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Review of *Rare Vascular Plants of Alberta* by Linda Kershaw, Joyce Gould, Derek Johnson, and Jane Lancaster

Donna Cherniawsky
Alberta, Edmonton

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Rare Vascular Plants of Alberta. Linda Kershaw, Joyce Gould, Derek Johnson, and Jane Lancaster. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2001. xliv + 369 pp.. Illustrations, photographs, maps, glossary, references, index. \$75.00 cloth, \$29.95 paper.

This book is a marvelous addition to the literature on rare vascular plants of Alberta and certainly the most comprehensive. It is itself rare through its inclusion of descriptions, illustrations, photographs, and distribution maps with species lists of rare vascular plants. The editors and many contributors have done magnificent work demonstrating that rare plant information is not static, but always changing as the status of rare plants is continually reviewed with new documentation. An appeal is even made to readers to enhance their awareness and assist with documentation of new rare plant sightings for subsequent status review and conservation. Clearly, the volume's intent is not only to help readers recognize rare vascular plants but to help them understand why they are rare, their significance, and the part we can all play in their conservation.

The book is organized into five major sections. Its introduction offers a comprehensive discussion of rare plants presented in the context of their geographic distribution, factors contributing to species' rarity, and different types of rarities. Also addressed are plant assessment and tracking for conservation in Alberta and Canada, rare plant surveys, and data management. Considerable space is devoted to the six natural regions of Alberta with descriptions of indicator vegetation communities supplemented by a full-page color map.

Species accounts are arranged according to growth form: trees/shrubs, monocots, dicots, grass-like plants, ferns/fern allies. With an unknown plant, therefore, identification requires perusal, page by page, through all the species listed under the appropriate growth form. It would have been

more efficient, I think, had the species been organized according to the natural region(s) in which they are most prevalent. This method would have also allowed the reader to look specifically for rare plants in each region with less likelihood of missing some, further contributing to the ongoing updates of rare plant documentation.

Presently, the families and their genera are grouped according to similarity to one another, although it is not evident which criteria have been used. To the novice this has little meaning; with larger complex groups like *Carex* and grasses, an alphabetical arrangement would certainly be preferred by most of us. Along with scientific and common names, the authors include descriptions of plants and habitats accompanied by notes that include topics varying from etymology and similar common species to ethnobotanical information. In place of the latter, I would have preferred more information directly related to the species' rarity.

Excellent and informative photographs, line drawings, and distribution maps for Alberta and North America are included for each rare species. The Alberta distributions are conveniently superimposed on the six natural regions of the province. The North American maps are shaded to show the rarity status of plants by province and state, thereby indicating where a taxon is rare (and why) across its geographic range. This greatly expands the functionality of an Alberta-based book across North America and, certainly, into the Great Plains. Not restricted to prairie elements, the Great Plains is largely dominated by grasslands. Rare grassland species of Alberta are well represented in this book; of these, 70 percent are also rare in the Great Plains region outside of Alberta.

The volume's addendum consists of thirteen species accounts of taxa new to the tracking list since 1998. Placed apart from the other species accounts, though, they are at risk of being overlooked.

Appendices include keys to difficult species, various rare species lists from different sources, and a rare plant report form. The most useful appendix is an alphabetical list of all the rare plants in Alberta, their rarity status, and the natural regions in which they are found. Not all plants are treated in the book, however, so it would have been beneficial to have highlighted those that are represented. An illustrated glossary presents terms, predominantly morphological, accompanied by clear illustrations, although the most straightforward definitions are not always provided.

Although the book is intended "for anyone interested in learning more about rare plants in Alberta," I would recommend that the reader have some background in biology, preferably botany. To capture a wider audience,

more definitions are required in the text or glossary. Focused on Alberta, much of the information presented on rare plants nonetheless transcends political boundaries and is applicable to the rest of North America north of Mexico.

This endeavor is the successful culmination of dedicated collaboration by the editors and numerous contributors who accepted the challenge of educating their readers about rare vascular plants and their conservation. The volume is a valuable resource serving as both a field guide and reference, not only for Alberta, but for all of Canada and the United States. **Donna M. Cherniawsky**, *Botany Program, The Provincial Museum of Alberta, Edmonton.*