

Manitoba's Species At Risk

Endangered



Any native Manitoba species threatened to disappear through all or most of its Manitoba range. Endangered species are declared as such by regulation under the *Endangered Species Act*.

Small white lady's-slipper

Cypripedium candidum

The Small white lady's-slipper (*Cypripedium candidum*) is a provincially and nationally endangered orchid, occurring in Manitoba, Ontario and fifteen American states. It is a herbaceous perennial that can grow to a height of 10 to 35 cm (4 to 13 inches).

Plants grow in clumps, with each flowering stem surrounded by two to four leaves. One flower is found at the tip of a flowering stem, and consists of a white, pouch-shaped "slipper", streaked with a rose-purple colour, and two twisted, greenish-yellow side petals that can be spotted or streaked with purple.

The Small white lady's-slipper is similar in size to some Yellow lady's-slippers. It has been known to produce hybrids with them when growing in close contact. Flowers on hybrid plants are between Small white and Yellow lady's-slipper flowers in colour.

Habitat

In Manitoba, the Small white lady's-slipper can be found in calcareous (calcium-rich, or alkaline) prairie openings in wooded grasslands, or on more open, south-facing slopes. It most often grows in relatively undisturbed grassland, but can also be seen in disturbed sites such as roadside ditches.

Life History

The Small white lady's-slipper is a perennial, surviving from one year to another as an underground stem. Flowers typically open by late May or early June, and are insect-pollinated. Once the insects (mainly small bees) enter the orchid's pouch, they can only exit in one direction. In the process, pollen collected at the previous flower rubs off of the bee's back to fertilize

the flower, then more pollen is picked up to take to the next flower, ensuring that flowers are cross-pollinated. Seed capsules mature and seeds are shed by late July, releasing thousands of tiny seeds. Seeds can remain viable for at least eight years.

Distribution

The Small white lady's-slipper occurs from southern Manitoba and Ontario, through the American Midwest to the east coast. It was last seen in Saskatchewan in 1895, and is now considered extirpated there.

Manitoba's populations of Small white lady's-slippers are found in three widely separated areas: southeastern Manitoba (including the Tall Grass Prairie Preserve), the southern Interlake region, and in the vicinity of Brandon in southwestern Manitoba.

Status

The Small white lady's-slipper is considered provincially very rare by the Manitoba Conservation Data Centre. It is considered rare in virtually every state and province it occurs in, but overall it is considered secure globally by the Association for Biodiversity Information. Threats to the species include encroachment of woody species, late spring frosts, illegal collection of plants, spraying of herbicides and clearing of ditches, weedy species invasion, urbanization, hybridization with Yellow lady's-slippers, and conversion of native prairie to agricultural land.

The Small white lady's-slipper is listed as Endangered by regulation 25/98 under the Manitoba *Endangered Species Act*. The orchid has also been assigned a status of Endangered by the Committee on the



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Cool Facts

The Small white lady's-slipper is very slow growing. It is estimated to take at least twelve years to reach maturity.

Manitoba's largest populations of Small white lady's-slippers are found at the Tall Grass Prairie Preserve. In most years, more than half of all flowering plants will be found there.

Studies of twice-over grazing at the Tall Grass Prairie Preserve suggest that the Small white lady's-slipper can do well under that system. Roughly twice as many plants were observed as in adjacent ungrazed areas.

The Small white lady's-slipper grows with the assistance of mycorrhizae, soil fungi that assist the plant in taking up soil nutrients. Moving plants from their native habitat is generally not successful because of their very specific habitat and soil requirements.



Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC), and is listed as Endangered under Ontario's *Endangered Species Act*.

Stewardship and recovery

A key component of recovery efforts is the protection of critical habitat for the species. The Manitoba Tall Grass Prairie Preserve protects over 2,100 hectares (5,200 acres) of habitat for native prairie species, including the Small white lady's-slipper. The Manitoba Naturalists Society have purchased property near Brandon to protect lady's-slippers found there. A number of landowners are also aware of orchids on their property, and manage their land in ways that maintain the plants.

Monitoring of Small white lady's-slipper populations is done regularly in Manitoba sites. It appears that controlled burning, mowing and twice-over grazing can have positive effects on lady's-slippers. These practices appear to improve growing conditions by controlling woody species and clearing excess thatch.

Get involved in recovery

If you have a Small white lady's-slipper on your property, congratulations. Your land management skills have helped to maintain the population of one of the rarest plants in Canada. Contact the Wildlife Branch, or your nearest Manitoba Conservation office, if you would like more information on what you can do to further enhance your land for this and other native Manitoba plant and animal species.

If you see a Small white lady's-slipper, contact Manitoba Conservation at one of the numbers listed below.

Manitoba Conservation Wildlife Branch

Box 24, 200 Saulteaux Crescent
Winnipeg, MB R3J 3W3
(204) 945-7775

www.gov.mb.ca/natres/wildlife/index.html

Manitoba Conservation Regional Offices

Eastern Region
Lac du Bonnet
(204) 345-1427

Central Region
Gimli
(204) 642-6077

Western Region
Brandon
(204) 726-6450

Partners in production of this fact sheet:
Manitoba Conservation, Wildlife Branch
Environment Canada, Canadian Wildlife Service

Extirpated Species

Any species once native to Manitoba that has disappeared through all of its Manitoba range. Extirpated species are declared as such by regulation under the *Endangered Species Act*.

Endangered Species

Any native Manitoba species threatened to disappear through all or most of its Manitoba range. Endangered species are declared as such by regulation under the *Endangered Species Act*.

Threatened Species

Any native Manitoba species likely to become endangered or at risk due to low or declining numbers in Manitoba if the factors affecting it don't improve. Threatened species are declared as such by regulation under the *Endangered Species Act*.

Vulnerable Species

Species not regulated under the *Endangered Species Act* but which could eventually be considered Endangered or Threatened if the factors affecting them do not improve.