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Mitchelliana

New York Flora Association Newsletter Winter 2025



Message from the President:

To all NYFA members and friends, as we head into the year 2025 I want to most sincerely wish all of you a happy and healthy New Year. NYFA will continue working on and expand on our projects for the current year: field trips, workshops, constant tweaking of the NY Flora Atlas to keep it up-to-date and to make it more user friendly, facilitating the new Flora of New York, and advocating for NY's native plants and communities at the statewide level. We couldn't do this without your interest, commitment, help and participation. On behalf of the NYFA Board, I thank you. Best regards in the New Year, Dan Spada, NYFA President

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NYFA Mission:

To help people enjoy and learn about the wild plants of New York State and promote the conservation of native species.

NYFA Sphagnum Workshop, August 16 to 18, 2024

by Tom Phillips, photos by Kyle Webster



The New York Flora Association, with the help of laboratory space at SUNY Potsdam, sponsored a Sphagnum workshop in the northwestern Adirondacks in August. Eleven participants joined workshop instructors Jon Shaw, Sean Robinson and Tom Phillips for a weekend of bog walks and laboratory keying of a variety of Sphagnum species. The workshop started Friday evening with a short presentation by Jon introducing Sphagnum morphology, basic identification of subgenera, ecology, and an introduction to the current phylogenetics of the genus. In addition, Jon highlighted some of his and his coworkers research on the complex phylogenetics of the *Sphagnum magellanicum* complex.

On Saturday morning the group traveled south from Potsdam to three different fens in the Sevey area, each fen with a slightly different assemblage of Sphagnum species. Field characteristics of the different subgenera and specific species were highlighted with an emphasis on the need to confirm each species identification with microscopy. Everyone collected specimens to work on later back at the lab in Potsdam. The first fen was fairly small but had a very diverse Sphagnum flora (see lists below) and a pH measured at 5.5. We spent a good part of the morning exploring the main peat mat then along the forested edge, comparing the different Sphagnum in each microhabitat. The next two fens were larger, with significant sedge coverage, and additional species were identified. The second had a pH of 6 and the last peatland had a pH of 5. Before entering the third peatland, the group stopped for lunch in a spruce forest that extended out into the peat mat. An unusual species, *Sphagnum quinquefarium*, was identified in the wooded area just as the group entered the fen. We then returned to Potsdam where the instructors introduced dissection and staining techniques and the use of the microscopes, both stereo-dissecting and compound. The group worked through the afternoon then enjoyed a dinner at a local Indian restaurant, returning to the lab afterward for some additional microscope time.





On Sunday the group traveled northeast to the Brasher State Forest to survey a dwarf shrub bog where additional species were identified. A few participants chose to leave for home from Brasher and the remaining participants returned to Potsdam to continue their microscopic identifications. A hearty thank- you is given to Glenn Johnson and Rachel Wallace of SUNY Potsdam for allowing the workshop to use the lab space and for providing microscopes and supplies, and to Dan Spada and Anne Johnson for help finding field sites for the group to visit.



Sphagnum species from 8/17/2024, Sevey Area

1st fen: *S. angustifolium*, *S. fallax*, *S. palustre*, *S. rubellum*, *S. magellanicum* complex, *S. cuspidatum*, *S. majus*, *S. fuscum*, *S. papillosum* Sevey 2nd fen: *S. subsecundum*, *S. magellanicum* complex, *S. papillosum*, *S. fallax*, *S. fimbriatum*

Sevey 3rd fen: Peatland mat; *S. capillifolium*, *S. fallax*, *S. magellanicum* complex, *S. fuscum*, *S. fimbriatum*, *S. majus*; Wooded entrance to peatland; *S. girgenhonii*, *S. quinquefarium*

Sphagnum species from 8/18/2024, Brasher State Forest *S. fallax*, *S. russowii*, *S. paulstre*, *S. centrale*, *S. capillifolium*, *S. squarrosa*, *S. fuscum*



Plants on the move: Tracking 60 years of climate-induced vegetation shifts on Whiteface Mountain, New York

By Rachel Hopkins, SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry



Figure 1: From left to right: view from the top of Whiteface Mountain showing Lake Placid in the distance, a 1x1m square quadrat used to survey understory vegetation, the field crew (author on the left and Rachel Benway on the right).

