Camphorweed Found in the City of Alexandria

by R.H. SIMMONS

One of the Washington, D.C. region's rarest plants was recently discovered in the City of Alexandria, Virginia. This is a new addition to the Alexandria Flora and is the third known location in northern Virginia for this plant—all in Fairfax County. The Alexandria population consists of three plants, two with abundant seed. A voucher specimen of diagnostic parts of a plant, not a whole or uprooted plant owing to its rarity, was carefully collected and is housed in the City of Alexandria Herbarium (AVCH).

Pluchea camphorata, known as Camphorweed, is a member of the aster family (Asteraceae) that flowers in late summer and early fall in our area. It was previously collected in Fairfax County from "Eakin Park" by John Strohl in 1969 (John R. Strohl s.n., 9 Oct 1969, "In Eakin Park") and "Mount Vernon" by William Hunter in 1877 (W. Hunter s.n., 23 Sep 1877, Mount Vernon, Va.). The Strohl specimen is housed in the George Mason University Herbarium (GMUF) in Fairfax, Virginia; the Hunter specimen in the U.S. National Herbarium (US) in Washington, D.C.

The Fairfax County plants (including those from the City of Alexandria) are geographically disjunct from the south and central Coastal Plain and outer southern Piedmont populations where it is "frequent to locally common" (Virginia Botanical Associates 2023). It is considered "imperiled" in Maryland (S2) with an Endangered (Proposed Threatened) status (Maryland Natural Heritage Program 2021).

The D.C. region is the northernmost extent of this primarily southeastern U.S. species. Maryland locations occur at the northern extent of the species' range and were previously considered localized to the Western Shore, but new locations were recently added to the flora of the Eastern Shore along the upper Choptank River and the Pocomoke River. Several older reports from salt marsh habitats are not *P. camphorata* but rather the more common *Pluchea odorata* (Maryland Natural Heritage Program 2021).

R.H. Simmons collected *Pluchea*

Camphorweed (*Pluchea camphorata*) at the Telegraph and Duke Meadow Complex, City of Alexandria, Virginia. Photo by R.H. Simmons

camphorata in 1998 from a wet meadow and beaver impoundment at Chapman Forest South in the Mattawoman Creek watershed in Charles County, Maryland (R. Simmons, s.n., Aug 1998, "Chapman Forest"). This specimen is deposited at the DC Herbarium and represents the only Maryland specimen in the collection within the geographical limits of the Flora of the Baltimore-Washington Area.

This most recent discovery, in Alexandria at the Telegraph and Duke Meadow Complex, occurred during a site visit by R.H. Simmons, Mary Farrah, and Sara Tangren on October 23, 2020 to film a discussion of best practices and native biodiversity of managed meadows for the regional Meadow Working Group. The meadow complex is a 5-plus-acre suite of native successional meadow habitat that has been actively stewarded by Alexandria Natural Lands Management for nearly 27 years.

The entire complex of meadows overlies a massive lens of heavy, shrink-swell, hardpan clay of the Potomac Formation (Arell clay). The largest meadow parcel, where the Pluchea was found, overlies the heaviest clay and is seasonally wet.

This recent discovery underscores the importance of preserving and carefully managing open grassy areas and meadow habitat as critical refugia for native species requiring such conditions. It also shows the great wealth of native diversity in the seedbank that eventually re-emerges following the abatement of regular mowing practices and with the vigilant control of non-native invasive plants.

REFERENCES

Maryland Natural Heritage Program. 2021. Rare, Threatened, and Endangered Plants of Maryland, C. Frye Ed., Maryland Department of Natural Resources, 580 Taylor Avenue, Annapolis, MD 21401.

Virginia Botanical Associates. 2023. Digital Atlas of the Virginia Flora (http://www.vaplantatlas.org). c/o Virginia Botanical Associates, Blacksburg, Virginia. Accessed 15 September 2023.

UPCOMING EVENTS

MNPS Programs

2023

Oct. 31 Madeline Potter. *Lessons From an Insect Egg Hunt: How Plant Selection Can Impact Sustainable Control of Insect Pests.*

Nov. 28 Damien Ossi. *Invader Detectors. Monitoring Invasive Species in the DMV.*

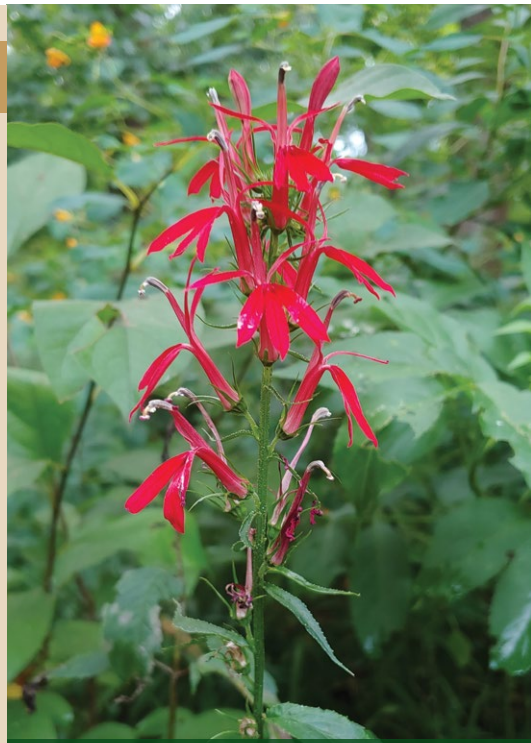
2024

Jan. 30 Sara Tangren. *Are Native Plants Warming to a Changing Climate? Potential Effects of Climate Change on Maryland's Native Plants.*

Feb. 27 Joe Chambers & Andrew Putnam. *Tiny Forests, Big Results? Testing the Miyawaki Tiny Forest Concept in Urban Landscapes.*

Mar. 26 Art Gover & Luke Flory. *Trying to Put the "B" in BMP (Best Management Practices) for Controlling Stiltgrass* (Gover)*; How Stiltgrass Removal Method Affects Native Plant Response* (Flory).

Registration is required. Unless otherwise indicated, all programs are by Zoom and are recorded. Zoom opens at 7:00PM for pre-program board update and member Q&A. Presentations begin at 7:30PM and generally run until 8:45PM. Please check mdflora.org for details, updates, and recordings of past presentations.



Cardinal Flower, *Lobelia cardinalis*. Photo by Judy Fulton.

Co-sponsored by UMD Extension-Garrett County & Mountain Laurel Garden Club

NATIVE PLANT SYMPOSIUM

The Power of Native Plants

Thursday April 11, 2024
9 am – 3 pm

Garrett College, McHenry, MD

For more information, contact Liz McDowell at lmcd.mnps@gmail.com.