant species to compete with the new arrivals). Control plots were identified to determine existing vegetation.

Species placed within the grid included bloodroot, maidenhair fern, wood fern, rue-anemone, wood anemone, showy tick-trefoil, great lobelia, Solomon's seal, wild ginger, and sharp-lobed hepatica. Care was taken to dig a large root ball and to transport quickly. Volunteers then transplanted, watered and flagged the plants, placing each in a similar environment to where it was originally found. It was hoped that the plants would adapt well and even flourish in their new home. Keith Fletcher of the Nature Conservancy, upon reviewing the results at the end of the day, found the event to be "a moving experience."

The transplanting results varied. A number of plants experienced transplant shock, and many had already begun to go dormant. Of all the plants, both the ferns and the wild ginger seemed most unaffected by transplanting. After a long cold winter, it will be exciting to see the first green shoots of those plants which withstood the move and to further our understanding of methods available to increase the diversity of our woodlands.

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# National Guard Welcomes INPS

*by Mary Jones, Environmental Specialist, Camp Dodge*

The Iowa National Guard is pleased to welcome the Iowa Native Plant Society to Camp Dodge. During your visit you will see a working military installation faced with ever-changing natural resource management challenges.

Some would say that military training and natural resources could never peacefully co-exist. However, throughout the country many military installations are becoming the last and best hope for the survival of many sensitive species. Thanks to partnerships with the scientific community, military land managers are identifying and protecting significant resources while continuing to train troops.

Most installations -Camp Dodge included - were once located away from cities and in areas not deemed very "useful." Now that the value of wetland, river valley, shorefront and desert communities are known, many military posts could be said to be located on prime real estate. Because of increased urbanization, installations are finding themselves to be islands of refuge for wildlife, bringing increased land management pressures.

Land managers at Camp Dodge face many of the same challenges that park system managers face. These include finding ways to maintain a balance between land use and resource protection. Park managers deal with poaching, erosion, all-terrain vehicles, wildlife populations, invader species, and site overuse. They must find a balance between the needs of site users and protection for future site use. The same is true at Camp Dodge.

In addition, National Guard troops must train. They must know how to operate vehicles, weapons and equipment. Obviously, these activities have the potential to take a toll on the environment. Partnerships with the scientific community have allowed Camp Dodge to meet this challenge by identifying areas that should be protected and enhanced. Other areas are then certified for training use and monitored to prevent erosion and other signs of site overuse. Several wetland areas have been identified for restoration and survey. Areas of native prairie have been located and posted for further protection. Over 200 acres of Camp Dodge has been planted to native grasses in order to test the power of the prairie against the new "buffalo" - M-1 tanks. These acres will be compared against other types of groundcovers in order to create future land revegetation strategies.

Throughout its 90 year history, Camp Dodge has changed in size and in the types of training that occur here. Modern military equipment and training requires more land on which to maneuver. In the past five years, the post has nearly doubled in size from 2,000 to over 4,000 acres. Maintaining this land in peak condition can be expensive. As budgets shrink, land managers learn that rehabilitation costs must be reduced by monitoring and identifying problems early. This makes natural resource protection not only the right thing to do, but the cost effective thing to do.

As the land is converted from row crop use to training area use, the Camp Dodge natural resource program continues to grow. Tiles were broken last summer to convert 30 acres of farmland back into the wetland seen on maps from the 1900s. Native species are beginning to make a comeback and wildlife species are an increased presence. You are invited to see these areas in their infancy and to watch as they grow.

**The Iowa Native Plant Society Annual Meeting is scheduled for August 2, 1997, at Camp Dodge, Johnston, Iowa. Meeting agenda and field trip information will be in next newsletter.**

# On the horizon...

## ...1997 INPS Events

**ALL EVENTS START AT 10 AM SHARP. BRING A SACK LUNCH AND REFRESHMENTS.**

Saturday, May 17: Anderson Prairie State Preserve (Emmet County).

