



H.Taube

Showy Aster, *Eurybia conspicua*, Oleskiw Park, July 2021

From Your Editor:

Welcome to the Wildflower News for August.

The weather this season has certainly proved challenging. Even the drought-tolerant native plants in some areas in the wild are showing signs of stress. Certainly our native plant growers are having a bit of a struggle to keep all those plants in pots watered and alive. A few days of steady rain would be most welcome!

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Something Different

Stop the presses!

Native plants in local gardens:

Alan Jones: Here are some pictures of my wildflower patches.



L: Giant hyssop, *Agastache foeniculum*; C: Tufted white prairie aster, *Symphyotrichum ericoides*;
R: Showy fleabane. *Erigeron speciosus*.

WN: Your little patches with native plants seem to be filling in very nicely!

From the Habitat Garden at the St. Albert Botanical Garden:



Top row left to right: mixed native wildflowers; curly-cup gumweed, *Grindelia squarrosa*; meadow blazingstar, *Liatris ligulistylis* and giant hyssop, *Agastache foeniculum*

Bottom row left to right: Joe Pye weed, *Eutrochium maculatum*; rhombic-leaved sunflower, *Helianthus pauciflorus* subsp. *subrhomboideus*

WN: Definitely worth a trip to see!

From a trip to Big Island by Hubert Taube:



Physostegia ledinghamii,
Ledingham's false-dragonhead



Glycyrrhiza lepidota, wild liquorice.



Eurybia sibirica,
Siberian aster



Erigeron strigosus,
rough fleabane.



Alisma triviale,
northern water-plaintain.



Sium suave, common waterparsnip.

WN: Nice to see some wildflowers from the river valley.

EVENTS - if you would like us to list your event that involves native flowers, please email us at engedmonton@gmail.com by the 25th of the previous month.

No events this month.

NEWS... If you have a news item involving native plants that you would like posted, please email us at engedmonton@gmail.com

No news either!

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Top 5 Native Plants for Birds in a City Garden by Melissa Penney

With so many choices for native plants that benefit birds it's really hard to pick just five! But since most city yards are small, you have to make the most of what you have.

Why do birds need native plants? They return season after season, despite our cold winters and sometimes searing hot summers (without being babysat by the hose). Native plants also attract the insects that birds want to eat. By attracting beneficial insects, your whole garden will get better pollination. This will give you more flowers, which means more seeds and berries for birds! You may recognize some of the names in my Top Five from the garden centre. But the versions of these plants sold there are typically cultivars (not true native plants) so they are less attractive to birds, insects and pollinators. All of my top five plants are easy to grow from seed and readily available for purchase in Edmonton.

In addition to deciding what to plant, it's important to consider where to plant to maximize the benefit for birds. Birds (and pollinators) enjoy mass plantings. You do not want to scatter your plants around the yard and make it a scavenger hunt for them! You are bringing birds to your garden so you can enjoy them, so plant where you can watch them!



Meadow Blazingstar (full sun)

Meadow Blazing Star blooms in July and August with tall fluffy purple-ish spikes. It's a magnet for bees, butterflies and other beneficial insects (like flower flies). It's also attractive to ruby-throated hummingbirds! And when the flowers die, the seeds stay on the plant providing a feast for black-capped chickadees, pine siskins, goldfinches and other birds. Of course, all those bees, butterflies and insects will also provide a feast for your birds!



Giant Hyssop (full/part sun)

True to its name, Giant Hyssop grows up to three feet and is capped with a light purple spike of flowers! Another summer bloomer, its flowers will attract pollinators and then its spikes will save their seeds for hungry birds. Most songbirds eat seeds, especially those in the finch family like goldfinches, pine siskins, and house finches. They will gorge themselves on this plant. Giant hyssop is fast growing and thus a great choice for mass planting. The seeds that the birds don't eat will fall to the ground and give you even more plants the next year!



Yarrow (full sun, it can grow in the shade but might get floppy)

Another important pollinator plant, this typically white (or sometimes light pink) flower will attract many beneficial insects, butterflies and bees. The long-blooming yarrow often displays its flowers from June all the way through August! It spreads vigorously, so be careful where you plant it. Most migratory birds are insectivores, so yarrow will bring a smorgasbord of insects! Since birds do not love its seeds as much as others, you can control their spread by snipping off the flowers before the seeds fall and make beautiful dried-cut flowers. It is also a great choice for difficult grow areas: yarrow will persevere!

