



SPECIAL PLANTS OF
NEW JERSEY

factsheet

Variable Sedge

Scientific Name: *Carex polymorpha*

State-listed: Endangered

Federally-listed: None

State Conservation Rank: S1

Global Conservation Rank: G3

Description/Identification Tips: Erect, perennial grass-like herb in the sedge family (Cyperaceae) that grows to a height of 30-60 cm. Dense colonies form from stout rhizomes in open sun; less dense beneath a forested canopy. Leaves firm and flat, 3-6 mm wide, with basal leaves reduced to bladeless sheaths. Male flowers are 1-3 cm long terminal spikes; female flowers erect. Perigynia are numerous, hairless, and conspicuously beaked, 4-5.5 mm long. Pistillate scales are much shorter than the perigynia with purplish-brown sides and a green center.

Range: ME south to VA and WV; likely extirpated in DE, MD, and NY.

Best Time to See: Flowers June through early July.

Habitat: Forests, scrublands, and open herbaceous vegetation communities mostly on dry to seasonally saturated sandy acid soils.

Management: Variable Sedge appears to be a disturbance colonizer given appropriate soil conditions and may benefit from canopy thinning, litter removal, prescribed burning, and off-season mowing.

Needs: This species is known to exist in only two locations in Morris County. Protection of these remaining habitats is crucial as both are on public lands.

Comments: Variable Sedge regularly occurs in association with Velvety Sedge (*Carex vestita*).

References: Gleason and Cronquist 1991; Everett 2001; NatureServe 2010; New York Natural Heritage Program 2011; Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program 2011; USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database 2011.

— Ecological Interactions —

* *Carex* spp. are an important food source to insects, which eat the leaves, and birds, which eat the seeds.



NJ Natural Heritage
Program Data: August
2008

Current and Historically
Documented Records