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# NYFA Newsletter

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New York Flora Association  
of the New York State Museum Institute

Vol. 8. No. 2

Richard S. Mitchell, Editor  
New York State Museum

June - 1997

ADDRESS ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO NYFA, 3140 CEC, ALBANY, NY 12230 - DUES \$10 PER YEAR

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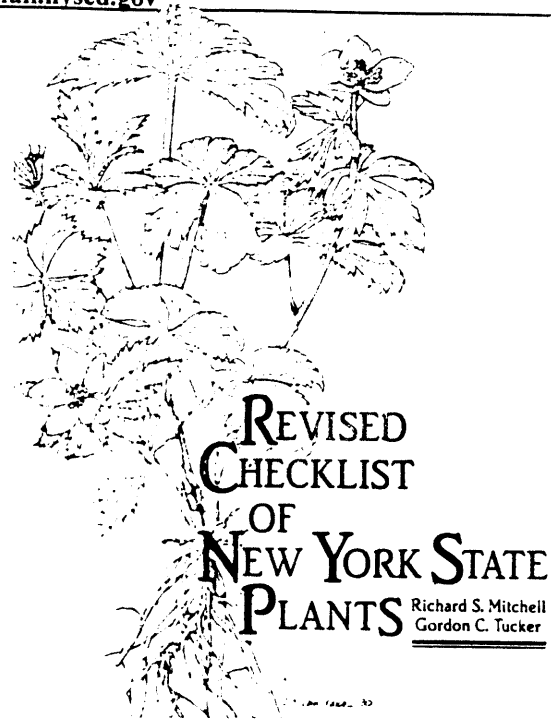
## The New State Checklist is Finally Out -

by Richard S. Mitchell

Eleven years in preparation, the book is finally available from **New York State Museum Publications**. An order form may be found on the last page of this newsletter. To say the least, my co-author, Gordon Tucker, and I are pleased and relieved to see the book come out. I'm particular proud to have kept the cost down, so that it will be readily available to all. This was done by delivering the job, camera-ready to the printer.

It is a 400 page, hard-cover book that lists the 3603 species of vascular plants that have been reliably reported from New York. Compared with the previous checklist (Mitchell, 1986), it offers many new features, as follows:

- The format for Angiosperms is a complete Cronquist System, listing all taxonomic levels from phylum down through variety (minor variations include lumping some families, as in Ericaceae).
- The format for pteridophytes is that of *Flora of North America* (vol. 2).
- Genera are titled, with accompanying authorities and generic synonymy.
- All taxa listed in Homer House's (1924) state checklist are accounted for. Many are synonyms, since House used the American Code of Nomenclature, replaced by the International Code 1932.
- All taxa listed by Kartesz (1994) are accounted for, either in the primary list or as synonyms; this is an ongoing process, but it was updated into the last week before publication of the checklist.
- No single source book provided the basis for our systematics: current literature was consulted through 1996, and taxonomic decisions were made by the authors regarding the acceptance of each taxon listed.
- Excluded species appear in an appendix that lists hundreds of taxa incorrectly reported from the state, whether through conjecture or misidentification.
- Rarity codes are those set forth by The Nature Conservancy, and recommendations for legal protection follow New York Natural Heritage Program guidelines.
- Six tables present statistics on the evolving state of knowledge about the flora, tallying all taxa and comparing past New York State floras and checklists.



NEW YORK STATE MUSEUM

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### A Few Surprises:

Those of you who don't regularly keep up with nomenclatural changes may be shocked to find *Smilacina* species transferred into *Maianthemum*, *Pyrola* and *Monotropa* suddenly in the Ericaceae, *Vincetoxicum* species back in *Cynanchum*, etc. All in all, there have been tens of thousands of changes, but fortunately most of them were in the synonymy, which has been expanded in the new volume to include a very high proportion of all the plants that have ever been reported for the state under different names.

So far, I have found two noteworthy errors:

- 1) *Solanum ptycanthum* (which accounts for most of what we have called "*S. nigrum*") is apparently native and shouldn't be marked with an asterisk.
- 2) Missing authorities: *Carex albicans* Willd. ex Spreng. and its var. *emmonsii* (Dewey ex Torrey) Rettig.

I'm sure you'll find more. Rupert Barneby once called them "beauty spots," and perhaps that's a good way to look at it. **We welcome all comments and corrections.**

## **White-tailed Deer & Vegetation: a Conflict?**

**By Steve Young, N. Y. Natural Heritage Program**

Last summer I had the opportunity to talk to the state's deer biologist on the subject of deer and vegetation in the state. Before we met I talked to various botanists and land managers throughout the state to obtain their perception about what deer are doing to the vegetation in their area. Many thought the deer were having a negative impact on the vegetation, especially the regeneration of herbaceous vegetation and seedlings, but that there was not much in the way of hard evidence supporting the severity of that impact. When I presented this information to the deer biologists they were concerned that the botanical community was misinformed and some of our perceptions may be wrong. They agreed to write responses to our comments to try to increase communication between deer biologists and plant people.

