Department of Renewable Resources
751 General Services
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB, Canada
T6G 2H1

Alberta Plantwatch: Spring 2007 Newsletter

Dear Plant watcher!

Spring greetings! This newsletter summarizes observer comments from last year, and I hope you enjoy it. Enclosed is a map (see end of newsletter) showing how many years of data exist for our observation locations in Alberta, for your interest.

For information on the Alberta Plantwatch program see http://plantwatch.sunsite.ualberta.ca , and the national Plantwatch Canada program is at www.plantwatch.ca. If you know of potential keen observers for Plantwatch, I'd be delighted to contact them!

My PhD program began this January in the University of Alberta's Department of Renewable Resources, with Dr. Andreas Hamann. This research will focus on plant-climate relationships as shown by 20 years of Alberta Plantwatch data. The resulting publications will help strengthen this program. I look forward to having interesting graphs to show you!

The "earth is running a slight fever" according to the US National Academy of Sciences. The winter of 2005-6 was the warmest in Canada since records began in 1948, with temperatures 4 ° C warmer than normal. Spring 2006 in Alberta was 2.4 ° C higher than normal, and again this season was the warmest spring in Canada's records. Alberta also enjoyed 40% more precipitation than normal last spring. Summer 2006 as well as the winter just past (2006-7) were Canada's 2nd warmest. The winter was 3 ° C warmer than usual, partly due to an El Nino event which was strong in January.

Awareness is growing in Canada of the impacts of climate change. By reporting bloom dates, you are contributing to a great tool to track the effects of warming, as perennial plants bloom earlier with higher winter and spring temperatures. To learn more about how climate change affects plants, see **http://www.plant-talk.org/resource/climate.html** and also under "impacts" at **http://www.davidsuzuki.org/Climate_Change** . More information on climate change is available from the Pembina Institute at **http://www.pembina.org/climate-change/index.php** .

You can help reduce global warming by decreasing the greenhouse gas your household produces. To calculate your consumption and find out how to reduce it, go to **http://www.climatechange.gc.ca/calculator/english** .

Observer comments: 2006 in Alberta

Many observers commented on the excellent growing season, with rain arriving just as it was needed. Winter was warm with almost no snow until March. M. Halvorson (Sundre) noted "one of the prettiest springs I've seen. We missed the usual May snowstorm. Perennials, garden vegetables and hay crops about 2 weeks ahead of usual!"

Many species bloomed vigorously. Abundant early blue violets were reported in Gibbons and Duffield. Dandelions reportedly did well, as the 'hills were yellow'. In many places, shrubs of saskatoon, choke cherry and pin cherry were covered with blossoms. But prairie crocus were scarce in Innisfail (E. Scott) and in Twin Butte, M. Winkler reported the "shortest bloom of prairie crocus since 1973."

The last two weeks of May were very warm, and in Edmonton we had a record number of plant species in bloom for the Federation of Alberta Naturalists' May Species Count. I compared some of the available lilac data for this area: flowering in 2006 was as early as in 1998, which previously had the record for earliest lilac bloom.

Saskatoon fruit was abundant in Wainwright and Markerville, and Wetaskiwin enjoyed good berries and apples. S. Bargholz said "great year for saskatoons and chokecherries, with big plump ones at Alix, but just a few miles east it was just the opposite." An enthusiastic Plantwatcher, he commented: "I just love watching spring come and throw everything into gear!"

In some areas such as Oyen, Heinsburg, Sherwood Park, Camrose, and Duffield, there were few or no Saskatoon berries. In Jasper National Park however, E. Slatter said "native plants very lush…abundant berry production…bears feasted on the abundant and early-ripening buffaloberry crop here at Pocohontas, then did the same with red-osier dogwood and chokecherry".

Moisture conditions were variable. In Wainwright; P. Porter noted that flowering plants were abundant, and said: "water levels in a lot of sloughs and lakes have returned to that in the early 1980's for most of east central Alberta and waterfowl have returned." But shallow lakes in the Edmonton area lacked water and shore lines have greatly receded. At Beaverhill lake, the exposed mudflats have grown into extensive areas of foxtail barley. These seeds blew south from the lake and collected around the poplar trees; in spring the area was still knee-deep in a soft cloud of fluffy seeds. Mice and short-eared owls flourished!

In the north, C. Reese (Manning) said "due to lots of rain at just the right time, every flower species I've seen in the past 8 years bloomed this summer in great quantities…. lots of blueberries and cranberries as well". K. Fraser (Muskeg fire tower, Ft. McMurray) reported "heavy infestation of tent caterpillars this year... blueberries 3 weeks ahead of usual."

