

Volunteer's Love of Life Shines Through

By Beth Geiger

The achievements of botany enthusiast and volunteer Don Knoke are as varied and numerous as one of his plant-species lists. World War II pilot. Local farmer and historian. Fine photographer. Accomplished birder. Skilled marksman and hunter. Internet-savvy computer user. And at 88 years old, an unstoppable hiker.

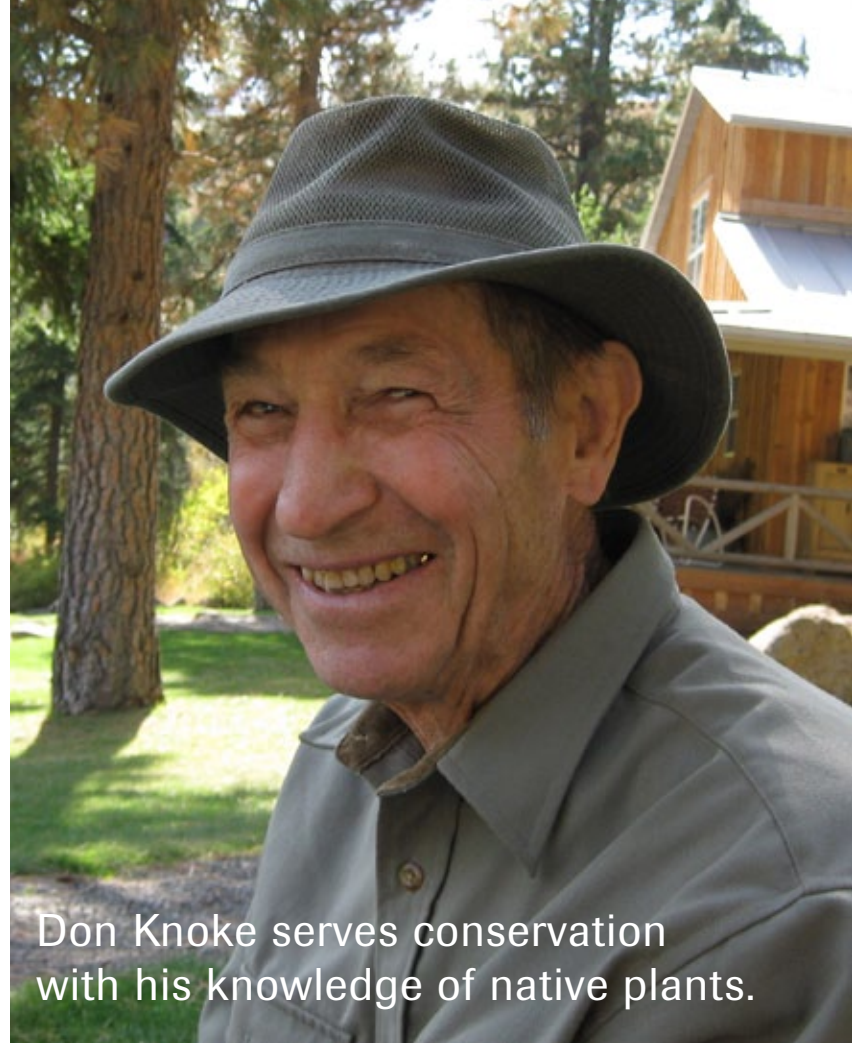
Most famously, Don is among Washington's most respected experts on regional native plants. Even without an official botany degree, "Don is a peer and a colleague among professionals," says University of Washington botanist David Giblin.

Happily, Don also contributes his considerable knowledge and energy to The Nature Conservancy. "Don has been a leader among volunteers and a plant-identification resource person for other volunteers," says Conservancy botanist Jim Evans. Don volunteered his time to inventory plants at the Conservancy's Ebey's Landing Preserve. He also identified plant species and planted trees in Swauk Valley, where the Conservancy holds a conservation easement.

Don's interest in plants began during childhood on the Kittitas Valley farm homesteaded by his great-grandfather. As a chemistry major at the University of Washington, Don couldn't resist a botany field course taught by renowned professor C. Leo Hitchcock.