Ecological communities worldwide are already changing in response to warming climate (Parmesan and Yohe, 2003; Root et al., 2003; Chen et al., 2011) and temperatures are predicted to continue rising (Calvin et al., 2023). Mountain ecosystems are considered to be especially vulnerable to such climatic change (Beniston, 2003; Diaz et al., 2003), and the importance of mountain ecosystems for biodiversity conservation, ecosystem services, recreation, and more, highlights the necessity of studying the effects of climate change on these sensitive areas (Beniston, 2003; Diaz et al., 2003; Körner, 2004).

The natural elevational gradients on mountains provide a means of studying these changes, particularly plant species range shifts in response to warming temperatures (Becker et al., 2007; Körner, 2007; Sundqvist et al., 2013). As elevation increases, temperature decreases, thus, plant species often tend to shift upslope as climate warms (Allen and Breshears, 1998; Beckage et al., 2008; Lenoir et al., 2008; Tourville et al., 2023). However, findings have varied, with some studies showing downslope shifts (Foster and D'Amato, 2015; Wason and Dovciak, 2017), suggesting that climate is interacting with other factors, and highlighting the need for further research. This research focused on forest understory plants, which represent up to 90% of plant biodiversity in temperate forests, and contribute disproportionately to nutrient cycling (Gilliam, 2007). Additionally, due to their faster life histories and shorter lifespans than canopy trees (Lenoir et al., 2008; Pucko et al., 2011), understory species can serve as important indicators of recent climate change.

This research aims to: 1) examine how forest understory plant species distributions and community composition might have changed since the 1960s, and 2) evaluate how climatic or other factors might explain these changes. To accomplish this, in the summer of 2024 I resurveyed historic vegetation plots that were established on Whiteface Mountain in the Adirondacks of New York State in the 1960s (Holway and Scott 1969). Some of the sites were resurveyed in 1982, and a few in 2012-2013 (by colleagues from my current research group), but a full resurvey was never undertaken.

The data collection for this fieldwork season was completed in September 2024. I resurveyed 27 of the historic vegetation plots and 5 additional vegetation plots on Whiteface Mountain following the understory surveying methods described by Breisch et al. (1969). At each plot, I surveyed forest understory vegetation at 20 subplots along a transect that follows a contour line. At each subplot, I recorded the presence of all species within 1x1m quadrats. It is important to note that, due to the definition of what constitutes an understory species, woody species <1 cm DBH and ≤ 1 m height were counted. Thus, tree species that met that size criteria were included, but the data does not generalize to the species



as a whole (i.e. does not include more mature age classes). Ancillary data such as canopy openness, dominant trees, soil depth, percent cover, and *in situ* climate data using climate data loggers (e.g., iButtons) was also collected (cf. Wason & Dovciak 2017). The climate data loggers, along with climate data from nearby weather stations, will be used to relate range shifts to temperature.

While data analyses are ongoing, a number of interesting trends are emerging for some of the more common overstory and understory plant species. Here, I present preliminary results for four species (*Viburnum lantanoides* Michx., *Acer saccharum* Marshall, *Abies balsamea* (L.) Mill., and *Clintonia borealis* (Aiton) Raf. – hereafter referred to by their USDA plant codes, VILA11, ACSA3, ABBA, and CLBO3, respectively). These species were chosen due to their widespread distribution, general association with low (VILA11, ACSA3) and high (ABBA, CLBO3) elevations and differences in growth form.



Figure 2: (clockwise from top left): *Abies balsamea* seedlings, *Clintonia borealis* in flower, *Acer saccharum* seedling, *Viburnum lantanoides* leaves.

The distribution of ABBA appears to be positively correlated with elevation (Figure 3). The distributions appear quite similar between the 1960s and 1982, but, in 2024 the distribution over elevation is more strongly correlated with higher abundance at higher elevations, and lower abundance at lower elevations. This could suggest that ABBA is becoming less abundant at lower elevations, and more abundant at higher elevations, potentially illustrating an upslope shift in abundance. This may not be representative of the species overall (see above for trees counted as understory), however, since only smaller (and younger) individuals were measured, this could suggest that there is an ongoing and more recent pattern of changing abundance over elevation.



