

Smooth Swallow-wort

Cynanchum laeve

Description

Smooth Swallow-wort is a perennial twining vine that may grow 10 to 13 feet (3-4 meters) long. This species is a member of the milkweed family and produces a white, milky sap if bruised. The leaves are oppositely arranged, long-stalked, broadly heart-shaped, and have long-pointed tips. The flowers, appearing from July to August, are grouped in rounded clusters that emerge from the leaf axils. Each cluster contains about 30 creamy white flowers, each of which is about ¼ inch (5 mm) wide and has 5 narrow lobes. The fruit is pod-like and contains hairy seeds.



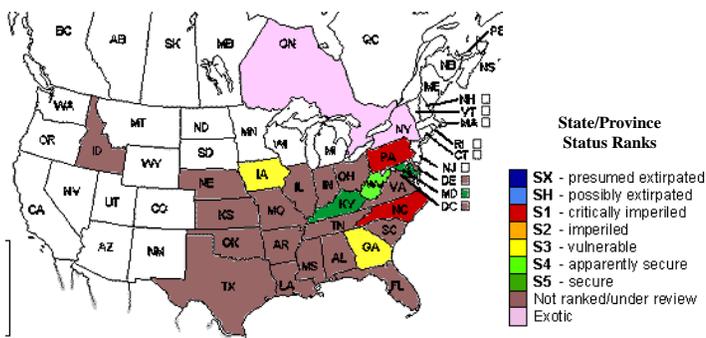
Photo source: R. Harrison Wiegand

Distribution & Habitat

Smooth Swallow-wort has a range in much of eastern and midwestern North America. In Pennsylvania, it reaches a northern border of its natural range, and has been documented historically in a few southeastern counties. It grows naturally on scoured riverbanks and riverbed rock outcrops in the Susquehanna River, and sometimes in disturbed ground.

North American State/Province Conservation Status

Map by NatureServe 2010

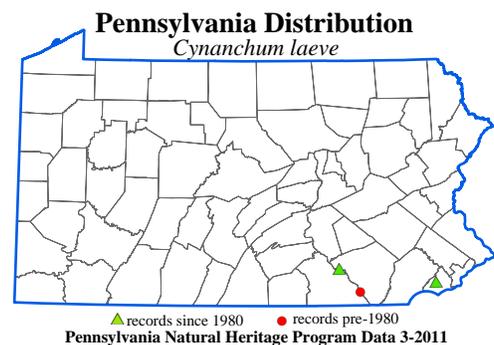


Current State Status

The PA Biological Survey (PABS) considers Smooth Swallow-wort to be a species of special concern, based on the few occurrences that have been recently confirmed in natural habitat. It has a PA legal rarity status and a PABS suggested rarity status of Endangered. Fewer than 5 populations are currently known from the state.

Conservation Considerations

The viability of populations of Smooth Swallow-wort and its habitat depends on maintaining the natural hydrology and natural condition of the shoreline and islands of the lower Susquehanna River. The species appears well-adapted to the seasonal fluctuations in water levels, especially the lower water levels of summer and fall when the plant is flowering and fruiting. Invasive species represent a threat to this species and its habitat. Occurrences of this species in disturbed habitats are not considered to be of conservation concern.



NatureServe conservation status ranks

G5 – Globally Secure; **S1** – Critically Imperiled in Pennsylvania

References

- NatureServe. 2011. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 7.1. NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available at <http://www.natureserve.org/explorer>
- Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program. 2011.
- Rhoads, A.F. and W.M. Klein, Jr. 1993. The Vascular Flora of Pennsylvania. American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- Rhoads, A.F. and T.A. Block. 2007. The Plants of Pennsylvania: An Illustrated Manual. 2nd edition. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