Participants will be fortunate to have veteran conservation officer and naturalist Bob Moats on hand to show us this wonderful prairie. Bob will no doubt captivate us with numerous tidbits of Anderson Prairie's natural history while pointing out pasque flower, prairie dandelion, locoweed, and other spring wildflowers in this prairie. We have an excellent chance of seeing two rare Iowa forbs on this trip: kittentails (*Besseyia bullii*) and biscuit-root (*Lomatium orientale*). After lunch, we may travel to Fort Defiance State Park to look for woodland wildflowers.

Leader: Bob Moats

Directions: From Estherville, drive west on Iowa Hwy 9 until you reach a primitive rest area on the north side of the road (approx. 1 mile). Turn north onto a gravel road here. Travel 1.5 miles north on this road; Anderson Prairie will be on the right. From Spirit Lake: drive east on Iowa Hwy 9 to the little town of Superior (6 miles). Continue driving east on Hwy 9 until you reach the primitive rest area on the north side of the highway (approx. 8 miles). Turn north onto the gravel road. Travel 1.5 miles, and Anderson Prairie is on the right (east side).

Saturday, June 14: Peterson property (Muscatine County). Please note early starting time of 9:00 a.m.

We will visit a very interesting Swamp White Oak-Bur Oak community. The property is about 380 acres and has low sandy ridges and swales, several ponds and a creek running through it. We were excited to find two good-sized populations of *Phlox bifida* in bloom there at the end of April. The Nature Conservancy has a lease with an option to buy on this property and is anxious to have folks out there, looking for plants, herps and birds. After lunch, those who wish may attend a Nature Conservancy outing at Greiner Preserve nearby, which begins at 1:00 p.m.

Leader: Mary Brown (319) 338-3875

Directions: The Peterson property is about 5 miles south of Nichols. From Highway 70, south of Nichols, turn east on G28. The entrance to the property will be about 3 miles down the road on your left (north). On the way, you will pass a sign for Gedney Lake County Recreation Area on the right (south). Stay on G28 and cross the bridge over Gedney Lake. Begin watching on the left (north) for the

first gravel drive. There is a "For Sale" sign. This is the entrance to the Peterson property. If you are coming from the east on G28, the entrance is less than a mile west of the Cedar River bridge.

Saturday, June 28: Wearin Prairie (Mills County).

This 45 acre private river bottom prairie in southwest Iowa near Hastings (partway between Glenwood and Red Oak) is unusual in that otherwise prime farmland (not a wetland) along the Nishnabotna River was never plowed. It has 140+ species including federally endangered western prairie fringed orchid and very little invasion of exotics.

Leader: Bruce Heyne

Directions: From Red Oak (intersection of US 34 & IA 48): west on US 34 17 miles to 350th St (Mills county L66). For landmarks, L66 is a T intersection .25 miles west of the West Nishnabotna bridge; or 1 mile west of the Hastings turnoff. Turn North on L66; go nearly a mile; turn east into the field (probably corn) just south of the first house on the east side of the road (separate driveway); follow the drive as it winds through the field until you come to the prairie (and the river). Alternatively, go east on US 34 from Glenwood (the intersection of US 275 and US 34 on the SW edge of town) 12.5 miles and turn north on L66 as above.

For those who wish to carpool to the Wearin Prairie, meet at 9:30 at the parking lot of the high school in Red Oak. It is located on the south side of US 34 about .5 mile east of IA 48 junction or across from the hospital and a block or so west. Access the school from the street on the east side of it.

Saturday, July 19: Savanna Restoration/Slip Bluff Park (Decatur County).

Participants will have the opportunity to tour a diverse savanna owned and currently being restored by INPS member Sibylla Brown. Among the many plants we should see in flower is a rare lily, *Veratrum woodii*. Before touring the savanna, we will meet at Slip Bluff Park to explore the woodland flora there.

Leader: Sibylla Brown

Directions: Meet at the shelter at Slip Bluff Park. From the north - - take Highway 2 east off of I-35 (exit 12); follow Highway 2 to Highway 69 (on west edge of Leon); take Highway 69 south to Davis City. About halfway through Davis City there will be signs for Slip Bluff; follow signs to the park. From the south (for Missourians) - - take exit for Highway 69 off of I-35 (just north of border); take 69 north to Davis City and follow signs.

