Wildflowers of the Adirondacks

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Book Review

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Wildflowers of the Adirondacks
D. J. Leopold and L. J. Musselman
Johns Hopkins Press
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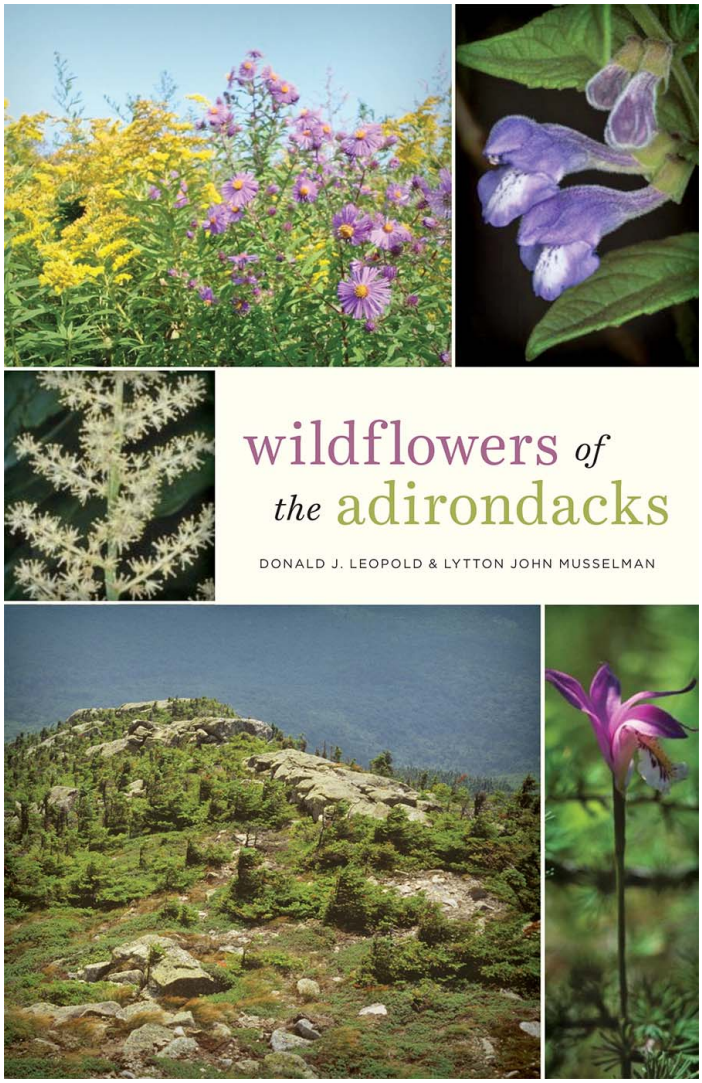
Though I was long familiar with Adirondack chairs, it was not until fairly recently that I visited the Adirondack Park, a park covering more than 6 million acres almost half of which is in forest preserve land. A landscape formed by glaciers, the large elevational range spanned (95–5334 feet) and numerous lakes and water features makes for many plant communities. The authors of *Wildflowers of the Adirondacks* wrote this book after years of teaching courses about the flora at the Cranberry Lake Biological Station of the State University of New York's College of Environmental Science. If only I'd had this book at the time, it would have been enlightening and fun to use it exploring the woods, meadows, and bogs of this beautiful park.

Descriptions of the plant communities are included, with lists of species representative of each (giving both Latin and common names). A variety of wetlands adds to the diversity of wildflowers as this area has bogs, fens, and marshes. Habitat shots give a feel for each community before launching into the flowers themselves.

The focus is on showy, mostly herbaceous plants, with lovely photos to inspire enthusiasm and aid in identification. There are no keys, and I was amused to see dichotomous keys described as "an identification method devised by people who don't need the keys for people who can't use the keys"! The decision of the authors to avoid jargon makes the book friendly and accessible, and like many popular wildflower guides, the plants are arranged by the color of their flowers or flower-like parts. The species are listed first under their Latin names, then their common names—perhaps due to the academic botanical training of the authors. It took me a while to realize that plants are arranged (after flower color) in alphabetical order of the plant families, then genus name.

The plant descriptions are useful to help distinguish one from another, especially between multiple species in the same genus or family. I enjoyed the inclusion of colorful explanations and vivid common names, such as "lumberjack's toilet paper" (large-leaved aster, *Eurybia macrophylla*). That particular common name cannot be found in the index, however, and were it there it might also be applied to some other species with large and soft leaves such as mullein (*Verbascum thapsis*), evidence of the value of Latin names in unequivocally identifying species. Some of the descriptions include an explanation of why the Latin name is appropriate, such as the names for two pink-flowered orchids. The pink lady's slipper, *Cypripedium acaule*, can be understood when you know that *pedium* means "shoe" and *acaule* means "stemless," as the leaves are all basal. The Latin name of the early spotted coral root, *Corallorhiza maculata*, makes sense when they say that *coral* implies coral-like, rhiza "root" refers to the



underground rhizomes that resemble marine corals, and maculate means spotted, referring to the spotted lip of the flower. (I have always liked Stearn's *Botanical Latin* to understand the meanings of plant names.) The authors also include traditional medicinal and homeopathic uses for some of the plants, and warnings about which are poisonous and deadly.

As my early botanical training was in northern Michigan, taking Boreal Flora from E.G. Voss at the University of Michigan Biological Station, many of the species included are quite familiar. Most people from the Midwest to Northeast, as well as

eastern Canada, may find familiar faces among the many nice flower portraits. The authors mention some wildflowers serving as foods for bees, butterflies, hummingbirds, and other wildlife, but I would have liked to see a little more ecological information where available, especially about plant/animal interactions of some of the species, such as mosquito pollination in *Platanthera (Habenaria) obtusata* (Thien 1969). To be fair, the authors do mention that *Trillium* are favorite food of white-tailed deer, and when deer populations grow large, their numbers dwindle. They also include details about the insectivorous habits of bladderworts (*Utricularia*—six species!), sundews (two kinds of *Drosera*), and purple pitcher plants (*Sarracenia purpurea*).

My sole complaint is that the text appears to be double-spaced, not making it any more legible but perhaps spanning more pages than required. A slimmer book would be easier to carry in one's backpack. I highly recommend this book and expect it will be used and enjoyed by many exploring this floristically rich region of the world.

Literature Cited

Stearn, W.T. 1995. Botanical Latin, 4th edition. Timber Press, Portland, OR.

Thien, L.B. 1969. Mosquito pollination of *Habenaria obtusata* (Orchidaceae). American Journal of Botany 56:232–237.