

The Newsletter of the Palouse Prairie Foundation

P.O. Box 8952, Moscow, ID 83843

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www.palouseprairie.org/

Winter 2012

The regular meeting date for the Palouse Prairie Foundation is the second Thursday of each month. Check the PPF website for updates and locations. The next scheduled meeting is a business meeting on January 10, 2013.

PPF Note cards available

As a fundraiser, PPF has created a series of note cards depicting flowers and landscapes of the Palouse. These would make great gifts for the upcoming holiday season, or get them for yourself! They are available in packets of 5 cards and 5 envelopes for \$5.00. All funds directly benefit the Palouse Prairie Foundation. If you are interested in purchasing cards, please contact Dave Skinner by email at abbie48@roadrunner.com (you will need to replace “at” and “dot” with the appropriate symbols) or call him at 208-874-3205. We will also bring them to meetings and presentations.

US 95 update

The Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) and Federal Highway Administration have approved a draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) for the proposed U.S. Highway 95 re-alignment from Thorn Creek Road to Moscow. The DEIS favors the eastern realignment on Paradise Ridge. The DEIS will be published in late December or early January and will then enter a public comment process. A public hearing on draft will be held January 23, 2013 at the University Inn Best Western. The period for public comment on the DEIS will end on February 23, 2013. ITD will then evaluate the public comments and issue a final EIS. The final EIS is also subject to a public comment period.

Links to the PPF website

submitted by David Hall.

The following respected organization web pages link to the Palouse Prairie Foundation web site.

1. In the Wikipedia article on the giant Palouse earthworm, the first External link is to the palouseprairie.org page on the Giant Palouse earthworm.
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giant_Palouse_earthworm
2. On the Scientific American blog, Extinction Countdown, News and research about endangered species from around the world, the article “Save the giant spitting earthworm”, by John R. Platt. July 1, 2009 blogs.scientificamerican.com/extinction-countdown/2009/07/01/save-the-giant-spitting-earthworm/
3. On the “This Old House” website in the article “Choose Native Plants for a Successful Garden”, p. 2 of 12. Palouse, the first resource is Palouse Prairie Foundation: palouseprairie.org
www.thisoldhouse.com/toh/article/0,,1613197-2,00.html
4. In the Oregon Public Broadcasting Field Journal for April 2010 the article “Elusive Giant Worm Not So Giant, But Still Rare”, there is a link to the PPF web page on the giant Palouse earthworm.
blogs.opb.org/fieldjournal/2010/04/
5. The University of British Columbia Botanical Garden Botany Photo of the Day for May 24, 2007: has a photo of the Palouse Hills, By Daniel Mosquin www.botanicalgarden.ubc.ca/potd/2007/05/
6. Universities Space Research Association Earth Science Picture of the Day, August 30, 2010 is of Palouse Loess. Today this region is called the Palouse and the distinctive deep, rich soil is known as Palouse Loess. epod.usra.edu/blog/2010/08/palouse-loess.html

7. WSU Ecology@WSU Magpie Forest "Washington State University is collaborating with the local community to develop a long-term plan for the conservation and public use of Magpie Forest. WSU is working closely with the Pullman Civic Trust, Pullman Chamber of Commerce, Palouse-Clearwater Environmental Institute (PCEI), Palouse Prairie Foundation, the City of Pullman, and Whitman County to develop future management plans."
ecology.wordpress.com/magpie-forest/
8. UI College of Natural Resources EcologyOnline, Idaho & Region, Local Resources first entry is a link to the PPF website. cnr.uidaho.edu/ecologyonline/resources.htm
9. Gardeners' World Magazine article "Slugs and snails and puppy dogs' tails" includes a mention and link to the PPF web page about the giant Palouse earthworm.
www.GardenersWorld.com/blogs/unassigned/slugs-and-snails-and-puppy-dogs-tails/2448.html
10. The Conservation Report "Tracking news regarding conservation, the environment, energy, politics, and technology" ENDANGERED SPECIES: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service denies unique giant worm protection. On the Net: More information on the Giant Palouse Earthworm
conservationreport.com/2008/01/29/endangered-species-us-fish-and-wildlife-service-denies-unique-giant-worm-protection/
11. Tri-CitiesGuide.org, Community Directory & Visitors Information Guide for the Tri-Cities Washington Metro Area, Animals and Plants of Eastern Washington has a link to the Palouse Prairie Foundation website It states "The Palouse Prairie Foundation promotes preservation and restoration of native Palouse Prairie ecosystems in Whitman and Latah Counties (Colfax, WA - Moscow, ID region). This organization has documented the birds, animals, and plants that are native to the Palouse Prairie region. In addition to promoting landscaping with native plants, they have interesting information about the Giant Palouse Earthworm."
tri-citiesguide.org/outdoors.htm
12. Thorn Creek Native Seed Farm – nativeseedfarm.com/links.php
13. Palouse-Clearwater Environmental Institute – pcei.org/links.htm
14. Alison Meyer Photography – www.alisonmeyerphotography.com/links.cfm
15. Palouse Permaculture – palousepermaculture.com/
16. Friends of the Clearwater – www.friendsoftheclearwater.org/who-we-work-with/
17. Idaho Native Plant Society, White pine Chapter– whitepineinps.org/wplandsc.html
18. Steven Colbert spoke of the Giant Palouse Earthworm on the Colbert Report in 2010: Colbert Report "Scientists and KFC" segment, Thursday April 29, 2010. 70,478 views "Scientists demystify the fabled Palouse Earthworm."
www.colbertnation.com/the-colbert-report-videos/308102/april-29-2010/tip-wag---scientists---kfc
19. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. 2011 Annual Report, p. 169-170. Candidate Species: Giant Palouse Earthworm. Partners and Cooperators: Washington Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, University of Idaho, Palouse Prairie Foundation, Palouse Audubon, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Soil Biology Associates.

