



# Minnesota Plant Press

The Minnesota Native Plant Society  
Newsletter

Volume 17, Number 1

Fall 1997

## Upcoming Monthly Meetings

Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge  
Visitor Center, 3815 East 80th Street

Bloomington, MN 55425-1600 612-335-2323

6:30-7:00 PM—Refreshments, Room A  
7:00-8:30 PM—Program & Society Business  
8:30 PM—Socializing  
9:30 PM—Doors close sharply at 9:30 PM

## Programs

### October 2, 1997

*Protecting Minnesota Prairies and Forests—Conserving our Native Lands.*—Lisa Mueller (Nature Conservancy)

### November 6, 1997

*Planting the Native Species—Cooperating Communities.*—Cynthia Lane (Greening The Great River Park)

### December 4, 1997

*Using Native Plants for Shoreline Protection: Emergent and Aquatic Plants to Reduce Erosion and Runoff, Buffer Zones as Nutrient Filters.*—Mike Halvorson (DNR)

### January 1998 (NO MEETING)

### February-June, 1998

- *Native Plants in Minnesota*—Vera Wong
- *Mound Prairie Scenic and Natural Areas*—Ken Kailing
- *Minnesota Nature Photography Show*
- *Lichens, Mosses, Ferns—Indicator Species*—Eville Gorham

### MNPS Web Site:

<http://www.stolaf.edu/depts/biology/mnps>

## MNPS board looks ahead to 1997-1998

On Sunday, September 7, 1997, the MNPS board met for its annual fall meeting. The first item of business was the appointment of Bill Capman as vice president and Jackie Buffalow as secretary. Thanks were extended to both for being willing to serve in these positions and a special thanks to Chris Drassal for her past work as secretary.

The status of the program of speakers for this coming year was reviewed. Plans for certain months are still being firmed up, and it looks like we are going to have an exciting and diverse mix of topics. Planning is underway for the Spring Symposium which will focus on the paleobotany and geology of Minnesota, and possible dates are either April 18th or April 25th, 1998.

We spent considerable time discussing the location of current meetings. Board members were pleased with the location and facilities at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge but concerns were raised about (a) increasing costs (\$450/yr) and (b) limited size. If the cost to use the facilities rises too much more or attendance at meetings increases very much, we may need to move and alternative locations were named.

This year meetings will extend from 6:30 to 9:30 PM so there will be more time to chat with fellow members. We will be trying to increase communication among members by arranging for interest tables (for example, a prairie table or a forest table) where members can discuss problems/observations/questions with like-minded people. We may also be arranging for the "experts" around us to make themselves available at different meetings to help with plant identification or other questions. Contact John or Jackie Buffalow if you are interested in either of these ideas. We will also be making a survey of member backgrounds/interests later this year.—Charles Umbanhowar, President MNPS

## Seed Collecting

It is that time of the year when many of us are collecting seeds of native prairie plants or scouting for our favorite patch of blazing star in anticipation of seeds to come. Much has been written about seeds as symbols of life and renewal, and it is the rare person who does not enjoy being out to collect them. Many books and articles have been written about how to collect, process and store native seeds—for example, Char Bezanson's article in the Fall, 1993 *Minnesota Plant Press* (also on WWW site)—but we also need to think about how much seed to collect (or not).

In a recent article in the *Iowa Prairie Network News*\* on seed collecting, Cindy Hildebrand weighed the pros and cons of seed collecting on Iowa prairie preserves. Because of increasing interest in planting farm fields to prairie as part of the Conservation Reserve Program, she is concerned about the introduction of non-Iowa ecotypes and the possibility of "genetic pollution" or imported disease and to this list could be added the possibility that these plantings fail or that certain aggressive cultivars invade native remnants; she sees the collecting of local seeds from local prairie remnants as being a way to avoid these problems.

In Minnesota, seed collecting is already forbidden (without a permit) on state or Nature Conservancy prairie remnants, but many of us collect seeds from plants growing in roadside or railroad remnants, and I suspect that a few of us succumb to the temptation to pick a few forbidden fruits (or seeds). Regardless of the source, we need to think about the biology and ethics of seed collection. Although it is true that many prairie plants reproduce vegetatively and that very few seeds ever germinate and grow to be mature plants, the fact is that for most species we don't know how important seeds are (or are not) to continued reproduction, nor do we know what insects may depend upon these seeds (or fruits). Trampling or direct damage to plants resulting from pulling seed heads may also cause damage. I can think of one site where the seeds from such popular species as compass plant and rattlesnake-master have been completely stripped and the vegetation surrounding these plants completely flattened.

To protect all of our prairie remnants, one possibility would be not to collect seeds but rather to buy plants and seeds from reputable suppliers of native prairie plants. Many of these suppliers are members in good standing with MNPS. Another possibility would be to sow half the seed you pick. One for you and one for the prairie, one for.... We would like to know how you decide: if to collect? where to collect? what to collect? and how much to collect? So write us and let us know what you think. We will compile all of the answers (and can arrange for anonymity, Bottle Gentian in Mankato!) and summarize/quote them in the next issue of the *Minnesota Plant Press*.—Charles Umbanhowar, St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota

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\*IPN News is published by the Iowa Prairie Network, P.O. Box 516, Mason City, IA, 50402. Information is also available at <http://www.netins.net/showcase/bluestem/ipnapp.htm>.

