
An Interesting Fen at the Purdon Conservation Area, Lanark County

David J. White

Joyce Reddoch has written about a number of fens in the Ottawa area (Reddoch 1979, 1984). I would like to publicize the Purdon Fen located in Lanark County (Figure 1). Although several of Joyce's fens are closer to Ottawa, larger in size or richer in plant species, none is as easily accessible as the Purdon Fen.

The Purdon Conservation Area, owned and managed by the Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority (Figure 2), consists of approximately 25 hectares of swamp, upland mixed forest, shallow lake, shoreline marsh, and open and treed fen. It is the fen habitat which has the most interesting and unusual plants.

The site has been developed both to provide better access for visitors and to protect the sensitive areas from trampling. There is a parking lot, a picnic area overlooking Purdon Lake,

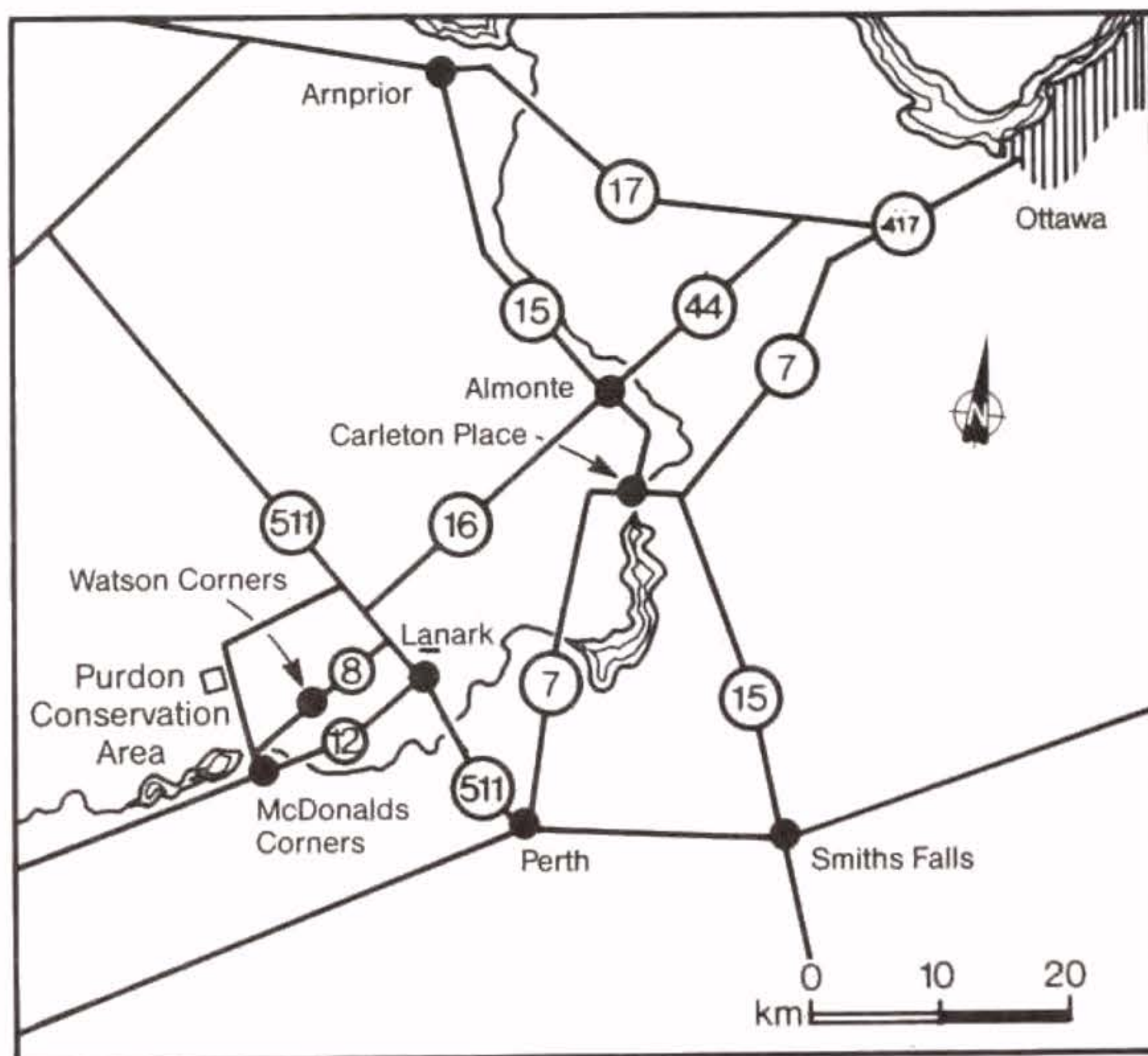


Figure 1. The location of the Purdon Conservation Area.
Base map courtesy Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority

outdoor toilets, hiking trails, and stairs leading to a carefully built boardwalk which makes a loop around the open fen habitat. For many years, I have considered bogs and fens to be among my favourite habitats and I have fought my way into many. It was a real treat to get onto this interesting fen with dry feet and no thrashing through alder thickets.

I first saw the fen in 1981 when people from the Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority, the Nature Conservancy of Canada and several of us from The Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club met with the late Joe Purdon for a site tour of the fen (Figure 3). Mr. Purdon was in poor health and he wished to find someone to take over the property and his "caretaker" role of protecting and nurturing the fen and its large colony of Showy Lady's-slipper (*Cypripedium reginae*; Figure 4).

