

TWO ORCHIDS—Hardly Suitable for a Corsage

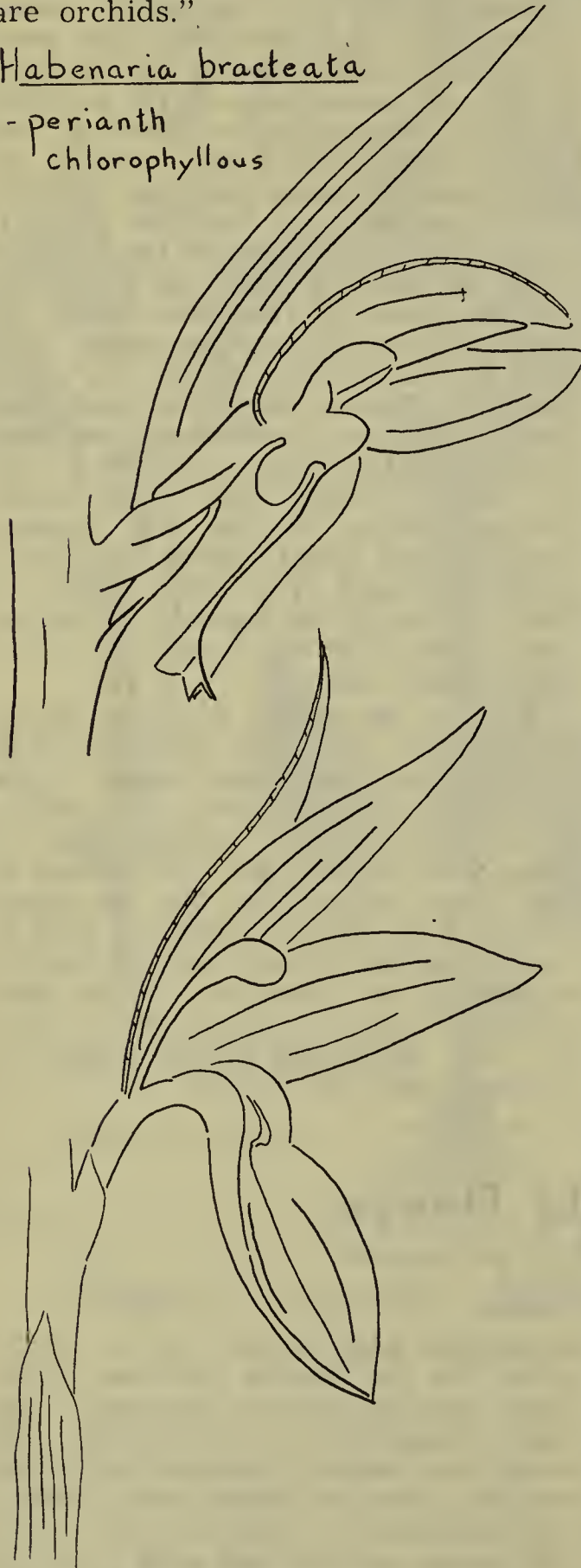
By R. B. WILLEMS, Lockwood, Sask.

"Look at the weeds he brought Mrs. Willems this time."

"Madam, those flowers in the vase are orchids."

Habenaria bracteata

- perianth
chlorophyllous



Corallorhiza striata

-destitute of chlorophyll

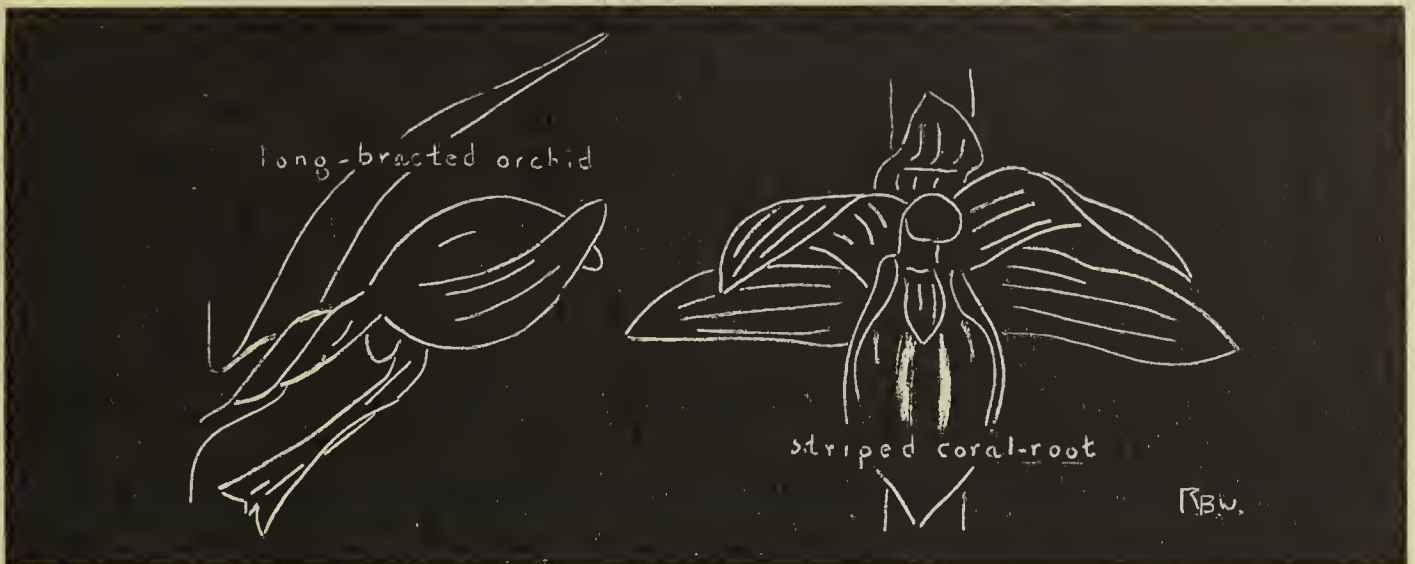
"Orchids!"