Saturday, August 2: INPS ANNUAL MEETING: Camp Dodge (Johnston, Polk County).

This military installation has a surprising diversity of unusual habitats, including a sand prairie, extensive freshwater wetlands, and rich wooded bottomlands, where we should see cardinal flower in bloom. Over 400 plant species have been recorded on this property during a recent inventory of the flora. Field trips will follow the morning meeting. BE PREPARED TO GET YOUR FEET WET!!

Leaders: Ruth Herzberg, Tom Rosburg, Glenn Fuchs

Directions: Take I-80/35 to the Merle Hay Road exit. Go north through Johnston until you get to NW Beaver Drive. Take a left and go west until you get to Camp Dodge's main entrance. Stay to the right and go to Des Moines Ave. Take a right and go to 13th St. Park behind building M-9. Classroom 2 is where we will be meeting.

Saturday, August 23: Buffalo Slough (Cerro Gordo County) - Co-sponsored by The Nature Conservancy (Iowa Chapter)

Participants will join forces to begin a floristic inventory of this recent TNC acquisition, which is known to possess a diverse fen community with plants like bog buckbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*).

Leaders: Joel Hanes, Jerry Selby

Directions: Buffalo Slough is a wet slough area surrounded by residential areas. A gift of long time INPS member Lucille L. Minott, Buffalo Slough is a slough/channel fen with at least three species of rare plants including the largest population of bog buckbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*) in Iowa. This site has an ecological rating of 2, and the community type of a poor fen. Rare or endangered species include: sedge skipper, baltimore, great angelica, swamp aster, fragrant false indigo, prairie bush clover, bog buckbean, bog bedstraw, sage willow, bog willow and braetted orchid.

Directions: From the intersection of Hwy 65 and 12th Street NE in Mason City, turn east onto 12th St. and go to North Carolina Ave. (the first intersection after the Winnebago River). Turn north for approximately 1.5 miles to 2319 N. Carolina Ave. You will be directed to a parking area east of the house at this address.

Saturday, October 4: Lacey-Keosauqua State Park (Van Buren County)

Details: Provided later.

Leader: Ellen Fuller

Directions: Meet at the Hotel Manning in Keosauqua (you can't miss it).

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## In a Nutshell...

TNC: The Nature Conservancy; CIPN: Central Iowa Prairie Network; IPN: Iowa Prairie Network

Call numbers provided for further information.

May 10: Cedar Hills Sand Prairie, Black Hawk County (TNC)  
1 p.m. (515) 244-5044

May 13: Ames High School Prairie, Story County (TNC)  
6:30 p.m. (515) 244-5044

May 17: Sioux City Prairie, Woodbury County (TNC)  
1 p.m. (515) 244-5044

May 17: Kaufmann Avenue Prairie, Dubuque County (TNC)  
1 p.m. (515) 244-5044

May 17: Inventory Techniques Workshop at Timberhill, restored savanna, Decatur County (CIPN)  
9:30 a.m. (515) 382-2802 or (515) 446-7358

May 18: Retz Memorial Woods, Clayton County (TNC)  
1 p.m. (515) 244-5044

May 22: Doolittle Prairie, Story County (CIPN)  
7 p.m. (515) 432-5026

May 30 - June 1: Loess Hills Seminar, Monona County (Western Hills AEA, Monona County Conservation Board)  
(712) 274-6083

## mother activities of interest to INPS members

May 31: Schroeder Preserve, Chickasaw County (IPN)  
1 p.m. (319) 235-9907

June 7: Crossman Prairie, Howard County (TNC)  
1 p.m. (515) 244-5044

June 14: Greiner Family Nature Preserve, Muscatine County (TNC)  
1 p.m. (515) 244-5044

June 16: Grant Ridge Prairie, Story County (CIPN)  
7 p.m. (515) 232-3807

June 17: Ames High School Prairie, Story County (TNC)  
6:30 p.m. (515) 244-5044

June 25: Raymond-Rolling Prairie, Story County (CIPN)  
7 p.m. (515) 377-2930

June 27-29: Iowa Department of Natural Resources Natural History Foray, Walnut Creek National Wildlife Refuge, Marion County (DNR) (515) 281-3891

June 28: Broken Kettle Grasslands, Plymouth County (TNC)  
1 p.m. (515) 244-5044

July 30 - August 2: Midwest Oak-Savanna & Woodland Conference. Memorial Union of University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI.

