

# Terrestrial & Palustrine Plant Communities Of Pennsylvania

By Jean Fike

## Sphagnum - beaked rush peatland

This type occurs in the open areas of many acidic peatlands. The substrate is sphagnum peat, often a floating mat. Typical species include *Rhynchospora alba* (white beaked-rush), *Sarracenia purpurea* (pitcher-plant), *Drosera intermedia* (spatulate-leaved sundew), *D. rotundifolia* (round-leaved sundew), *Xyris montana*<sup>S</sup> (yellow-eyed grass), *Juncus pelocarpus* (brown-fruited rush), *Carex trisperma* (a sedge), *Platanthera blephariglottis*<sup>S</sup> (white-fringed orchid), *Utricularia cornuta*<sup>S</sup> (horned bladderwort), *Eriophorum vaginatum* (cotton-grass), and *E. virginicum* (tawny cotton-grass). *Vaccinium macrocarpon* (large cranberry), and *V. oxycoccos* (small cranberry) are abundant in some areas. Shrubs, such as *Chamaedaphne calyculata* (leatherleaf), *Kalmia polifolia* (bog laurel), and *Andromeda polifolia*<sup>S</sup> (bog-rosemary), may also occur but do not dominate the community. This community usually occupies one of the interior zones of a larger peatland complex that may also include shrub, woodland, and forest physiognomies. In this case it may occur as part of the "Acidic glacial peatland complex."

**Related types:** The "Many fruited sedge - bladderwort peatland" type has a very similar structure and setting, but occurs under the influence of groundwater that raises the pH to at least 5. There is a corresponding difference in species composition. As the shrub cover increases, this type usually grades into one of the associated shrub peatland types. Pennsylvania's acidic peatlands usually represent a mosaic of floristically and physiognomically distinct patches or zones. For a description of this pattern and a list of associated community types, see the "Acidic peatland complex" description.

**Range:** Glaciated NE, Glaciated NW, Pocono Plateau, Unglaciated Allegheny Plateau.

**Selected references:** Crum 1992, PNDI field surveys.

**[Crosswalk:** Smith's "Oligotrophic Kettlehole Bog" (in part), "Nonglacial Bog" (in part), TNC's *Chamaedaphne calyculata* - *Carex* spp. Saturated Shrub Herbaceous Alliance.]