

May Plant Count – 2022 Report

By Trevor Floreani

The Alberta May Plant Count (MPC) is a citizen science initiative that focuses on recording the phenology or flowering stage of vascular plants each year during the last week of May. From May 25-31, counters head out to their favourite natural areas, urban parks, and even their yards to record which species are in bloom. The main goal of the MPC is to increase awareness of native plants and get people engaged in thinking about phenology and the variability of the changing of the seasons. The data collected could also be used to help track species in the province and any trends related to climate change. This project is closely related to the Alberta PlantWatch, however it focuses on recording at similar locations at a similar time each year to make it more accessible for novice botanists and those that cannot commit to more rigorous monitoring. Participants are asked to record species that are about to flower to those in full bloom to those that have faded flowers. These values are captured in standardized code as a single value to indicate the reproductive stage of the species.

2022 was an exciting year for the MPC, as Nature Alberta was instrumental in establishing the project on iNaturalist. The decision to use the platform was seen as a great way to get folks involved on their mobile devices while still allowing traditional data submission methods to be uploaded. iNaturalist offers the MPC a space to store count data and photos, keep species names up to date, and makes all data accessible to the public in a geospatial environment. From what has been compiled, interim results for 2022 indicate 12 observers took part via iNaturalist, with another 20 involved in email data submissions.

At least 23 areas were surveyed including sites near Banff, Calgary, Peace River, Grande Prairie, Edmonton, Red Deer, Lethbridge, and Jasper. 205 plant species were identified across the province, with a total of 557 individual observation points recorded. Not surprisingly, the species with the most observations was saskatoon, followed by early blue violet, rough-fruited fairybells, wild strawberry, and prairie-crocus. We hope to have more data come our way so we can give updated results in the spring of 2023 and see how things compare to previous years. The general consensus from most participants was that the spring of 2022 was on the cool side and many species were at later blooming stages than normal.

The current MPC organizing committee consists of Melanie Bird, Trevor Floreani, Carlie Lewis, and Jeremie Mahaux. Many of those involved in the MPC over the years are members of the Alberta Native Plant Council. The MPC would also not exist if not for the dedication of past organizers and datakeepers such as Derek Johnson, Elisabeth Beaubien, and Kim Mackenzie. For those who are into data, we will be looking for help moving historical data from digital copies into iNaturalist! If you would like to get involved or learn more, please contact mayplantcount@outlook.com."