August 11-15: Natural History Week at Iowa Lakeside Lab.  
(515) 294-2488

## Wearin Prairie

submitted by Tom Rosburg

Floodplain prairie is among the most rare of all prairie communities in Iowa. The rich alluvial soils that support floodplain prairie were among the most eagerly sought soils for agricultural development. Fortunately, there are a few remnant examples of this tallgrass community that have been conserved. Wearin Prairie, located in Mills County along the Nishnabotna River, is perhaps the only place in Iowa where an extensive tract of tallgrass floodplain prairie still abuts a major river without the presence of riparian woodland. The 45 acre prairie is also the largest native remnant in southwestern Iowa outside of the Loess Hills.

Wearin is a wet-mesic to mesic prairie, dominated by big bluestem and switchgrass, and in areas by prairie cordgrass. Diversity and quality is high for most of the tract. Barb Wilson, a naturalist who formerly lived in southwestern Iowa, completed an inventory of the prairie and found at least 100 native prairie species. Weedy problems caused by sweet clover and red clover on the north portion appear to be decreasing. In 1995, the Iowa Prairie Network annual meeting was held in southwestern Iowa and a field trip was held at Wearin Prairie. Abundant precipitation in 1995 had made the prairie very productive and vigorous. Much of the big bluestem and prairie cordgrass was easily eight feet or more tall. Prairie blazingstar (*Liatris pycnostachya*), rattlesnake master (*Eryngium yuccifolium*) and compass plant (*Silphium laciniatum*) were flowering profusely. In most years, and especially in a wet year, a late summer visit to Wearin prairie will give one a true sense of the claustrophobic feeling the early pioneers must have had as they tried to negotiate the tallgrass prairie wilderness.

For the bulk of its history, most of the prairie has been annually hayed by Otha Wearin (now deceased). A portion on the east side of the prairie and adjacent to the Nishnabotna appears to have been fenced and grazed. Currently, Becky Pulk, the daughter of Otha and the manager of Wearin estate, leases the prairie to Keith McGinnis, a prairie nurseryman in Glenwood. Fire management has been used on Wearin prairie at least since the mid 1980's, when Dr. Thomas Bragg (University of Nebraska at Omaha) and Barb Wilson assisted Otha in performing some spring burns. Keith McGinnis has been implementing burns and harvesting seed from the prairie since 1995. Half of the prairie was burned in 1996, and the whole remnant was burned near the first of April in 1997. Natural erosion of northeastern corner of the prairie into the Nishnabotna has been a problem for many years, and attempts have been made to stabilize the bank with concrete rubble.

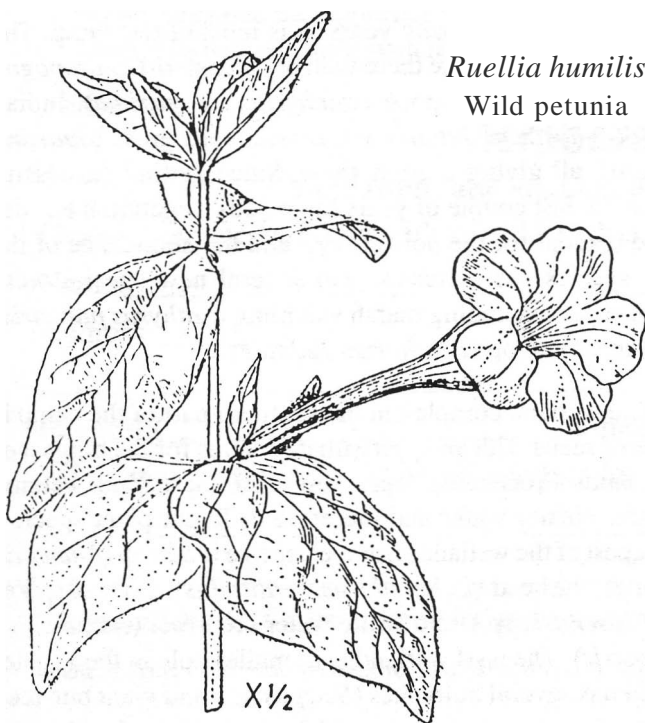
If you are able to join the Iowa Native Plant Society field trip scheduled for June 28, you could have the opportunity to see some of the following plant species: Sullivant's milkweed (*Asclepias sullivantii*), wild petunia (*Ruellia humilis*), golden alexander (*Zizia aurea*), Indian plantain (*Cacalia tuberosa*), western prairie fringed orchid (*Platanthera praeclara*), Culver's root (*Veronicastrum virginianum*), fringed loosestrife (*Lysimachia ciliata*), western wild lettuce (*Lactuca ludoviciana*), and water hemlock (*Cicuta maculata*). Good populations of several butterflies and moths have also been observed, including regal fritillaries, dusky wings, and the clouded crimson moth (a specialist on flowering species of gaura).

