



Nature Notes

Todmorden Mills Wildflower Preserve

Your nature guide for the week July 5–July 11

This year's transition from spring into summer has been slower than normal, but the lazy, hazy days are here.



Wildflowers

Some of the early summer wildflowers—which thrive in sunny, disturbed sites such as the back parking lot at Todmorden and along roadsides—were introduced from Europe as garden ornamentals, but escaped cultivation and became naturalized. **Chicory** has pale blue flowers which it continues to produce throughout summer, a few at a time arranged up the kinked stalks. **Viper's Bugloss**, while never abundant, stands out because of its tall, showy, purple spikes of bristly flowers. **White Sweet Clover** is a tall, gangly plant with white pea-like flowers. It is invasive and seems particularly dense in places this summer. The aptly-named **Queen Anne's Lace** has delicately-patterned flat-topped clusters of white flowers. Also known as Wild Carrot, the feathery basal leaves provide a food source for caterpillars of the native Black Swallowtail. **Milkweed** continues to bloom profusely in the meadow.

Along the woodland trail through the swamp area look for **Fringed Loosestrife** which has started flowering. The pale yellow flowers droop a little (often referred to as “nodding”, as in nodding-off to sleep, perhaps) and a careful examination of the petals reveals a ragged edge.

Most people are familiar with the brown cigar-shaped seedheads of **cattails**, but for a while now there is an opportunity to see the flowers. Tiny male and female flowers are densely packed into separate parts of the flower spike. The male flowers, which produce yellow pollen, are at the top of the stalk; below are the greenish female flowers. There are two cattail species at Todmorden and they can be differentiated based on the spacing between the male and female sections. The Narrow-leaved Cattail has a gap of several centimetres between the flowers, whereas the Common Cattail has no gap. Soon, the male flowers will disintegrate and the pollinated female flowers will transform into the familiar seedhead packed with downy seeds.



Trees and Shrubs

The profuse flowering of Little-leaf Linden, imported from Europe and planted along many of Toronto's streets, is a cue to look for for our native linden, the **Basswood**. Basswood is a characteristic tree of our eastern deciduous forest, and it has been replanted at Todmorden as part of the restoration effort. Basswood has large, heart-shaped leaves and white flowers which hang down in clusters. Attached to each cluster is a bract which looks like the wing of a maple key. **Common Elderberry** continues to flower throughout the Preserve; there are several large shrubs at the pond viewing-stand, covered in large flat-topped clusters of white flowers.



Insects

The trail through the meadow has become dense with tall grasses, and the huge leaves of the **Common Burdock** are prominent. Some of the stems of Burdock look quite black and closer examination reveals heavy infestations of **aphids**. Attending the aphids are **Red Ants** which feed on the dilute honeydew which the aphids excrete. The presence of the Red Ants may benefit the aphids as the ants are aggressive and likely a deterrent to visiting aphid predators such as ladybugs. **Mosquitoes** remain quite abundant in the woodland trail, particularly through the swamp areas, so bug repellent is recommended.

More Info

For more information about the Todmorden Mills Wildflower Preserve, please visit the Preserve Web site (www.hopscotch.ca/tmwp), or contact the Todmorden Mills Heritage Museum (Tel: 416 396-2819).

Nature Notes is researched and written by Mike Dennison and Alejandro Lynch, and is published in print and online formats by Hopscotch Interactive Inc. For more information on **Nature Notes** and other services provided by Hopscotch please visit their Web site (<http://www.hopscotch.ca>).