Featured Plant: *Asclepias speciosa*

submitted by David M. Skinner



Asclepias speciosa flower.
Photo © David M. Skinner.

The seeds are brown, flattened and wing-margined, and attached to a long tuft of fine white hairs which aid in wind dispersal. Seed ripens in September and early October on the Palouse and should be collected as the follicles begin to split open. $2n = 22$.

Asclepias speciosa is insect pollinated with bumblebees being the most frequent visitors to the flowers. The flowers may be self-pollinated or pollinated by other flowers on the same plant, but most of these fruits are aborted in favor of those from flowers pollinated by other plants.

Various parts of the showy milkweed plant were used by native peoples for food, medicine, and cordage. However, the plants are **poisonous** without proper preparation and can be toxic to livestock as well. For that reason it is sometimes considered a weedy species in pastures and rangeland.



Asclepias speciosa.
Photo © David M. Skinner.

Showy milkweed, *Asclepias speciosa*, is a long-lived perennial forb belonging to the milkweed family, Asclepiadaceae, although some recent research has suggested including it in the dogbane family, Apocynaceae. It is a common species native to mesic places in much of western North America, including the Palouse. Plants require more degree days than many Palouse natives and are among the last species to break dormancy in the spring locally.

Plants are rhizomatous, erect, 16-48 inches tall, with milky sap and fleshy, opposite leaves. Flowers are perfect, pink to purple and are borne in a subterminal umbel. They bloom in early July on the Palouse. The fruit is a warty follicle 2½ to 5 inches long, thick near the base and tapering to a sharp tip.

Larva of the monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) are obligate *Asclepias* foliar feeders and adults of the western milkweed long-horned beetle (*Tetraopes femoratus*) feed on the leaves, buds, and flowers of *A. speciosa*. The larva feed on the roots.

There are 72,000 seeds/lb.

Plants overwintered outdoors in containers are highly susceptible to winter kill from cold temperatures. Fresh seeds can be planted in autumn for germination the following spring and summer. Seeds stored dry at room temperature retain high germination for at least 5 years. The tuft of hairs (coma) must be removed before the seed can be cleaned. No problems with

seed insects have been observed.

There are 2 protocols in the Native Plant Network:

Pullman, Washington Plant Materials Center

nativeplants.for.uidaho.edu/Network/ViewProtocols.aspx?ProtocolID=3487

Corvallis, Oregon Plant Materials Center

nativeplants.for.uidaho.edu/Network/ViewProtocols.aspx?ProtocolID=2301

For more information on *Asclepias speciosa* see:

Specimen data and digital resources from The Consortium of Pacific Northwest Herbaria

www.pnwherbaria.org/

Plant Profile from the USDA NRCS PLANTS Database

plants.usda.gov/java/profile?symbol=ASSP

Species page from the University of Washington Herbarium (WTU)

biology.burke.washington.edu/herbarium/imagecollection.php?Genus=Asclepias&Species=speciosa

Species information from the PPF Palouse Plant Database

dev.palouseprairie.org/plants/plantdb/PPFplants.php?USDA=ASSP

There is some information on *A. speciosa* on the NRCS Plant Materials Center website at [public.wsu.edu/~pmc_nrcs/Docs/More Forbs for Landscaping.pdf](http://public.wsu.edu/~pmc_nrcs/Docs/More_Forbs_for_Landscaping.pdf)

Pollinators and Pollinator Watch

Submitted by Timothy D. Hatten



A margined white butterfly, *Pieris marginalis* nectaring on *Arnica cordifolia* near Troy, ID. Photo: T.D. Hatten.

