

Conservation Corner April, 2024 by John Alexander

Early Spring ?

The effects of Climate Change are unpredictable. I know there will be many of you who will say “I love this weather”, a nice mild winter. Be careful what you wish for. There are many potential ramifications of a mild winter with little or no snow fall or rain. This creates a lack of ground water overall, but also a lack of spring melt water that helps to nourish our gardens for the coming growing season. Extrapolate this to farmland, meadows and forests, and there is the perfect setting for another serious forest fire season. In B.C. and Alberta, it has already started. A lack of snow fall in the west that would normally extinguish any late burning fires from last year hasn’t happened. How does this affect our native orchids?

Many of our native orchids can be found in and around wetlands, particularly fens. If there was not enough precipitation throughout the winter, then the water levels in the fens will be low. Some orchids need it to be cold and wet in the spring, with the water level slowly declining throughout the season, but never completely dry. We know that orchids will wait for the perfect conditions to come up and bloom – and much of that depends on water. Consecutive seasons of low precipitation can potentially alter the health of an orchid colony. Even if the plants come up, will they have the energy to bloom? If the temperatures remain warmer than usual without sufficient rainfall, will the plants survive long enough to bloom? Remember that many of our orchids like the Round Leaf (*Galearis rotundifolia*) and the Calypso or Fairy Slipper (*Calypso bulbosa*) like it cold. The range of the Calypso has continuously shrunk northward from the Wiarton area on the Bruce Peninsula, to now only the tip of the peninsula and Flower Pot Island.

Hiking season will soon be upon us! If you are interested in any outings to see native orchids, please send me an email at alexanderarts@sympatico.ca The Conservation Committee is in the process of planning potential outings. Let us know if you are interested.

Stay tuned for next month’s column by another Conservation Committee member, Nick Cox.



Calypso Orchid photographed on the Saugeen Bruce Peninsula by John Alexander