Showy Lady's Slipper (*Cypripedium reginae*)

Pennsylvania Threatened Plant Species
State Rank: S2 (imperiled), Global Rank: G4 (apparently secure)

Photo Credit: Paul Wiegman, Western Pennsylvania Conservancy

Identification

Showy lady's slipper orchids are named for the inflated pouch formed by the lower petal. The single or paired, 1 - to 2-inch white and rose-pink flowers are the largest of our native orchids. Plants stand one to two feet high with 8-inch oval leaves clasping the stems.

Biology-Natural History

This species is a member of the Orchid Family *(Orchidaceae).* Plants of this genus are perennial herbs. Flowers bloom in June and July.

Habitat

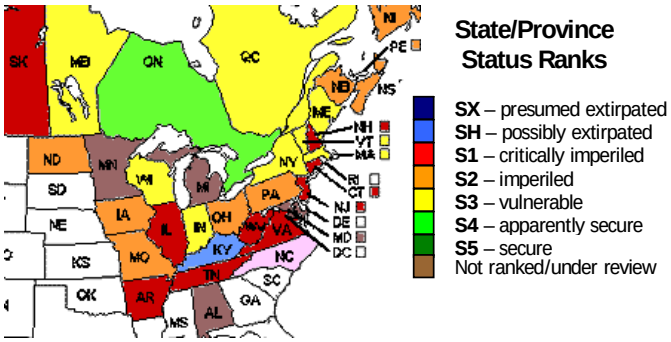
Showy lady's slippers have been found in swamps, bogs and wet woods extending from Newfoundland and Quebec to North Dakota and south through New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Missouri to the Appalachian Mountains as far south as North Carolina and Georgia. Pennsylvania populations historically occurred in alkaline wetlands from northwest through central to southeast areas of the state, but can be found today only in the glaciated northwest.

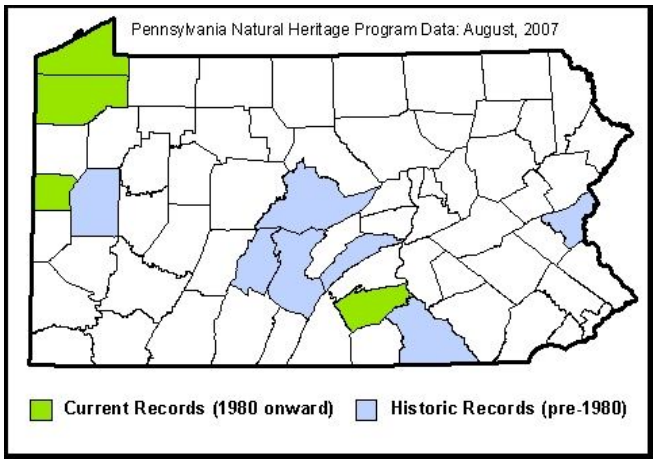
Reasons for Being Threatened

Threats include collection by nurserymen and misguided gardeners. The probability of showy lady's slippers surviving a transplant from their wetland habitat is poor. Even casual picking of the flowers destroys the plant's chances of reproducing. Loss of habitat from recreational and housing development, in addition to water pollution from mineral extraction, have taken their toll. Altho ugh 29 populations have been documented by historical collections, only five are known to exist here today.

North American State/Province Conservation Status

Map by NatureServe (August 2007)





Management Programs

One showy lady's slipper population is protected in a natural area owned by the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. A second is located on a state game lands. Owners of the three other sites should be encouraged to protect the plants. Searches must continue to assess the current condition of historically documented plant populations.

Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program

References:

- NatureServe. 2007. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 6.2. NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available http://www.natureserve.org/explorer. (Accessed: August 22, 2007).

Fact Sheet adapted from: Felbaum, Mitchell, et al. Endangered and Threatened Species of Pennsylvania. Harrisburg, PA: Wild Resource Conservation Fund, 1995.