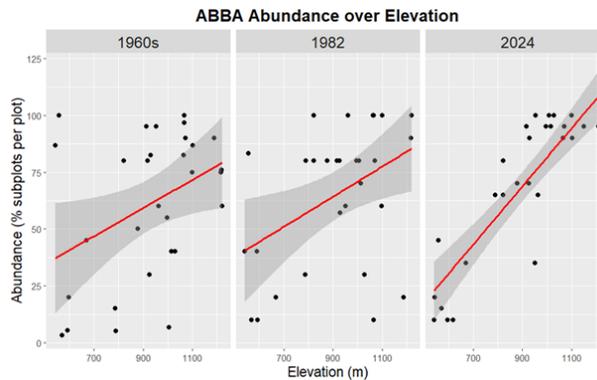


Figure 3: ABBA (*Abies balsamea*) abundance (measured by subplots present / total subplots per plot, expressed as a percentage) over elevation. Each data point represents a plot. Regression line calculated using geom_smooth as part of ggplot2 package in R STUDIO.

The distribution of CLBO3 (Figure 4) does not appear to have a strong linear relationship with elevation as ABBA does. However, patterns can still be detected, and a regression line is shown to help visualize patterns. In the 1960s, CLBO3 appears to have a slight negative correlation with abundance over elevation, however this could be influenced by two potential outliers around 800 meters. In 1982, there is a positive correlation, and in 2024 there is no significant correlation with elevation. In the 1960s and 1982 the abundance was mostly < 50%, except a few plots at mid to high elevation. In 2024, it appears the overall abundance of CLBO3 has declined, with no frequency > 50%, and all but two plots with abundance < 25%. Additionally, it appears that the distribution of CLBO3 has contracted, with most records in 2024 above 800 m, whereas in the past 2 survey years, it was a bit more spread out into the lower elevations, and with higher abundance. If true, this pattern of decline provides evidence that this species (generally associated with higher elevations) may be declining in overall abundance.

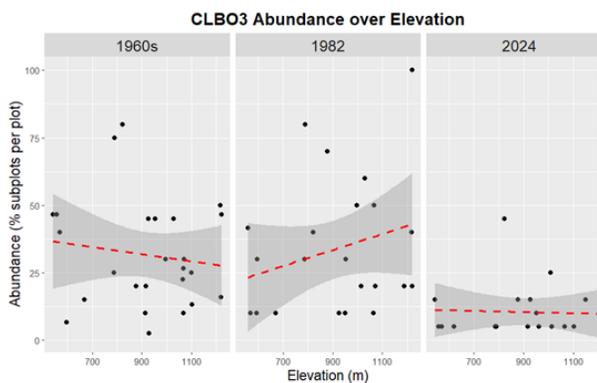


Figure 4: CLBO3 (*Clintonia borealis*) abundance (measured by subplots present / total subplots per plot, expressed as a percentage) over elevation. Each data point represents a plot. Regression line calculated using geom_smooth as part of ggplot2 package in R STUDIO.

Overall, the low elevational species were found at fewer plots than more ubiquitous or high elevational species, hence the lower number of records for ACSA3 and VILA11. It is more difficult to draw any conclusions with fewer records, however some patterns can still be described. For ACSA3 (Figure 5) the overall abundance increased to almost twice as much in 2024. The 1960s and 1982 appear similar with distributions mostly concentrated at lower elevations. In 2024 the distribution is more spread, and with



higher abundance at middle elevations. This could suggest increased abundance of ACSA3, although it would be difficult to draw that conclusion, given that the individuals measured were only seedlings, and it is unknown if this represents the species as a whole. Additionally, the regression lines in the 1960s and in 1982 do not appear to capture the pattern well, although they do illustrate higher abundance at lower elevations, and a slight negative correlation with elevation. The regression line for 2024 is somewhat more precise, and also suggests a slight negative correlation with elevation.