As a result, I urge those of you who are in plant societies around the state to invite your regional deer biologist to your meetings to share thoughts, perceptions and solutions to the deer-vegetation conflict that is occurring in the state. Their addresses and phone numbers are listed below.

### **Official Deer Team Members (as of late 1996)**

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## White-tailed Deer: An Editorial Comment -

by Richard S. Mitchell

In the preceding article, Steve Young was diplomatic and informational about the "deer problem," and, while this is an excellent position for him to take, I feel less inclined toward shyness about the issue. Steve recounted for us an opinion held among certain people he consulted: that there is little "hard evidence" of the wholesale destruction of vegetation by deer. Extensive enclosure studies by state, federal and private agencies over many decades have shown repeatedly and indisputably that deer overpopulation has a significant negative impact on the diversity and the health of natural communities -- especially the herbs, shrubs and tree seedlings.

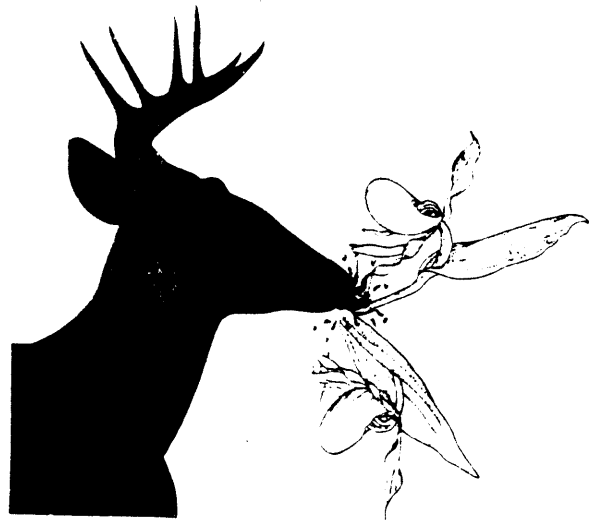
The question is not, "is there a problem," but "will New York's forests and wetlands survive the onslaught of outrageously-inflated, starving deer herds that are already wreaking destruction in several regions at this moment?"

Deer-foraging impact is particularly vexing on large tracts of state park land where the agencies responsible for land management have tried to implement sound practices, but were stopped by lobbying influences.

This is not a new problem. Aldo Leopold clearly forewarned us in the *Journal of Forestry* in 1936, offering suggestions that have gone largely unheeded. In the New York context, I refer you just one of many articles, an item in *The Conservationist* (September issue, 1982: Deer Management, Unit 53), in which Thomas Cobb explained the plight of deer in Harriman State Park, described to him at that time by Ward Stone (DEC pathologist) as being in "the worst condition that I have ever seen in wild deer." Since that article was published, the Palisades Interstate Park Commission tried to initiate a reasonable deer management program in Harriman State Park, but was stopped by public outcry from animal rights activists. The deer are in even worse shape now, of course, and park vegetation suffered significantly.

After personally exploring hundreds of miles, seeking every habitat in Harriman State Park and surrounding areas, I can tell you first hand that the vegetation there has been devastated by deer. Nearly every green thing has been nipped, often to the ground. Orchids and other rare herbs have shown a steep decline since the 1940s, and serious forage damage is evident throughout, from dry ridge-tops to trampled wetlands. In nearby Storm King State Park, where limited hunting is allowed, forage damage is far less, and plant diversity amazingly high for the latitude (over 850 species in 1200 acres). A similar, healthier condition is found in the adjacent West Point Military Academy Reserve, where careful management, enclosure studies and monitoring activities are carried out on a regular basis by the Army Corps of Engineers.

It amazes me that animal rights activists are willing to fight relentlessly to insure that their friends, the deer, die slow agonizing deaths, rather than being thinned out by controlled hunting programs. Is this humane?



### Poor Bambi, I Agree...

Bambi, your current fate as a fawn is not to see your mommy shot down during a forest fire, but to follow her to each summer meadow, only to find it stripped of all succulent treats. Twilight and dawn see you foraging shoulder to shoulder with others of your kind along deeply-trampled paths that cut and drain the wetlands. In the late night, you nibble near human dwellings on lettuce and hedges that provide little nourishment. You watch as your mother's energy level drops, and she finally sinks to her knees in exhaustion. It is November now. Her ribs and yours show through at a time when you should have stored up fat reserves to last you through the long winter. You begin to strip the bark from shrubs and trees, not sensing that you are destroying the very resources that sustain you.

Please, Mr. Disney, make the movie.

