

Cross-leaved Milkwort

Polygala cruciata

Description

Cross-leaved Milkwort is an herbaceous annual with a hairless, more-or-less 4-sided stem that may grow to 1 foot (ca 30 cm) in height, but is usually shorter. The leaves are arranged in whorls of 3 or 4, unstalked, linear to narrowly elliptic in shape, untoothed on the margin, and to 1.5 inches (4 cm) in length and to 1/8 inch (3 mm) in width. The greenish or greenish-purple flowers, appearing from July to September, are individually small and are aggregated in a dense, apically rounded, barrel-shaped cluster, which has at most a very short stalk, at the end of the stem or the branches of the stem. The most notable parts of the individual flower are the 2 inner sepals, which are larger and shaped differently from the 3 outer sepals and the 3 petals, being broadly-triangular in outline, heart-shaped at the base, and long-pointed at the tip. The fruit is a dry capsule containing 2 seeds.



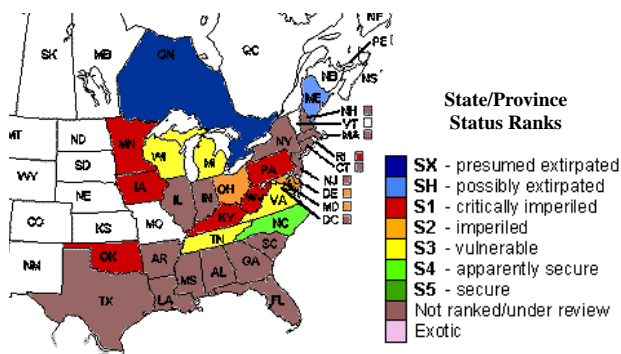
Photo source: John Kunsman (PNHP)

Distribution & Habitat

Cross-leaved Milkwort ranges from Maine to Minnesota and south into Florida and Texas. In Pennsylvania, it has been documented historically in the southeastern and southwestern counties. It grows in damp or wet openings, bogs, shorelines, and marshes.

North American State/Province Conservation Status

Map by NatureServe 2010

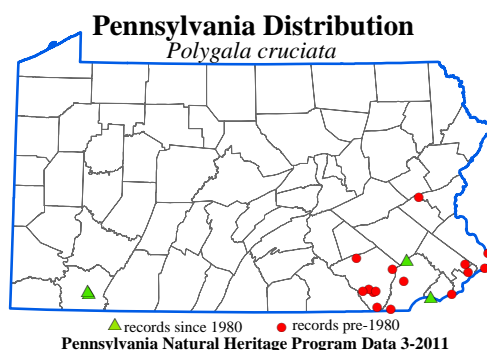


Current State Status

The PA Biological Survey (PABS) considers Cross-leaved Milkwort to be a species of special concern, based on the limited number of locations that have been recently confirmed and the wetland habitat. It has a PA legal rarity status and a PABS suggested rarity status of Endangered.

Conservation Considerations

The viability of populations of Cross-leaved Milkwort and its habitat may be enhanced by creating buffers and protecting the natural hydrology around wetlands and controlling invasive species.



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>
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- 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.

