

THE LINNAEAN
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LETTER

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CONSERVATION WALK IN THE NORTH WOODS

Judy Rabi

On Sunday, September 7, 2014, Regina Alvarez led members of the Linnaean Society Conservation Committee (Eric Ozawa, Anders Peltomaa, Judy Rabi, Andrew Rubinfeld, and Barbara Saunders) on a botanical ramble through The Loch and Wildflower Meadow. This area of Central Park's North Woods is small but incredibly alive with all manner of plantings. It was a lovely day: clear blue skies, no humidity, and temperatures in the seventies.

During our walk Regina, who has a doctorate in plant ecology and who is a former Woodland Manager of Central Park, shared her very considerable knowledge with us. She pointed out and identified a wide array of grasses, weeds, plants, bushes, trees, and ferns. She indicated the habitats they prefer, interesting differences between similar native and non-native species, the ways that plants grow and change over time, and the varied methods of seed dispersal.

We started our walk along The Pool. Pickerel, lotus and a small stand of phragmites dot parts of this area. Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*) and Marsh Fern (*Thelypteris palustris*) grow along the water's edge on drier

land. Water-Lettuce (*Pistia stratiotes*), an invasive but quite handsome plant, grows with large green leaves spread out flat on the water, each plant resembling an open fan. The whole covers a fairly large swath on the southwest shore of The Pool. Regina explained that if the winter is warm and the Water Lettuce plants sustain themselves, they will have to be removed. For the plant naturalists, she added, deciding if and when to remove invasive plants while at the same time continuing to add native species, is an ongoing challenge.



Water-Lettuce

© Barbara Saunders



European Plantain

© Barbara Saunders

During our walk Regina showed us an easy distinction between the London Plane-Tree (*Platanus x acerifolia*) – a non-native, fast growing tree that is no longer planted in the park – and the native Sycamore (*P. occidentalis*). The trunk color under the peeling bark on the London Plane-Tree is yellowish; on the Sycamore it is white. The Sycamore also prefers wetter soil. She pointed out an easy way to identify the difference between European (Broad-leaf) Plantain (*Plantago major*) and American Plantain (*P. rugelii*) – red lower stem on the native variety. The contrast between first year Burdock (*Arctium minus*) and second year Burdock was also striking. They look utterly different. The first year plant, large leaved and flat to the ground; the second year plant, tall and branched. Along the stands of Thin-leaved Coneflowers (*Rudbeckia triloba*) we observed the profusely growing Partridge-Pea (*Chamaecrista fasciculata*), slender stemmed with pinnate compound leaves, a narrow pod attached. A plant that amused us, the Obedient Plant (*Physostegia virginiana*), also

known as False Dragonhead, allows one to bend the individual flowers any which way. Move a flower to the right and it will go there, push it to the left and, voilà!, it reorients.

This year's walk with Regina was different from our walk in the Ramble last year. Then we had many questions about the loss of mudflats and shoreline around the lake; the possibility of limiting boat access to the Lower Lobe, Indian Cave, and the Oven; the lack of plantings on the southern-most edge of the Point; the need for more bushes in the Henshead area nearer to the shore to protect it from pedestrian traffic; huge areas of erosion around the Gill; protecting the Jewelweed (*Impatiens capensis*) in the Ramble; possibly planting evergreen trees and shrubs to provide protection for birds in the fall; the need to keep dogs leashed; and more education about the special nature of the Ramble.



American Plantain

© Barbara Saunders

While there is much still to be done, we have all noted real improvements in the Ramble. Boat access has been limited. There are more bushes in the Henshead and throughout the Ramble. The Jewelweed is prolific in many parts of the park. There are more signs indicating the purpose of the Ramble, though there could be more. The Gill is slated for improvements as well.



Burdock (first year)

© Barbara Saunders



Burdock (second year)

© Barbara Saunders



Obedient Plant

© Barbara Saunders

On this year's North Woods walk we expressed particular concern about the enlarged path down to the Loch. This path invites pedestrian traffic and offers easy access along the water's edge as well. We asked Regina to share our concerns with the Woodlands Committee. (We did add that we are also aware that birders and birding photographers, not you or I of course, have been guilty of penetrating these areas.)

This was the Conservation Committee's second annual walk with Regina. Although

she is no longer employed by the park, we benefit from her experience and knowledge, not only as a botanist, but also as someone very much in touch with what the Central Park Conservancy and New York City Parks Department are trying to achieve. We are grateful to Regina for making herself available to us and for her appreciation that the Linnaean Society would like to make Central Park more bird-friendly. A more bird-friendly park can only make it a better park for all New Yorkers and visitors.



Regina Alvarez (left) showing plants to members of the Conservation Committee

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