Incredulous at first, our friend who had dropped in for tea let me introduce her to the long-bracted orchids I had brought home to photograph. The word *orchid* conjures up in most minds exotic blossoms available only at florists for those special corsages. It is therefore no wonder that anyone would be surprised to learn that we have many wild orchids growing in Saskatchewan, some of them quite plain in appearance.

The long-bracted orchid, not uncommon at Edenwold, is found in open woods. It is a plant that is easily overlooked, because it may be obscured by taller neighbors, it grows from six inches to two feet tall. Early in the spring last year, I noticed the shining parallel-veined leaves that stretched upward and outward on opposite sides of the stem. When I returned in June to look for the blossoms, the top of every plant had been singled out and grazed off, presumably by deer. I finally located some plants in a different location.

The leafy plant stem bears a spike three to five inches long of light green flowers. A close look at the complex flower structure will reveal a number of interesting features. A bract subtends each flower giving this orchid its name, long-bracted orchid. In *Habenaria bracteata*, the bracts are two to four times as long as the flowers. The flower has three sepals, forming the hood, two narrow petals and a lip. The semi-transparent sac-shaped spur is the latest for nectar-seeking insects. These parts all appear to come from the top of the ovary which, as in all orchids, shows the intriguing 180 degree twist. Although it is true that the long-bracted orchid is not in the least prepossessing and is hardly suitable for a corsage, nevertheless it is an orchid — and should never be called a weed!

Once in a while you come across a plant that, generally speaking, is rather rare. I was very much surprised when I came across a coral-



root in a poplar grove. The coral-root, too, is an orchid. Except for its purplish-red color this otherwise cold and clammy plant is the ghoul of the woodlands. Green is the emblem of the plant kingdom, representing the chlorophyll in plants which enables them to make their own food. In contrast to the long-bracted orchid, the coral-root is destitute of chlorophyll. Since it has no chlorophyll with which to make its own food, it has to subsist on the humus and other organic debris of plant life found in the rich woods. Its short, thick, knobby roots in clumps like coral give the plant its common name, coral-root.

The striped coral-root, *Corallorhiza striata*, grows from eight to twenty inches high. The leaves are

greatly reduced and are in the form of small sheathing scales. Their succulent scapes or stems are yellowish, tinged with purple or magenta. You may recognize this rare and local species with its sepals and petals conspicuously striate-veined with three madder-purple veins.

It was a fitting climax to the annual summer outing at Madge Lake this year that a number of the Natural History group should have the rare luck to find the coral-root. To me this beautiful flower, belonging to one of the most highly specialized plant groups, brought to mind a quotation from one of our science textbooks:

"O Painter of the fruits and flowers,
We thank Thee for Thy wise design."

SASKATCHEWAN NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

ANNUAL MEETING

October 26 and 27, 1956

in Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History, Regina

The Annual Meeting will begin at 8 Friday evening with an executive meeting. The Saturday morning session will consist of reports by various officers of the Society. The afternoon session will conclude with the resolutions and the election of officers. During both morning and afternoon, short papers will be given and kodachromes will be shown by members. The main address of the evening will be by Dr. Douglas Leechman, Director of Western Canadiana, Calgary, Alberta. He will speak on "First Trails Through the Yukon."

Suggestions for the nominations committee should go to Dr. S. Houston, Box 279, Yorkton. Resolutions must be in the hands of Dr. R. Bremner, 725 University Drive not later than October 15, 1956.

Members planning to attend the Annual Meeting are requested to bring 10 kodachromes or some other item of interest. Write to "The Blue Jay," 2335 Athol Street, Regina; for program details.