Further meetings and discussions took place over the next few years culminating in 1984 with the purchase of the fen and some surrounding property for the MVCA by the government of Ontario and a number of private donors.

In 1985, a detailed life science inventory was carried out and a management plan was drawn up (Mosquin 1985). Site development took place to provide interpretive signs and the amenities described above. Access for the handicapped is planned for 1988. Interpretive pamphlets are available at the site.



Figure 2. Visitors to the Purdon Conservation Area are expected to stay on the boardwalk in order to protect the fragile fen habitat. Photographs by the author, except as noted.

The management that has been proposed for the wetland consists of carrying on the good work of Joe Purdon. From the 1930s to the early 1980s, he kept the beaver population and the water level within bounds and undertook some selective cutting of White Cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*). He had noticed that as the cedar trees became tall and thick, the lady's-slippers began to disappear, so he selectively cut some areas in winter on a trial basis, and over the years observed that the orchids increased in those thinned-out areas. It is hoped that a continuation of this gentle management will ensure the long-term survival not only of the lady's-slippers but of the other interesting plants as well, most of which require an open fen habitat.

The site was officially opened by the MVCA on June 21, 1986, at the height of bloom of the Showy Lady's-slippers. From the boardwalk can be seen thousands of lady's-slippers. Mosquin (1985) estimated the Purdon Fen population of the orchid to be 16,000 plants.

Certainly, the fen is most impressive in mid-June; however, it is also attractive at other times of the year. For example, late summer finds many Bog Goldenrod (*Solidago uliginosa*) and Shrubby Cinquefoil in bloom.

The life science inventory conducted by Mosquin (1985) and field visits by the present author have turned up a number of rare and uncommon plants that demonstrate the significance of this wetland (Table 1). Several plants known from this fen are not known elsewhere in Lanark County.

In summary, I would encourage you to pay a visit to this interesting wetland and enjoy the boardwalk over a wet fen. If you are interested primarily in seeing the Showy Lady's-slippers in bloom, the best time is around the 12th to the 21st of June.

Literature Cited

- Dugal, A. 1982. Bog Bedstraw (*Galium labradoricum*) in Ottawa District fens. *Trail & Landscape* 16(3): 126-130.
- Gillett, J.M. and D.J. White. 1978. Checklist of vascular plants of the Ottawa-Hull Region, Canada. National Museum of Natural Sciences, Ottawa. 155 pp.
- Mosquin, T. 1985. A management plan for the Showy Lady's Slipper, *Cypripedium reginae*, in the Purdon Conservation Area, Lanark County, Ontario. Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority. Unpublished report.
- Reddoch, J. 1979. Calcareous fens in the Ottawa District. *Trail & Landscape* 13(1): 16-27.

Reddoch, J.M. 1984. White Lake Fen. Trail & Landscape 18(3): 134-141.

White, D.J. 1988. A preliminary checklist of the vascular plants of Lanark County. In progress.

TABLE 1

Significant Vascular Plants of the Purdon Fen

Common Name	Botanical Name	Lanark Co. Status ¹	O.D. Status ²
Bog Clubmoss ³	* <i>Lycopodium inundatum</i>	rare	sparse
Brownish Sedge	* <i>Carex brunnescens</i>	rare	sparse
Lead-coloured Sedge ³	* <i>Carex livida</i>	rare	rare
Sartwell's Sedge	<i>Carex sartwellii</i>	rare	rare
Three-fruited Sedge	* <i>Carex trisperma</i>	uncommon	sparse
	<i>Dulichium arundin-</i>		
Three-way Sedge	<i>aceum</i>	uncommon	sparse
Slender Cotton-grass ³	* <i>Eriophorum gracile</i>	?rare	rare
	<i>Eriophorum viridi-</i>		
Green Cotton-grass	<i>carinatum</i>	uncommon	sparse
Hudsonian Club-rush	<i>Scirpus hudsonianus</i>	rare	sparse
Canada Rush	* <i>Juncus canadensis</i>	?rare	sparse
White Bog Orchid#	<i>Platanthera dilatata</i>	rare	rare
Hoary Willow	<i>Salix candida</i>	uncommon	sparse
Bog Willow ³	* <i>Salix pedicellaris</i>	?rare	rare
Shrubby Cinquefoil	<i>Potentilla fruticosa</i>	uncommon	sparse
Northern Bog Violet	* <i>Viola nephrophylla</i>	rare	sparse
Kidney-leaved Violet	* <i>Viola renifolia</i>	rare	sparse
Bog Bedstraw ³	<i>Galium labradoricum</i>	rare	rare ⁴

¹ The status in Lanark County is based on White (1988). The term "rare" indicates that three records or fewer are known for the county; the term "uncommon" indicates a species that is not easily found, even in suitable habitat. This latter term is equivalent to the terms "sparse" and "uncommon" as used by Gillett and White (1978).

² Status in the Ottawa District (O.D.) is based on Gillett and White (1978).

³ Known in Lanark County only from the Purdon Fen.

⁴ Refer to Dugal (1982).

* Additional species reported by Mosquin (1985).

See Figure 5.



Figure 3. The late Joe Purdon (right) and the late George Findlay during the 1981 visit. Photograph by Allan Reddoch.



*Figure 4 (left). A group of Showy Lady's-slippers.
Figure 5 (right). Flowers of the White Bog Orchid, a less common orchid in the Purdon Fen. Photograph by Allan Reddoch. ■*