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THE RARE VASCULAR PLANTS OF SASKATCHEWAN

ROBERT V. MAHER, GEORGE W. ARGUS, VERNON L. HARMS and JOHN H. HUDSON. 1979. Syllogeus #20, National Museum of Natural Sciences, Ottawa K1A 0M8. Free.

This book lists 368 species (in 60 vascular plant families) which have been reported as rare. One appendix lists additional species which have been reported as rare but which are unconfirmed or misidentified or which seem to be too widespread and abundant to be included in this list. The text includes preface, general comments, acknowledgements, bibliography and appendices (about 25 pages) as well as the annotated list (about 30 pages) of rare plants. Between the English and French texts there are 25 pages showing 300 maps of the province clearly indicating where herbarium specimens of most of the rare species have been collected.

Some plants are rare because plant migration is generally a slow process and less than twelve thousand years ago much of Saskatchewan was still covered by glaciers. Obviously the status of a species is constantly changing and a list of rare plants of an area will also change. A species may become less rare in an area or it may disappear completely. It is largely a matter of opinion whether a species is or is not considered rare. The authors base their decision in this regard on previous reports rather than on the distributions indicated by herbarium collections. It seems to me that there are additional species which might be classified as rare in Saskatchewan,

for example, *Sorbus scopuliva* and *decora*.

Some plants may eventually be dropped from the list of rare plants because they become more abundant or widespread or because further study shows that they are more abundant than presently reported. Other species may be dropped from the list for other reasons. For example, *Yucca glauca* is listed with one location east of Fox Valley. A herbarium specimen from this location was received in 1978. Recently we have been told that a *Yucca* plant brought in by a visitor from the United States was planted in that location 25-30 years ago. The plant has survived and reproduced and there are now a dozen or more plants in that same location. The species is indeed rare in Saskatchewan but is it a native species?

The spots on the maps represent collections over a hundred-year period. One wonders how many of the species listed as rare have already been extirpated from the province. *Downingia laeta* is represented by one spot near Skull Creek where it was collected in the nineteenth century by Macoun. A conscious search for the species in the same area showed that it was still present in the 1950s but will it still be there in the 1980s? What about other species. *Carex assiniboinensis* is reported as occurring at Moose Jaw, Lumsden, Lake Katepwa, and Roche Perce. The first collection in Saskatchewan was in River Park in Moose Jaw in 1936. Cities and towns in Saskatchewan are noted for the preservation of natural areas. Is there any *C. assiniboinensis* in Moose Jaw at the present time? There must now, as mentioned in the Preface, be verification of the specimens located on the maps and there must be "field



Blue-eyed Grass

Fred W. Lahrman

verification of the current status of populations and an assessment of threats to the habitat of each species."

The notes on each species listed as are give references and short comments on range, habitat and status. For a few species there are also some comments on protection but usually the laws protecting the species are applicable only in certain American states. In some cases there may also be laws restricting international trade. For the most part there is no legislation protecting native vegetation in Saskatchewan.

The book is an excellent initial study of our native vascular plants. It is to be hoped that knowledge of our rare plants will become more complete and that the study can be extended to cover all biological diversity in the province. It is also hoped that

more people will become interested in our native plants. How many of these rare vascular plants do you know? Obviously the authors are not urging readers to rush out to collect rare plants and the book does not give the exact location of any plant. The book does reflect an increasing appreciation of our natural heritage and an expanding interest and understanding will help in the development of effective conservation policies.

The Canadian Botanical Association and the National Museum of Natural Sciences are to be congratulated for initiating this study but the interest and support of naturalists are needed to complete the study and to give adequate protection to Saskatchewan's rare plants. — Reviewed by *George F. Ledingham*, 2335 Athol Street, Regina, Saskatchewan, S4T 3G4.