(Photo: Flora of Quebec, Google)



Wild Bergamot

Wild bergamot (or monarda) is a lovely, delicate looking pink-ish flower that is a major attractant for ruby-throated hummingbirds. Like the giant hyssop, it is tall and elegant and will create a mass planting quickly on its own. After the ruby-throated, bees and butterflies have finished gorging on the nectar, the inside of the flower (the nutlet) dries and becomes extremely attractive to song birds. The nutlet reminds me of a sunflower head with all the seeds packed tightly inside (except that the Wild Bergamot seeds are much smaller).



Common Tall Sunflower

This sunflower is very tall indeed, but has smaller heads than most. Its seeds are also small, which makes them easier for smaller birds to eat. After enjoying their sunny faces in the late summer, birds will camp out and pick the heads clean! The common tall sunflower's nutritious seeds are ready just in time for the migratory birds who are storing up energy for their long flight south. Being a native plant, this sunflower will also attract the kinds of bugs that birds love. And unlike many of the sunflowers sold at garden centres or sprouting near your bird feeder, the common tall sunflower is perennial. You can control the size of the patch by digging up the small unwanted plants.

You have probably noticed that my Top Five native plants share some important features. They have flowers that attract bees, butterflies and beneficial insects as well as seeds for the birds to eat in the fall (and even over the winter). Planting a native flowering shrub that produces berries will ensure that you have even more birds stopping by your yard. My picks would be red osier dogwood and common snowberry.

If you are looking for more tips on how to create habitat for birds in your yard, you can follow me on Instagram: @urban_bird_garden

All photos by ENPS volunteers, unless otherwise noted.

If you go down to the marsh today...look for the umbel-bearing plants in flower and fruit by Patsy Cotterill

July and August are the months when several of the flowers of plants that grow in wetlands achieve prominence. This late-season flowering differs from many of the woodland species which flower early before dense canopy shade develops. The white tops of two tall herbaceous marsh plants particularly stand out as beacons above the green stands of sedges. They are spotted water-hemlock (*Cicuta maculata*) and common water-parsnip (*Sium suave*). Like other members of the carrot family (Apiaceae, formerly Umbelliferae, that is, umbel-bearing) they have hollow stems, large roots, expanded leaf bases that form a partial sheath round the stem, and most obviously, very small, numerous flowers in flat-topped, umbrella-like clusters called umbels. Because of their superficial similarity and simultaneous flowering the two species are often confused, but in fact they are easily told apart by their leaves.

The leaves of spotted water-hemlock are compound, divided odd-pinnately into coarsely toothed, lanceolate leaflets that are further divided once (twice-pinnate) or twice (three times pinnate). The variety of spotted water-hemlock we have in Alberta is var. *angustifolia*, so its common name is, strictly, narrow-leaved water-hemlock. In comparison, the above-ground leaves of water-parsnip are only divided once (once-pinnate) into opposite pairs of narrower leaflets topped by a terminal leaflet.

Water-parsnip is the only species in its genus (*Sium*) in Alberta, but in fact we have three species of *Cicuta*. *Cicuta virosa* is very similar to *C. maculata*, differing in details of fruit shape but most obviously in the more elongate spaces between the veins on the leaf undersides. It is the common species of Europe but in North America is much less common than spotted water-hemlock, and in my experience seems to prefer somewhat more peaty wetlands. Observant explorers of marshes and especially peaty wetlands will, however, almost certainly encounter bulbous or bulbil-bearing water-hemlock (*C. bulbifera*). Although shorter than the other water-hemlocks and so slender as to be inconspicuous from a distance, it is quite distinctive. Most leaves are twice to three-times divided into linear segments and, intriguingly, many of the flowers in the inflorescence are replaced by small bulbils, which are capable of germinating to produce new plants directly when they fall in mud.

The fatal toxicity of water-hemlocks (*Cicuta* species) to man and domestic animals is legendary. The poison is cicutoxin, and it is especially concentrated in the thick, white tuberous roots. It works on the nervous system causing an array of awful symptoms and violent convulsions prior to death. Muskrats have been recorded as eating the stems, but the death of beaver following ingestion has been observed; generally, we can assume that aquatic mammalian herbivores avoid the water-hemlocks. Before anyone starts calling for the removal of water-hemlocks, which are really only an occasional danger to livestock, be aware that the flowers provide pollen and nectar for a variety of insects.

