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## Book review

### **Wildflowers and other plants of Iowa wetlands**

S.T. Runkel and D.M. Roosa, Iowa State University Press, Ames, Iowa, 1999, xvi + 372 pp., ISBN 0-8138-2174-6, US\$ 24.95 (paper)

This superbly illustrated field guide is not intended to function as a comprehensive technical guide to wetland plants of Iowa. Rather, it includes the more conspicuous botanical representatives of these habitats and presents them in a format that is intended to be “intelligible and useful to non-experts”. The book includes an introduction that summarizes wetland losses in Iowa and the steps being taken to preserve them. A substantial section follows in which the various wetland types that occur in the state (i.e. marshes, floodplain forests, alder thickets, fens, bogs, coldwater streams, open water lakes, oxbows, seeps, ephemeral ponds, wet prairies, willow thickets, sedge meadow, and farm ponds and impoundments) are described succinctly. At least one color photograph of representative habitat is provided for most wetland types. The wetland types are then surveyed briefly from within each of the major geological landforms occurring in Iowa. Again, color photographs supplement the discussions. There is even a brief section that presents an overview of the rare wetland species of Iowa.

However, the main feature of the book is the field guide, which is augmented by an excellent collection of large color photographs that accompany 150 species of angiosperms and lower vascular plants commonly occurring in Iowa wetlands. The printing quality is superior. The species are divided into several sections comprising the following. (1) Terrestrial flowering herbs (i.e. helophytes) which make up the bulk of the book with 96 species. These are arranged in order of their flowering sequence, which provides an advantage to any user by indicating the plants most likely to be in flower at various times of the year. (2) Ferns, fern allies and lower vascular plants (13 species). (3) Trees, shrubs, and vines (16 species). (4) Herbs growing in water (25 species). The latter three sections are arranged alphabetically by common name. There are no keys, but these would not be effective given the somewhat limited coverage of species.

In addition to a color photograph, each species account includes a list of common names, the derivation of the scientific name, where the plant is found, various aspects of its biology (flowering, fruiting, etc.), description of major features and economic uses. A good sense of humor keeps the reading lively. For instance, the authors indicate that the derivation of the genus name *Lysimachia* possibly involves a story of Lysimachus (literally: “a release from” “strife”) who, when chased by an angry bull, reputedly pacified the animal by waving

this plant in front of it. They add “an approach we have not tried but do not recommend”. I could not help but wonder whether the “bull” had other significance here. There is a wealth of interesting information in this section. Did you know that *Pycnanthemum* was used to bait mink traps, or that cows grazing on *Helenium* may produce bitter tasting milk, or that *Menyanthes* leaves were once substituted for hops in beer brewing?

I did manage to find a few errors. *Acorus calamus* is said to be the only species of the genus growing naturally in the USA. However, *Acorus americanus* certainly occurs in the country and is the only truly native *Acorus* species here. Also, the photograph of *Potamogeton nodosus* is actually that of *Potamogeton natans* (ironically, the text states that this species is easily identified “as pondweeds go”). I guess this emphasizes just how taxonomically difficult *Potamogeton* can be! The yellow waterlily is listed as *Nuphar luteum*, a species that does not occur naturally within the United States (this nomenclature apparently follows the outdated system proposed by Beal). *Marsilea* is said to be named after Luigi Fernando, Conte Marsigli (which agrees with Fernald), but Frances Perry attributed the name to Giovanni Marsigli. I am not sure which is correct. However, despite these few and minor inconsistencies, the book is quite accurate overall and certainly very informative.

As most aquatic botanists realize, the wide distributions of water plants enable field guides such as this to be used across a much broader geographical region — certainly at least to the genus level — so you do not have to live in Iowa to enjoy this book. In fact, I found that nearly all of the species in the guide also occur in Connecticut’s wetlands. In particular, students should find this book to be particularly useful for learning wetland plant names. I am certainly going to recommend it to mine.

This relatively small format guide is quite suitable for carrying around in the field. It is also bound so that it lays nicely open on a flat surface. I highly recommend that you pick up a copy and take it along with you next time you are out in the field.

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