Note: The foregoing opinions are solely my own, and do not represent any policy of the State Museum, Museum Institute or any park authority. I can't even guarantee that they will remain *my* opinions if some knowledgeable person can convince me that my eyes and years of field experience have deceived me. (RSM)

### Ted Baim: New York Amateur Botanist Extraordinaire -

By Anne Jaster and Steve Young

Passing that small house on a quiet street in Niskayuna, near Schenectady, New York, one could scarcely imagine the treasures held within. These natural history riches were the result of at least sixty five years devoted to the study of plants: the paintings, books and, until his 80th birthday a few years ago, the herbarium of Ted Baim. In June of 1990, in a small ceremony, Ted presented the 4500-sheet collection of pressed plants to the Landis Arboretum in Esperance, New York. Sadly, at 86, Ted passed away last fall after many years devoted

to the collection and painting of New York's plants.

Ted Baim's life-long interest in plants began in his early teens when he read Ernest Thompson Seton's "The Book of Woodcraft" (meaning survival in the woods, not woodworking). That book contains illustrations of one hundred trees, and identifying them in the field was Ted's initial experience in botany. Soon he was identifying the wild flowers as well, learning their structure, habits, habitats and systems for their classification.

Identifying the grasses and sedges was more difficult, since some of their distinguishing features are so small that seeing them requires a microscope. And, since large books must be consulted, Ted took plant materials home for study. These were his earliest herbarium specimens. The year was 1936.

Throughout the 1920s and 30s Ted enjoyed camping out, sometimes alone, sometimes with his brother and a friend. A favorite place was the Plotterkill ravine (now Schenectady County's 650 acre Plotterkill Preserve) which he first visited in 1923. Over the years he has identified more than 600 different plants there and has listed them in "Vascular Plants of the Plotterkill Preserve," a document he has illustrated and photocopied for numerous friends.

Other early camping/botanical destinations were Indian Lake (reached by bicycle from Schenectady in three days), and South Bay of Lake Champlain (reached by canoe). At Hart Lake in 1940 Ted first met Orra P. Phelps and her daughter, Orra A. Phelps, legendary figures to those interested in natural history and the Adirondacks. Over the years they and other naturalists, including three of the four State Botanists, were sources of information and inspiration for Ted. Ted was a good friend of Stanley Smith, Curator of the New York State Museum herbarium, and they were partners on many plant collecting trips, especially in the Adirondacks. Ted's amazing recollection of rare plant collection sites in Schenectady County and the Adirondacks has also helped the New York Natural Heritage Program with their plant relocation efforts and surveys.

With the advent of World War II, Ted began several years of service in the army. Although exposed to hardship and danger (he was twice wounded), he would collect plants wherever he was, if there was time. Training in Louisiana and Florida and service in the Philippines and New Guinea exposed him to huge new groups of plants. Faced with such a selection he had to decide what and how to collect. Ted sensibly chose easy to manage plants like ferns (that lie flat) and made each specimen conform to the dimensions of *Newsweek* magazine which was available to soldiers. At the end of his service career, he bound all the stuffed Newsweeks tightly together and carried them home in his duffel bag. Identifications of these exotic specimens were made with the aid of experts at the Arnold Arboretum and the Gray Herbarium of Harvard University, good connections for an aspiring botanist to make. Soon after his return to the

U. S., an offer of part time employment at the herbarium of the New York State Museum provided Ted with more opportunities to consult professionals and study plant classification. He was also a charter member of the Eastern New York Botanical Club, which he helped found in 1949, but which is no longer active.

Years before he began collecting plants, Ted was already drawing and painting them. Initially done to help him understand and remember their structures and habits, botanical illustration later became for him a subject of deep interest in itself. Using pen and ink and watercolor, he put his accurate eye, skilled hand, artistic sense and great patience to work to produce paintings of beauty and high quality. His series of fifty paintings of mosses has been exhibited at the New York Botanical Garden, the New York State Museum, General Electric Research Lab (where he worked as a machinist from 1954 -74), Burnt Hills Library, Rochester Museum of Arts and Sciences, and at the Landis Arboretum on the occasion of his 80th birthday. The 4500 herbarium sheets presented to the Arboretum constituted only half of the plants Ted had collected. The rest are scattered among herbaria at other institutions including a number at the New York State Museum.

In a lifetime of observing plants, Ted's goal of recording the flora of Schenectady County stands as an almost-completed achievement. He hand-wrote a checklist of the county that includes species names, locations and specimens collected. This checklist and accompanying natural history information are presently being computerized for publication. His books, notes and paintings on the natural history of New York and Schenectady County will be deposited in Schenectady County institutions.

Ted Baim's botanical information, collections and paintings will be invaluable to future generations of botanists. He will be missed by his friends and colleagues who knew him and hiked with him well into his eighties.

