

## Fair Meadows State Natural Area

by Nancy Thomas

In July the Natural Resources Foundation offered a field trip to Fair Meadows State Natural Area. Eastern white prairie fringed orchids were blooming and numerous enough that they were easy to find along the mowed trails. The property is 380 acres owned by Gary and Penny Shackelford since 1985. It originally had an apple orchard, forest and farm fields, which they have converted to mesic prairie and wetlands that are prime habitat for the orchids,

as well as many beautiful prairie and wetland plants. They not only support the management financially but do much of the work themselves. The property is in a conservation easement and they have started an endowment fund with the Natural Resources Foundation hoping to build it up sufficiently to support the land's management in perpetuity.



Note the extremely long spur on the E prairie fringed orchid [*Platanthera leucophaea*]. It extends well beyond the flower's stalk (twice the length or more). I learned they're pollinated by sphinx moths that feed at night.

On the left is a photograph from our property of the Ragged Fringed orchid [*Platanthera lacera*], the E prairie fringed orchid's poorer cousin. You can see the lip is narrower, longer than wide, in comparison with the E prairie fringed, and that the spurs on the Ragged Fringed are quite a bit shorter, only about as long as the flower's stalk.