

# White Lake Fen

## Field trip to White Lake Fen

Mississippi Valley Field Naturalists

Submitted by Tine Kuiper, Programme Director, 27th June 2003

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On Sunday June 22, the Mississippi Valley Field Naturalists (MVFN) ended their Spring season with a bang with a wonderful field trip to the White Lake Fen. Under the guidance of well-known field naturalists Monty and Grace Wood, participants learned all about the many natural attributes found in this rare environment, which is located on private property.

To get into the fen proper, the participants proceeded through a forested bog/fen area, where they viewed many mosses, irises and orchids, as well as liverworts.

The White Lake Fen is a quaking fen, with a mat of vegetation over water that probably connects to White Lake proper. It bounces like being on a water bed. Fens are a form of wetland, different from bogs, marshes and swamps, and more rare.

The White Lake Fen, in Renfrew County just north of Lanark County, is a very special place, and has Area of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSI) designation. Most of its trees are white cedar and tamarack and black spruce, found in the (supposedly) acidic patches.

Monty Wood is a renowned teacher and emeritus scientist (entomologist/taxonomist) at Agriculture Canada. His field work has taken him all over the world. Grace Wood is a biologist/toxicologist and has joined her husband in many of his travels.

Monty explained there were several species of deer fly in the Fen at this time of the year. We also located black larvae of the rare Buck bean moth which occurs only in this Fen and in the Richmond Fen, and which feeds on Buck bean, a plant found in Fens. About 10 years ago this moth was threatened after the Fen had been sprayed against the gypsy moth, and we were glad to see that it had returned.

A few Marsh marigolds were still in flower, as was Labrador tea, yellow lady slipper orchids, and several other orchids including the rare Dragons's mouth, a small magenta orchid. Also observed were many native irises and large red pitcher plants which were in full bloom. Pitcher plants are carnivorous and capture and digest insects in their leaves which have been modified into a pitcher to collect water for this purpose. Also found was the small bog rosemary, pyrola and twin flower, as well as two species of cotton grass in the un-treed part of the Fen. Another unusual feature of this Fen was many very large ant hills, often more than three feet in diameter and several feet high. These hills at a later stage could support the growth of small tree seedlings.