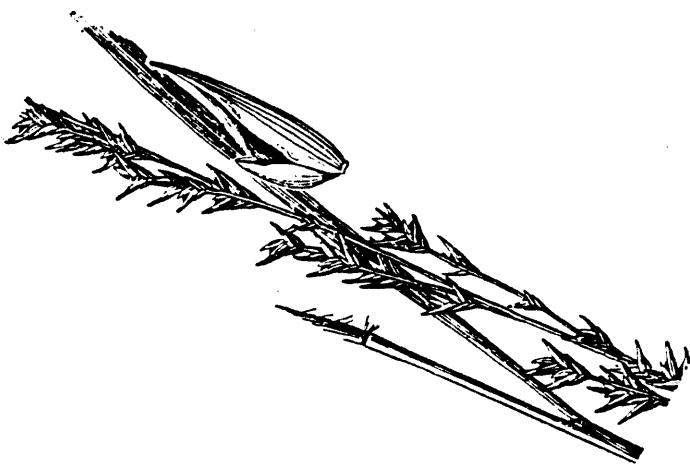
## **Book Review:**

### **Wild Orchids of the Northeastern United States -**

The Northeast could use a good, modern guide to the orchids, even though a number of such books have come and gone over the decades. It is a true shame that this volume, authored by Paul Martin Brown and illustrated by Stan Folsom was not produced in a professional manner. Cornell University Press has a good reputation, and certainly must have had the book reviewed, yet the result is a glib treatment of a complex subject, illustrated with pitiful line drawings. What appear to be disoriented veins in many species are found to be diagonal cross-hatches in others. The plants in these crude drawings lack underground parts, thus often leaving half a blank page above. The photos of the outrageously oversaturated

color plates are, for the most part, badly out of focus, lending an eery, nasty look to the publication.

Apparently the author does not consider Pennsylvania and New Jersey to be northeastern states, since the distribution ranges mysteriously play out -- one county deep. The mapped ranges are inaccurate in most cases, reflecting a lack of research. The book begins with lists of orchids that occur at the author's favorite collecting spots (or regions), which appear arbitrarily circumscribed. The book ends with a list of orchids of the "Northeast," as defined by Mr. Brown. Between, you will find little of interest. I encourage you not to buy this book, and to tell your botanical colleagues to avoid it as well. Like most fluff-pieces, however, I'm sure it will do well, making so many of you who do careful work wonder why you bother. **Richard S. Mitchell**



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*Chasmanthium laxum* (L.) Yates SLENDER SPIKEGRASS

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### **Ecologists Rediscover a Native Grass Thought to be Extirpated -**

by Greg Edinger, N. Y. Natural Heritage Program

While conducting natural community inventories in pouring rain on Barcelona Neck (eastern Long Island), associate ecologist/botanist Greg Edinger and associate ecologist David Hunt of the New York Natural Heritage Program found a small population of slender spikegrass, *Chasmanthium laxum* (L.) Yates. Slender spikegrass had been collected from six other locations in the state, the

last of which was in 1936. Bob Zaremba, Director of Science Programs with the New York Regional Office of The Nature Conservancy had visited the historical sites and tenaciously searched for the plant elsewhere on Long Island for over ten years, so the species was considered extirpated in New York and listed SX. The location at which we found it is at the northeastern limit of its distribution range.

**Note:** This discovery did not get into the new checklist, so you may wish to delete the symbol indicating that the species is extirpated. The TNC state rank changes from SX to S1. (RSM)

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### **Shawangunk Trip Listed Incorrectly:**

**Yes, it was my fault that last year's trip got announced again, a whole year late, but don't despair -- there is a trip scheduled but it's a joint effort between the Torrey and Long Island Botanical Clubs. Contact them for details.**

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### **Fall NYFA Trip Still Scheduled: The Montauk Peninsula of Long Island - Saturday & Sunday, Sept. 6-7**

We will be exploring the outermost limits of Long Island, an area famous for its unusual flora, including: Napeague Beaches, Walking Dunes, Oyster Pond, Montauk Point, the woodlands at Hither Hills, and grassland restoration burns at Prospect Hill. We may even see the very rare sandplains gerardia (*Agalinis acuta*), which should be in bloom at that time. Even if you must travel a considerable distance, try not to miss this one, as it is a very special tour. We hope to arrange housing for you, for which there will be a charge. Call Bob Zaremba for details at 518-463-6133 ext. 226 (or 518-274-7419).

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### **Due Dues -**

If you haven't checked your envelope lately (let's say the last couple of years) please do, and note the year above your address. It lets you know when you last paid up. We greatly appreciate your interest and support, and you can reinstate any time for a maximum of \$20, which will pay your subscription through 1997.

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**Your comments, articles, field experiences, botanical discoveries, etc.  
are of great interest to us. We invite you to share in the process.**

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