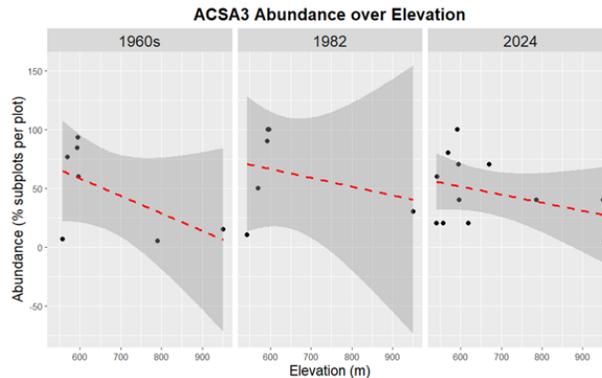


Figure 5: ACSA3 (*Acer saccharum*) abundance (measured by subplots present / total subplots per plot, expressed as a percentage) over elevation. Each data point represents a plot. Regression line calculated using `geom_smooth` as part of `ggplot2` package in R STUDIO.

For VILA11 (Figure 6), the distribution appears to differ between all three survey years. In the 1960s it was in high abundance at lower elevations, and at lower abundance at middle elevations. The regression line suggests negative correlation with increasing elevation. In 1982, there were fewer records of it, with overall abundance concentrated around 10%, and no clear association with elevation. In 2024, there are more records of it at lower elevations, and a few at middle elevations. The regression line for 2024 does not suggest much correlation with elevation either, and is similar to the regression line for 1982. VILA11 approximately doubled in number of records (plots) in 2024, however abundance was mostly < 20% per plot. Additionally, the change from the 1960s to 2024 suggests that VILA11 may now be more evenly distributed over elevation, rather than the sharp decline of abundance with elevation that is shown in the 1960s. It would be difficult to say whether this species has increased in overall abundance, since it has increased in number of records, but not in percent abundance per plot.

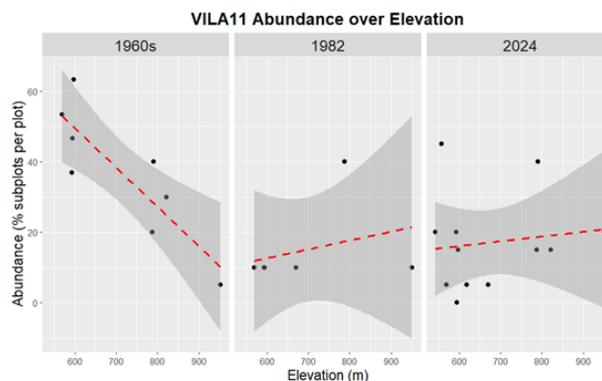


Figure 6: VILA11 (*Viburnum lantanoides*) abundance (measured by subplots present / total subplots per plot, expressed as a percentage) over elevation. Each data point represents a plot. Regression line calculated using `geom_smooth` as part of `ggplot2` package in R STUDIO.



Across these examples, we see evidence that species have changed in abundance and elevational distribution since the 1960s on Whiteface Mountain. Continued analyses are underway to determine how widespread these findings are across all plant species sampled. As the project continues, I will examine more individual species as well as plant community composition and perform statistical analysis, such as regression analysis and NMDS ordination methods. Additionally, I will investigate the role climate, and other factors may have in explaining any observed changes. This will lead to a better understanding of how plant species distributions and community composition might have changed on Whiteface Mountain and broaden our understanding of the effects ongoing climate change could have on flora in mountainous regions globally.