## Timberhill Restored Savanna

submitted by Sibylla Brown

Timberhill is comprised primarily of upland oak-hickory timber which descends in wooded ridges to Brush Creek. The area is quite hilly with scattered openings of grassland. A diverse population of prairie plants including *Spiranthes magnicamporum*, *Gentiana flavida*, *Liatris squarrosa*, and *Asclepias hirtella* and *A. purpurascens* inhabit the grassland. In the oak savannas both woodland and prairie plants are found including *Delphinium carolinianum*, *Eryngium yuccifolium*, *Eupatorium purpureum*, *Lithospermum canescens*, and *Amorpha canaescens*. Many of the savanna oaks are over one hundred fifty years old.

There is a large population of *Veratrum woodii* in the lower woodlands above Brush Creek. Since the suppression of prairie fires the ridges have filled in with oak hickory and ash and are now comprised primarily of woodland plants. The *Veratrum woodii* has spread throughout all the lower woodland.



*Ruellia humilis*  
Wild petunia

# Camp Dodge Preview

## Johnston, Iowa

*submitted by Ruth Herzberg*

Camp Dodge is a wildlife haven on the edge of an expanding metroplex, an Iowa National Guard training area by name, a botanist's wonder by sight (with a closer look). Home of the nation's largest swimming pool. Parts of the military base are farmed by local farmers. A couple of years ago Camp Dodge purchased an additional 2,000 acres to double its size to 4,000 acres.

I have spent the last three years collecting plants (for a floristic survey) from the diverse habitats that can be found within the boundaries of the Camp Dodge fences (except the poison ivy, of course, which is plentiful. Beware! Dress appropriately!). These include many bottomland woodlands that dissect the camp along Beaver Creek, the hidden prairie pothole, old sandy fields, *Carex* swales, old pastures, old homesteads, a small prairie remnant and a series of wetlands. I have found many interesting plants from the early Toothwort (*Dentaria laciniata*) in the woodlands to the late-blooming bottle gentian (*Gentiana andrewsii*) in the prairie remnant.

The post is a stone's throwaway from the southwest side of Saylorville Lake and is found by driving across the dam and exiting the park. Just before you get to Beaver Drive, on the south side of the road, is a beautiful small mature upland oak woodland with black, white and red oak (*Quercus* sp.) in the overstory. The herbaceous layer emerges in the spring, with spring beauty (*Dicentra cucullaria*), wild ginger (*Asarum canadense*) Jack-in-the-pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*), liverleaf (*Hepatica llobilis*) and an occasional showy orchis (*Galearis spectabilis*). An early woodland sedge (*Carex pensylvanica*) can be seen in this woodland also. A delight for winter weary eyes. Many ferns are also found in this rich woodland, including northern maidenhair fern (*Adiantum pedatum*), northern lady fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*), rattlesnake fern (*Botrychium virginianum*), and fragile fern (*Cystopteris tenuis*). This woodland is a complex of mature oak and scrub woodland interspersed with prairie plants, sedges (*Carex* sp.) and grasses.