F. Melnyk (Vegreville) found that the trees bloomed about 2 weeks earlier than usual. K. Edwards (Caroline) said she was "pleased to see the poplar leaves return to 'normal' size after 2 years of being affected by frost and or bugs." Twinflower was abundant, and bunchberry formed "carpets of white." M.J. Davies and Z.Kondra in Carstairs said: "we've had the best growing season since the wetter years of the 80's and early 90's". W. Brideaux (NW Calgary) noted exceptional numbers of moss phlox and golden bean. E. Gillespie (Finnegan on the Red Deer River) said: "this spring the coulees were purple, yellow and blue with wildflowers".

Here's a tip that may work in Alberta's aspen parkland to encourage wildflowers. D. Hopkins (Coyote Lake, Warburg) said: "since we've started mowing the meadow late in the summer and leaving the mulch in place, more and more wildflowers are showing up."

Many thanks to all our observers! Every observation counts, so even if you have only one flowering or leafing date to report, it will be greatly appreciated. Dates from past years are welcome too. Congratulations to D. Choy of Calgary, who tracked plants in both the Cross Conservation Area and Fish Creek Park and sent in 62 flowering dates.

Thanks to the Federation of Alberta Naturalists for their generous assistance with mailing costs for this spring letter. Thanks also to the Department of Renewable Resources for hosting this program (please note the new reporting address). Nature Saskatchewan and Environment Canada's EcoAction have kindly provided funding to assist with newsletter and wallchart production.

Here's to another marvelous growing season! Thanks very much for your interest in Alberta Plantwatch.

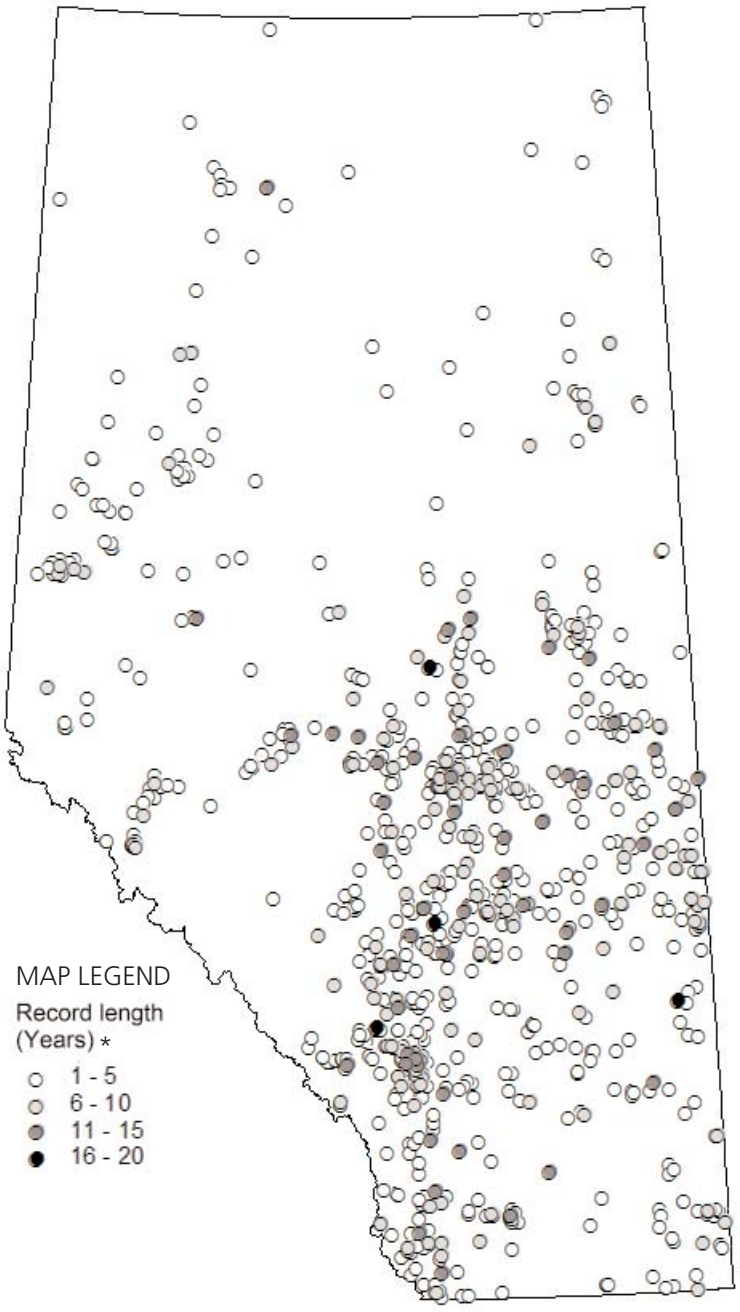
Cheers,

Elisabeth

Elisabeth Beaubien, Alberta Plantwatch
Department of Renewable Resources
751 General Services
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB, Canada
T6G 2H1

phone (780) 492- 2540 (SIS lab)
fax (780) 492- 4323
Email e.beaubien@ualberta.ca
http://plantwatch.sunsite.ualberta.ca

Alberta Plantwatch Observations 1987- 2004



* Shading shows relative length of observations
• mapping by Dr. A. Hamann