Acknowledgements

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Wolf Run Ramble, May 25, 2024

by Raquel Mennella, photos by Jordan Elliot

Driving in southwestern New York along a forested dirt road in Allegany State Park following the roaring Wolf Run River on May 25th led us to a small grassy roadside patch where NY Natural Heritage Program botanist Kyle Webster greeted us for the Wolf Run Ramble. This field trip was sure to be exciting, as this state park, physiographically, is a maturely dissected plateau, entirely unglaciated, and ranges in altitude from 1280 feet to 2400 feet. One particularly interesting fact is that the Allegany State Park (ASP) is the first state park in which a survey of vegetation was completed and submitted to the New York State Museum. This initial survey began in 1928 by staff of the New York State Museum. Today, we followed these botanists and continued the tradition of documenting the botanical wonders of ASP. With no direct trail to follow, seven of us set foot toward the forest to embark on botanical adventure. Sure enough, we made it no less than six feet from the road before being stopped by our first plant. The ever-graceful *Carex gracillima* was the first angiosperm to catch our eye along the open, wet roadside ditch before we entered the forest. *C. gracillima* was surrounded by *Carex stipata* and bountiful tufts of *Carex bromoides*. Although a traditionally tricky genus to key out, Kyle guided us through the identification of these new-to-me sedge friends. Pushing past the brush, we entered the oak-maple mixed hardwood forest and began to follow a seep along the Wolf Run tributary. Greeting us in this rich mesic woodland were the grass *Poa alsodes* and the sedge *Carex intumescens* (which was displaying its lustrous, inflated, tear-drop shaped perigynia). We observed more rich, mesic plants, including *Dryopteris cristata* which Kyle described as “venetian blind like”, an adequate description for this wood fern whose pinnae are at a 90-degree angle to the rachis, as if to greet the sun. The canopy in the forest opened and led us to a wet area where sun was abundant. With the sun shining on our faces and boots sloshing in mud we observed sun-loving species, such as *Solidago gigantea* and *Carex prasina*. In this moist area, I added a horsetail to my mental ID bank, *Equisetum sylvaticum*, whose branches are compound, delicate, occur in whorls, and droop downwards. In this open space we also stumbled upon a tricky-to-identify fern; one of the infamous wood fern hybrids, *Dryopteris ×boottii*, a sterile hybrid between



D. intermedia and *D. cristata*. This gorgeous specimen had the “venetian blind” characteristic of crested wood fern, but the indusia and rachis displayed the characteristic stipitate glands of the intermediate wood fern. Continuing onwards, following the seep upwards in altitude, we met many violets. Violets, like *Carex*, can be tricky to identify in my experience, but with Kyle’s guidance we were able to identify a total of eight species throughout the trip! Midway between the road and the crest of the hill we were climbing, we met a tiny little fern, *Botrychium angustisegmentum* (S4), otherwise known as narrow triangle moonwort. No bigger than my pointer finger, we had to lightly tiptoe through the forest to avoid trampling this small uncommon plant. Alongside the moonwort was the showier *Botrychium virginianum*.



Figure 1- *Equisetum sylvaticum* (left) and *Botrychium angustisegmentum* (right).

With two small streams on either side of us now, we avoided the lush growth of *Laportea canadensis* and carried onwards until we stumbled upon a recently deceased mink, then came upon a prime lunch spot: two fallen logs. We had a good conversation about breakfast pizza, an apparent Rochester favorite, although being from pizza capital New Jersey, I personally have my reservations. Fueled by pizza talk and PB&J sandwiches we continued on with more urgency now as impending thunderstorms threatened our sunny hike in the distant sky. We had to make a choice, put on our botany blinders to carry on upwards and meet the state-threatened *Clintonia umbellata* or turn around and accept defeat. Of course we chose the *Clintonia*. Leaving our seep trail behind, we scurried up the mountain where we found the flat crest and a trail. After reaching the ridge top, the skies opened and gave us a much needed cool down with rain. Trudging through the woods with rain in our eyes, we were determined to meet Miss *Clintonia*. And then suddenly, right alongside the trail, there she was! With just a few little yellow flowers, she was happy to greet us in the rain. Another marvelous site to see on this ridge were some young American chestnut. Although their fate is certain, it’s always nice to see that *Castanea dentata* is persisting in our forest’s understory. With the rain still pouring down on us, we made our way down the trail, eager for the warm salvation of our car’s heat. With that, our Wolf’s Run Ramble came to a moist close. It was an incredibly successful field trip, with great conversation and botanical wonders.



Figure 2. Left, *Clintonia umbellata* (photo taken from NYFA atlas) and right, the paw of the mink.