This fall the Palouse Prairie Foundation (PPF), Palouse Group Sierra Club and Invertebrate Ecology Inc. joined together to help conserve insect pollinators on the Palouse by cosponsoring a workshop featuring the interactive, web-based Pollinator Watch program.

A number of studies confirm that pollinators are in trouble just about everywhere they occur, with habitats that they depend on getting chopped up into smaller and smaller pieces, or eliminated, and the quality of these habitats in decline.

Factors such as invasive weeds, diminished floral and nest resources, inappropriate usage of pesticides, exotic pathogens, exotic predators or parasites, pollutants and a plethora of other factors all threaten the survival of pollinators.

Despite the overwhelming importance of pollinators for the reproductive success of flowering plants and ecosystems that

shelter them, we still know very little about them in many regions and this includes the Palouse. This appalling lack of knowledge was the motivator for the creation of Pollinator Watch

(www.pollinatorwatch.org). The idea of this program is to help citizen scientists to keep track of pollinators in the Palouse Bioregion, to learn more about them, and ultimately to better conserve them. To this end Pollinator Watch features a “Map Your Pollinators” page that allows the user to enter their observations on an interactive map. The program also has a photo gallery to post pictures on, and has a function to get help with identifications.



The bumble bee *Bombus nevadensis* approaching a lupine in a Latah County wheat field. Photo: T.D. Hatten.

Pollinator Watch was initiated to ‘share the fun’ and help those interested in conserving flies, bees, butterflies, beetles, birds, bats and other pollinators both large and small. What better way to do this than to help citizen monitors to help keep track of them in their own back yards, gardens, fields or out in wild habitats such as the region’s canyon grasslands, mixed forests, hawthorn thickets, Palouse Prairie, etc.

Pollinator Watch is in its early stages and there is a lot of work to be done if it is to reach its potential. Nevertheless, the author feels that great strides have been made in this direction.

The site now houses, for example, species lists for butterflies and bees of Latah (ID) and Whitman (WA) Counties, as well

as biological information for the dominant bee families in the region. Representative pictures sprinkle the bee pages and thumbnail pictures of all butterflies are provided as well as links to other pollinator websites. The goal is to upload data on additional fauna and to improve the site’s interactive capabilities. Right now the site doesn’t easily interact with those using Pollinator Watch, and being able to do so could be important if a citizen-scientist has a question about a sighting, or needs help with a sighting, or needs to be informed that they have found something really good!

Another goal for Pollinator Watch is to include habitat specific information about pollinators, and this will of course include those pollinators that utilize rare and/or endangered habitats such as Palouse Prairie.

The author believes that there is a great opportunity for the PPF to become more involved with pollinator conservation issues in the area, and this workshop on Pollinator Watch was a step in that direction.

Miscellanea:

Finding the Palouse Prairie: Images of a Vanishing Grassland.

“Finding the Palouse Prairie: Images of a Vanishing Grassland” can be purchased online at www.dolkas.com or www.blurb.com/bookstore/detail/2768591

We have posted a beta version of the Palouse Plant Database on the PPF website at dev.palouseprairie.org/plants/plantdb/PPFplants.php This is a temporary page and it will change in the future. You can always access the database from the main page of the Palouse Prairie Foundation website www.palouseprairie.org/ Please take a look at it. If you have suggestions or corrections for the database, please notify us using the contact information on the database pages.

If you would like to have the Palouse Prairie display at a gathering or meeting, please contact us. The display consists of a free standing 4 panel poster explaining Palouse Prairie, and a myriad of printed information regarding the prairie. A smaller version of the poster is also available for more limited spaces. You can view the poster on the PPF website at www.palouseprairie.org/display/

If you would like to give a presentation about some aspect of Palouse Prairie or know of someone whom you would like to hear talk about Palouse Prairie, or you have an idea for a field trip, please contact a board member.

Copies of past issues of the Newsletter of the Palouse Prairie Foundation are available online on the PPF website at www.palouseprairie.org/pppubs.html

If you have ideas, suggestions, or contributions for the newsletter, please send them to Dave Skinner at abbie48 at roadrunner dot com (you will need to replace “at” and “dot” with the appropriate symbols) or call him at 208-874-3205. Look for the next newsletter in spring 2013.