**Audio tapes.** If you can't attend a meeting but would like to hear the presentation, you can purchase an audio tape of the meeting, starting with the one on March 6, 1997 (subject to permission by the speaker). Send a check for \$5 payable to the *Minnesota Native Plant Society* and a mailing label with your full name and address. Send check and meeting date selection to Dave Crawford,

## The Minnesota Native Plant Society

### Minnesota Plant Press

Thor Kommedahl, editor

Membership dues are \$12 per year for regular members and includes subscription to the newsletter; dues for students and seniors are \$10, for family \$14, for institutions \$20, and donors \$25. Checks can be made out to: Minnesota Native Plant Society, and sent to: Minnesota Native Plant Society, 220 Biological Sciences Center, 1445 Gortner Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55108.

Four issues are published each year.

### MNPS Board of Directors

**President:** Charles Umbanhowar,

**Vice-President:** Bill Capman,

**Treasurer:** Pat Ryan,

**Secretary:** Jackie Buffalow,

Deb Anderson,

John Buffalow  
Dave Crawford,

Gerry Drewry,

Thor Kommedahl  
Gary Perrault,

Catherine Reed,

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## Society News

### Help needed for treats!

The MNPS Board thanks all who volunteered and brought refreshments to meetings in 1996-1997—a contribution much appreciated!

Again, we are requesting members to sign up to bring refreshments (finger food and one or more beverages—coffee is supplied by the MNWRCenter). If you would like to be a “breaker of the ice” by becoming the first “treat bringer of the year” for the October meeting, please call Dave Crawford at

Thank you.—*Dave Crawford*

### Guide to Spring Wildflower Areas

This MNPS guide prepared by Marilyn and J.B. Andersen, Jim Schuster, and John Moriarty has been updated, redesigned, and reprinted as the 1996 edition, and covers the Twin City natural areas. Vera Ming Wong prepared new illustrations. Purchase copies at regular meetings of the MNPS for \$3 each. To receive a copy by mail order, send \$6.50 (check or money order) to MNPS, c/o Char Bezanson, The School Nature Area Project, 1520 St. Olaf Avenue, Northfield, MN 55057. Make checks payable to MNPS.

### MNPS Display Board Use

All members are welcome to show our display board at events, museums, and schools, if an attendant is present or it is safely displayed. This 3 by 5 foot, 2-sided board holds information on the Society, native plants, and stewardship. Request it from Don Knutson

### Car pooling — thanks, Grace

Grace Gray has resigned as car pool coordinator as she will be out of the state this winter. Please make your own arrangements for car pooling.

### Prairie Moon Field trip attended by 25 persons

Members of the Prairie Moon Nursery co-op—Alan, Mary, and Bill—hosted a tour on June 14, 1997. This year's tour featured a woodland nursery area established with native flowers and ferns rescued or salvaged from MN DOT (with their permission). This cool glade inspired participants to discuss the ethics of transplanting any wild plant for personal or commercial gain. The landscape gardens near the office highlight the beauty of native plants and provide a great introduction or review of the flowers, grasses and shrubs native to the driftless bioregion.

Twelve people visited the Mound Prairie Scientific and Natural Area, and Ken Kailing led the group along a quarry road lined with bracken fern and paved with remnant blue and purple prairie clover plants. The climb over the quarry rubble enabled viewing a short grass prairie on a 60° slope, above the Root River. The heat of the late fall burn had removed all the thatch from the soil surface and the fragility of the soil on this slope was starkly evident. Many typical prairie plants were identified.—*Deb Anderson*

### Fillmore County roadside survey starts this fall

A survey of the roadside vegetation of Fillmore County will start this fall and be completed by December 1998. Volunteers and paid drivers are being sought to survey 975 miles of roadsides. Volunteers are also needed to make a relevé type survey of management practices along 3 miles of planted prairie roadsides. Training and workshops will be available to help any Minnesotans to set up roadside inventories in their township, town, or county. Please contact Deb Anderson if you would like to drive our scenic byways and help locate remnants of truly local genotype native plants.—*Prairie Smoke, Deb Anderson*

## Plant Lore

### What is giant-hyssop?

One of the hyssops native to Minnesota is fragrant giant-hyssop, a perennial in the mint family. It is *Agastache foeniculum*.

### What does it look like?

It grows 2 to 4 feet tall, with dense spikes of bright blue flowers attached to square stems. One sure way to identify it is to crush the leaves to get an anise or licorice odor. Also, it has 2 pairs of long, protruding stamens.

### Where is it found?

It grows along dry, open or semi-shady places throughout the state.

### How did it get its names?

The genus name is Greek for an ear of corn (wheat) because of the resemblance to wheat spikes. The specific epithet was chosen because the plant had the odor of fennel.

### What about the name hyssop?

This is the Greek name for the plant also, but it is used for another mint species, *Hyssopus officinalis*, native of Eurasia but which has been naturalized in Minnesota.

### Why is the name hyssop used for two different genera?

Well, they are both in the mint family, and both produce a distinctive odor. Moreover, tea is made from plants of both species. The tea from hyssop is made from flowers and used to treat respiratory ailments—it acts as a demulcent. A delicate anise-flavored tea is made from dried leaves of the fragrant giant-hyssop (*Agastache foeniculum*) to make a delicious beverage.

### Is the scent of each species the same?

No, the odor of hyssop is powerful; in fact, elderly persons were known in Europe early on to press its flowers in psalm books to keep themselves awake during church services. Romans made herbal wine from it, and medieval monks spiced soups and sauces with it. The scent of giant-hyssop is milder.

Minnesota Native Plant Society  
University of Minnesota  
220 Biological Sciences Center  
St. Paul MN 55108

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