An extensive environmental assessment by over 20 scientists from Iowa State University, University of Iowa and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, has been conducted over the last few years including hydrological, geological, bird, dragonfly, and herpetile surveys (including the building of a snake hibernaculum). Wetland, prairie and woodland restorations, with the possibility of planting woodland wildflowers, are ongoing at this time. A local Boy Scout troop is working on stabilizing a stream bank this spring. Central Iowa environmental groups have also become interested in Camp Dodge with the proposed construction of a major road extension past the southernmost, nearly pristine 11,300 year old prairie pot-

hole that sits "quietly" out of the way within the camp's boundaries. A "no impact" statement was made by the Corps of Engineers in an environmental assessment late last year, with much feedback from the public on how it would affect the pothole.

The diversity of the habitats has brought a list of the plant species to nearly 600. There are so many different areas to be viewed that it is hard to decide which area would be of most interest to the majority of the Native Plant Society's members. My most memorable time was when I was collecting at the biggest of the sand prairies. I was in amongst a big patch of partridge pea (*Chamaecrista fasciculata*) with the yellow flowers surrounding me. I sat and watched and listened as the bees buzzed from one flower to the next. I felt as this was a tiny example of what the settlers must have experienced. The earliest blooming plant on this old field is the blue transparent faces of the prairie blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium campestre*). Wild geraniums (*Geranium carolinianum*), common cinquefoil (*Potentilla simplex*), and wild four o'clocks (*Mirabilis nyctaginea*), and one white wild indigo plant (*Baptisia lactea*) bloom in early to mid June, as well as bracted plantain (*Plantago aristata*) and salt and pepper plant (*Plantago patagonica*), with ragged evening primrose (*Oenothera laciniata*), rattlebox (*Crotalaria sagittalis*), small-flowered gaura (*Gaura parviflora*), wild bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*) and round-headed bush clover (*Lespedeza capitata*) making good appearances in July and August. We should see these plants as well as many grass species (*Agalinis*, *Agrostis*, *Aristida*, *Dichanthelium*, *Muhlenbergia*, *Tridens*), sedges, and rushes (*Juncus* sp.) when we are there in early August.

The prairie remnant is small but diverse. It is located in the floodplain of Beaver Creek, near the shooting ranges, and had been mowed for many years as is most of the camp. The typical prairie grasses are there with big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*), little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), Indian grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*) and prairie cord grass (*Spartina pectinata*), all giving a good show. Since getting successful bums in the last couple of years the woody vegetation has decreased (except for the poison ivy), and the abundance of the prairie species has increased and several new species were found last year including marsh vetchling (*Lathyrus palustris*) and ditch stonecrop (*Penthorum sedoides*).

The wetland complex in the southern part of the camp is a series of seeps with an approximate 5 acres for the biggest of the wetlands. Proceeding "upstream" each succeeding wetland maintains clearer water and therefore different plant species. The biggest of the wetlands has species like toothcup (*Ammania coccinea*), burhead (*Echinodorus cordifolius*), several spike-rush (*Eleocharis* sp.), and white water crowfoot (*Ranunculus Longirostris*). The next wetland is a smaller hole in the vegetation and has several bulrushes (*Scirpus* sp.) and giant bur-reed (*Sparganium eurycarpum*), with a rare grass, bead grass

(*Paspalum setaceum*), that was found in the old pasture that surrounds the wetland. Also several sedge species have been found throughout the complex. A rare prairie bulrush (*Scirpus americanus*) can be found in one of the smaller wetlands farther north in the complex, as well as wild iris (*Iris shrevei*) Many common species are found there such as, water plantain (*Alisma plantago-aquatica*), arrowheads (*Sagittaria cuneata* and *S. latifolia*) and rushes (*Juncus torreyii*, *J. dudleyi* and *J. interior*).

We hope you find Camp Dodge to be an exciting place to investigate Iowa's native plants and maybe we can have another field trip in the future to see some of the other habitats.

**Notes...**

Progress is being made in having the new logo design on t-shirts, at least by the time of the Annual Meeting in August.

Early reports of the Fish Farm Mounds fieldtrip indicate it was well attended. Bill said about 50 people were on hand to enjoy the beautiful spring weather. Full report and pictures are expected for the next issue of the newsletter.