Poison-hemlock (*Conium maculatum*) is included in Alberta's flora, but this native of Europe and North Africa is an introduction. The only specimen I have ever seen was at the George Pegg Botanic Garden, near Glenevis. The stems have purple blotches and thus better qualify the plant to be called "spotted" than *C. maculata*, whose stems are often merely pinkish. *Conium* is considered to be the plant administered to poison Socrates, but it is actually less toxic than our water-hemlocks, and is used in homeopathy.

One has to wonder what the advantage to the plant is in producing such a potent toxin, especially as the plants, although common, grow as isolated specimens, suggesting that lack of herbivory does not boost their ability to dominate space. But perhaps that is research for another day!



Cicuta maculata, showing flowering plant.
Zeiner campground, Pigeon Lake
Provincial Park, 2009-07-19.

C. maculata showing twice-pinnate leaves and glaucous stem.
Wagner Natural Area, 2013-07-03.



C. maculata, showing developing fruits.
Big Island, SW Edmonton, 2015-08-03.



C. bulbifera, early flowering stage.
Halfmoon Lake Natural Area,
2016-07-09.



C. bulbifera, showing
developing bulbils. Lily Lake,
Lesser Slave Lake Provincial
Park, 2009-08-20



Sium suave. Elk Island,
2019-07-20.



S. suave, showing once-pinnate
leaves with narrow leaflets. 199
Street NW, Edmonton, 2019-08-10.



S. suave, showing upper pinnate leaves
and more deeply dissected (usually
submersed) lower leaves. Also note the
swollen leaf base on the large leaf at the
left. Gambling Lake, 2017-06-28.

Websites of the Month:

Alberta Native Plant Council

Here is the last issue of *IRIS*, the latest ANCP newsletter: https://anpc.ab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/IRIS_87_Winter_2021.pdf.

If you become a member you will receive the IRIS as well as ANPC info emails on a monthly basis - lots of cool information, and emails for Plant Happenings. To become a member: https://anpc.ab.ca/?page_id=108

Eastern Slopes Coal Policy

From an email by Ian Urquhart, AWA Incoming Executive Director, asking those who are concerned about coal mining in the Eastern Slopes to share your views on a coal policy by email to energy.coalpolicy@gov.ab.ca. Here's the link to the Committee's website: <https://www.alberta.ca/coal-policy-engagement.aspx>.

Some points to consider are aesthetics, recreational activities, water quality (selenium and other toxins) and water allocation, threats to habitat of species-at-risk (westslope cutthroat and bull trout, and grizzly bears). See also this news release from May 2021 https://albertawilderness.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/20210518_nr_coal_survey_environmental_concerns_trump_economic_benefits.pdf

Please write to the Committee and let's keep up the pressure to ensure that open-pit coal mining never again despoils Alberta's landscapes.

Province wants input on North Saskatchewan River water

From the North Saskatchewan River Valley Conservation Society's *River Valley News*

Alberta's minister of environment and parks, Jason Nixon, wants public input into a new framework for the North Saskatchewan River. The river is a critical natural resource serving many Alberta communities, as well as those at the Saskatchewan border and beyond. "Its clean and reliable flows are the source of drinking water for well over one million Albertans," said Nixon.

The North Saskatchewan offers a healthy aquatic ecosystem, that is home to more than 25 fish species, which is almost half of all the native fish species in Alberta. Part of a larger regulatory system, Nixon says the framework will help manage development activity and protect water quality. You can give your feedback until September 17 at <https://www.alberta.ca/north-saskatchewan-region-surface-water-quality-management-engagement.aspx>

Stop the presses!!

It appears that Monarch butterflies have been making an appearance in Edmonton! There have been two sightings that we know of: one in Riverdale and another in Fulton Place. This is very exciting news. The last time Monarchs were seen in Edmonton was in 2012. Everyone planting milkweed in their gardens may be paying off! Thank you to Rocky and Doreen for sharing their photos with us.



Photo by Rocky Feroe taken in her Riverdale garden.



Photos taken by Doreen Wyman in her Fulton Place garden. She and Eldon are happy to report that it visited their milkweed as well.

Aims of the Edmonton Native Plant Society:

Promote knowledge of the Edmonton area native plants.

Conserve our native plant species and their habitats.

Preserve native plant species and habitat for the enjoyment of present and future generations.

Educate individuals, business and local governments about native plants.

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www.edmontonnativeplantgroup.org