
Notes

This section of *SHALE* provides an opportunity for contributors to present the partial results of ongoing research, publish less-than-normal-length articles, and provide “interesting facts”.

The wild gardens of Ruxton Island—by Anne Gartshore

Not far off the southeast corner of De Courcy Island blooms one of the most attractive spring gardens in the Gulf Islands. Ian and I took two friends, who are keen gardeners and Alpine Garden members, over to the colourful ridges on the northern tip of Ruxton Island early this May. They were ecstatic about the beauty of these rocky points.

Pink sea blush (*Plectritis congesta*) is nestled in with blue-eyed Mary (*Collinsia grandiflora*) forming long banks that stretch the length of the sandstone ridges. Yellow monkey flower (*Mimulus guttatus*) grow in prolific patches amongst them. Occasional stems of white fringe cup (*Lithophragma parviflora*) poke through the pink, blue, and yellow. Bright yellow stonecrop (*Sedum* sp.) clings to the rock at the edge of the flowerbeds where there seems hardly enough soil or water for them to survive. Through them are growing here and there the rarer purple broomrape (*Orobranche uniflora*), which is parasitic on the sedum roots. Standing tall above them all, often forming drifts against the grey sandstone, is the stately camas (*Camassia quamash*), the blue flower that grows from bulbs and is even more attractive than the hyacinth. I’ve not seen the lilies (*Erythronium* sp.) there, but they are usually over when we visit in the first week of May.

De Courcy Island used to have wild flowers. Our southern exposures had some, twenty-three years ago when we first came and hunting was still allowed. Blue camas and death camas (*Zygadenus venenosus*) grew together on the peninsula and now only the death camas survives. There were still some lilies on the cliff banks; I saw chocolate lilies (*Fritillaria lanceolata*) once, and blue brodiaea (*Brodiaea* sp.) used to bloom in the grass in summer, but no longer. There are no seedling arbutus or cedar surviving here, and the young firs struggle to get high enough not to have their young shoots eaten off. We have an island whose biodiversity is challenged and where the only plants left growing for our children and grandchildren will be the few that our hungry deer won’t even try to eat.

Ruxton Island doesn’t have deer. Granted, De Courcy could never be deer-free and would we want that anyway; but a managed herd would not do the ecological damage that our over-population of deer does now. Perhaps the local conservation officer could advise us on how to keep our herd smaller and healthier. In the meantime, for colour, we can always go to Ruxton in May.

This article first appeared as “Wild Gardens in our Neighbourhood” in De Courcy Tidelines, Summer 2002, a publication of the De Courcy Island Community Association. My thanks to the author and to the DICA for their permission to print it again here. ◇

EDITOR