Many of us in the Ames area enjoyed the visit Dr. Voss made to ISU in late March. He presented two lectures on the conservation of rare plants around the Great Lakes region. It was a wonderful icebreaker for what was becoming a long, gray winter. The most striking aspect of his talks was his intimate knowledge of the plants and their habitats. This knowledge was well earned since he not only grew up on the shore of Lake Michigan, but has spent all his summers teaching at the University of Michigan Biological Station near his family cabin. This "rootedness in one place" presents the opportunity for the depth of connectedness he demonstrated with the plants and the landscapes.

*Veratrum woodii*,  
species profile on next page



**Membership Form and Survey:**

Your Input and support of the Iowa Native Plant Society are important:

Please complete and send with your 1997 dues of \$10 to Mary Brown. 330 Windsor Dr., Iowa City, IA 52245.

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

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

Phone #:(\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_- \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail address \_\_\_\_\_

Additional information or special interests for member directory entry: \_\_\_\_\_

Program ideas?:(Skills or knowledge to share with other INPS members, field trips you are willing to lead or would like offered, workshop or discussion topics) \_\_\_\_\_

**D** Mark this box if you DO NOT wish this information published. INPS member form and survey May 1997

# Species Profile: False Hellebore (*Veratrum woodii*)

## A Showy but Rare Member of Southern Iowa's Woodland Flora

Common name: (Wood's) False Hellebore

Scientific name: *Veratrum woodii* Robbins. The species is named in honor of Alphonso Wood (1810-1881), best known for his "beginning" textbooks of botany; the genus name is the Latin for "hellebore", as members of the genus share similar pharmacological properties with *Helleborus* (in the Ranunculaceae or buttercup family)

Family: Liliaceae-the lily family (or Melanthiaceae if splitting the large lily family)

If found in flower, *Veratrum woodii* can be spectacularly handsome, sending up blooming stalks to heights of 3 to nearly 6 feet. Even the early season growth is impressive, with large, "pleated" basal leaves that emerge in the spring. The leaves become much narrower progressing up the stem to the flower panicle. The flowers on the short, lowermost branches of the panicle are staminate (male), with 6 stamens; upwards the flowers are mostly pistillate (female) or perfect (having both stamens and pistils). Each flower has 6 maroon-colored tepals between 1/4 and 1/2 inch long. The maroon color of the tepals fades to a dull greenish-purple as the fruit is developing into an oval-shaped capsule containing winged seeds.

*Veratrum woodii* flowers July to September. Julian Steyermark, in *Flora of Missouri*, says that flowering appears to be very irregular, some seasons passing without any flowering taking place, or with a small percentage of the plants bearing flowering stalks. It is generally found on rich, calcareous wooded slopes. Wood's false hellebore ranges from Ohio and Iowa, south to Missouri and Oklahoma. In Iowa, it is found only rarely in scattered places in the southern part of the state.

Estimates of number of species in the genus *Veratrum* range from 25 to 45. The false hellebores are found pretty much across the temperate regions of the Northern Hemisphere. The six species of North America grow across the temperate U.S. from California and Oregon to the Atlantic Coast states. In Europe and the western U.S., the false hellebores are typically found in meadows, especially in wet spots; however, the three eastern U.S. species are members of the woodland flora.

*Veratrum* shares the same kind of or very similar alkaloids as the related death camas (*Zigadenus*). Its acute symptoms, if eaten, affect the circulatory and nervous systems and can cause death. It is known to be teratogenic (i.e., causing birth defects) as well. An extract from the rootstock has been tried medicinally to treat high blood pressure, but because of the varying amounts and stabilities of the alkaloids, along with the potential teratogenic effects, it is considered too dangerous to be marketed. Ordinarily, most grazing animals avoid the plant because of its sharp burning taste. In Europe a species of *Veratrum* is used as an insecticide.

We can hope that *Veratrum woodii* will cooperate this year, putting on a fine show when we visit Sibylla Brown's savanna restoration site in Decatur County on July 19th!

Iowa Native Plant Society  
c/o Deb Lewis  
Botany Department  
Iowa State University