"Hitchcock was an enthusiastic bird hunter, and when he found out my father had a farm with pheasants on it, he promptly gained permission to hunt there," Don explains. It was the start of a long relationship, and the root of Don's deep scientific knowledge of native plants.

After college, Don took over the family farm, where he still lives. When he retired in 1994, he began a



Don Knoke serves conservation with his knowledge of native plants.

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second, unpaid, career as a botanist. At the UW Herbarium, Don identifies plants, participates in collecting trips and contributes thousands of photos and descriptions. Don has also coordinated field trips for the Washington Native Plant Society and transferred scores of old plant lists to the society's Web site.

Don says that a typical day hike with these organizations nets about 150 species of plants. On each hike, he records species onto a digital voice recorder. Later, he enters the information into his database. "I have over 3,600 species and more than 600 plant lists on the database," says Don.

Is he slowing down any? Those who know him say his hiking stamina remains as remarkable as his encyclopedic knowledge of plants. "Don is an outlier in terms of his physical and mental ability," says UW's Giblin.

SCIENCE

Don Knoke's plant identification skills have enabled him to establish inventories of native plants for several Conservancy preserves

RESTORATION

ADVOCACY

Enjoy south Puget Sound's wildflowers

at Prairie Appreciation Day, May 9, at Glacial Heritage Preserve south of Olympia.

Visit prairieappreciationday.org for more information.

See Wildflowers at Conservancy Preserves in Washington

Native wildflowers pop out all across Washington in April and May, including at many Nature Conservancy preserves. Did you know that several of these sites are open to visitors?

HERE ARE YOUR BEST BETS FOR VIEWING WILDFLOWERS THIS SPRING -

EAST SIDE

Beezley Hills - Find yellow balsamroot, blue delphinium and bright pink phlox among the sagebrush and blue-bunch wheatgrass. The Conservancy owns more than 6,000 acres at Beezley Hills, which includes the Beezley Hills Monument Hill Trail north of Quincy. To locate the trail, travel east on SR 28 to the edge of town. Turn north on Columbia Way, and go eight miles to Monument Hill Road. The trailhead is on the east side of the road and identified by a walk-through gate.

Yakima Canyon - The Yakima River Canyon is the only place where the endangered basalt daisy grows, not far from a spot where volunteer Don Knoke shot these wildflower photos. Many hiking trails originate from the Yakima Canyon Road between Ellensburg and Yakima. The Conservancy's Yakima Canyon Preserve is about 13 miles south of Ellensburg, just upstream from Red's Fly Shop.

WEST SIDE

South Sound Prairies ♿ - One of the rarest ecosystems in the state, the prairies of South Puget Sound were sustained for thousands of years by Native Americans who used fire to keep forests at bay and encourage wildflower growth. Thanks to restoration and conservation by the Conservancy, volunteers and partners, visitors today can see spectacular displays of wildflowers. See them at the Mima Mounds Natural Area Preserve, one of the world's most unusual geological formations. The preserve has a wheelchair-accessible pathway through the unique mounded landscape. Head south on I-5 past Olympia and take the Littlerock exit (exit 95). Drive west through Littlerock and continue on 128th Ave. SW until it ends at an intersection with Waddell Creek Road. Turn right on Waddell Creek Road and look for the Mima Mounds entrance on the left.

Yellow Island - Yellow Island is among the most colorful of the Conservancy's preserves, long known to passengers aboard Washington's San Juan Islands ferries for its

dramatic wildflower displays. The small island's springtime floral display is greater than that of any similar-sized area in the 170-island San Juan archipelago. The island is open to daytime visitors, but you must find your own way there by private boat or kayak (some San Juan kayak guides offer tours).

For more details on visiting these preserves, go to nature.org/washington/wildflowers.

HESPEROCHIRON PUMILUS



"Many people are not familiar with it, but when they first see it, they think it is spectacular. The Hayward Road area is one of the few places it is found in the Kittitas Valley that I know of."

DODECATHEON CONJUGENS



"It grows only in vernal moist areas. But in good years, those areas can be a sea of pink."

FRITILLARIA PUDICA



An early bloomer: "Many people are familiar with it and when they find it in bloom they know that spring has arrived."



flower photos and text by Don Knoke