

## Nature Notes, June 2023

### Wild orchids abound in Saskatchewan

By Anna Leighton

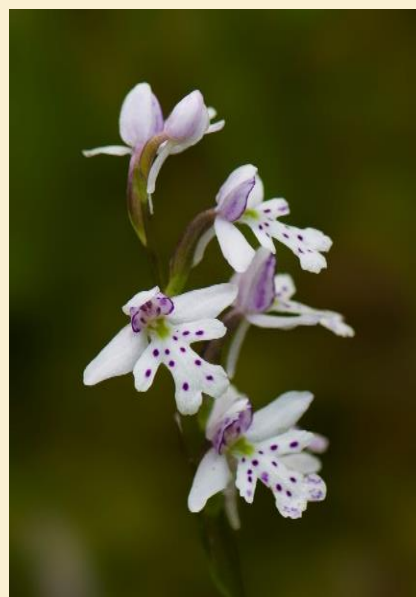
Many people think of orchids as exotic plants in far-away places. This is true. Many of the 60,000 species of orchid do grow in distant lands, but more than two dozen species grow in Saskatchewan and eight have been seen in the Saskatoon area. These are no showy corsage orchids but some of them are big enough to catch your eye as you walk along.

One of the best places to look for orchids close to Saskatoon is the Pike Lake area. A tall, white-flowered orchid called white bog-orchid or bog candle (*Platanthera dilatata*) has been seen in the bog in the area, as has one of our showy but small orchids, round-leaved bog-orchid (*Platanthera orbiculata*). The first is recognized by the tall spires of white flowers resembling a candle; the other by its two, round leaves that lie flat on the ground at the base of the flower stalk. Its small flowers are greenish white.

Two other species of orchids with green flowers are found around Saskatoon: long-bracted orchid (*Coeloglossum viride*) and northern green bog-orchid (*Platanthera aquilonis*). Both have small flowers in tall, narrow spikes. Northern green bog-orchid is widespread and grows in moist depressions, ditches and moist forest. Long-bracted orchid is uncommon and prefers moist woods.

Our most common orchid with a showy flower - small yellow lady's-slipper (*Cypripedium parviflorum* variety *makasin*) - has also been seen at Pike Lake. The bright yellow flowers, up to about an inch long, are slipper-shaped. Insects enter the slipper, become trapped and then pollinate the flowers when they climb out through a special back door. If you find one in flower, you might hear an insect buzzing inside.

Another orchid with a white spire of flowers is called hooded ladies'-tresses (*Spiranthes romanzoffiana*), for the way the flowers spiral around the stem, like braided hair. It has been seen growing in ditches west of Saskatoon. Not as tall as the bog candle, this plant can be hard to



The delicate and lovely round-leaved orchid has been seen along Beaver Creek. Photo by May Haga

spot among thick vegetation, but one should look for it in July.

One of our prettiest orchids, round-leaved orchid (*Amerorchis rotundifolia*) has been seen at a bog along Beaver Creek. The small, delicate flowers have a white central petal with red spots. This species flowers throughout June and into early July, and favours edges of channels in shady, wooded sites. Small yellow lady's-slipper has also been seen south of Saskatoon along the riverbank flowering in mid-June.

One species of orchid grows within Saskatoon in the moist woods of the river valley. This small, delicate species, called pale coralroot (*Corallorhiza trifida*), is easy to overlook. It grows low to the ground, is leafless and has pale flowers. These plants lack chlorophyll, the green pigment that plants use to create energy from sunlight, and instead of making their own food, they take nutrients from the soil with the help of soil fungi.

If you are interested in local orchids, you might enjoy the book *Lilies, Irises & Orchids of Saskatchewan* published by Nature Saskatchewan and available at Wild Birds Unlimited and McNally Robinson.

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