Wolf Run Species List:

Actaea racemosa, Black Cohosh
 Athyrium asplenoides, Southern Lady Fern
 Botrychium angustisegmentum, Lanceleaf Moonwort
 Botrychium virginianum, Rattlesnake Fern
 Cardamine rotundifolia, American Bittercress
 Carex bromoides, Brome-like Sedge
 Carex communis, Fibrous-root Sedge
 Carex gracillima, Graceful Sedge
 Carex intumescens, Bladder Sedge
 Carex plantaginea, Plantain-leaf Sedge
 Carex prasina, Drooping Sedge
 Carex stipata, Awl-fruited Sedge
 Carex woodii, Wood's Sedge
 Clintonia umbellata, White Clintonia
 Conopholis americana, American Cancer-root
 Dryopteris cristata, Crested Wood Fern
 Dryopteris xboottii, Boott's Wood Fern
 Equisetum sylvaticum, Wood Horsetail
 Festuca subverticillata, Nodding Fescue
 Galium lanceolatum, Lance-leaved Licorice Bedstraw
 Goodyera pubescens, Downy Rattlesnake Plantain
 Osmorhiza claytonia, Sweet Cicely
 Osmundastrum cinnamomeum, Cinnamon Fern
 Poa alsodes, Grove Bluegrass
 Prosartes lanuginosa, Yellow Fairybells
 Rubus idaeus, American Red Raspberry
 Solidago gigantea, Tall Goldenrod

Solidago rugosa, Rough Goldenrod
 Stellaria longifolia, Long-leaf Starwort
 Taenidia integerrima, Yellow Pimpernel
 Tiarella cordifolia, Foamflower
 Viola blanda, Sweet White Violet
 Viola canadensis, Canadian White Violet
 Viola cucullata, Hooded Blue Violet
 Viola labradorica, Labrador Violet
 Viola palmata, Trilobed Violet
 Viola pubescens, Downy Yellow Violet
 Viola rotundifolia, Round-leaved Violet
 Viola sororia, Common Blue Violet



Conopholis americana, American Cancer-root



Annual Meeting 2024 Recap

The NYFA annual meeting was held on September 21st at Ganondagon State Historical Site in Victor (Ontario County) with approximately 25 attendees, with the board welcoming new member Patty Butter. After the “business” portion of the meeting was concluded, the Conservationist of the Year Award (on a plaque made of solid *Prunus serotina*) was presented to Bruce Gilman, whose wealth of botanical knowledge is regularly shared with the general public through guided walks and lectures sponsored by many regional organizations. During his 42-year tenure at Finger Lakes Community College his teaching expertise included many aspects of field botany, glacial geology, and environmental and soil science. Bruce was also the Director of the Environmental Studies Program as well as Director of the college's Muller Field Station located in the southern Honeoye Valley. He continues to curate the Finger Lakes Herbarium, a collection of over 18,000 plant specimens representative of western New York, and is preparing an updated edition of his 1983 publication, Ontario County Flora.

After the presentation, we gathered in groups for Steve Young's always fun and creative plant quiz, followed by a tasty lunch provided by the NYFA. NYFA member Richard Cook brought two coolers full of home-grown and wild-collected *Asimina triloba* (pawpaws) for our gustatory pleasure and for anyone to take. After the lunch, Kyle led us as we botanized the nearby trails at Ganondagon, where highlights included 9 species of aster (*Symphotrichum puniceum*, *prenanthoides*, *lateriflorum*, *urophyllum*, *laeve*, *novae-angliae*, *pilosum* var. *pilosum*, *firmum*, and *lanceolatum*). The meeting concluded around 3:30 pm.





Left, Bruce Gilman receives the Conservationist of the Year award; Right, meeting attendees enjoy the pawpaw bounty provided by Richard Cook.



Board members posing after the luncheon: back row, left to right: Emily DeBolt, David Werier, Kyle Webster, Anna Stalter; front row, left to right: Rachel Schultz, Steven Daniel, Patty Butter, Joe McMullen, Ed Frantz, Dan Spada, Vicki Bustamante.

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