



Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program

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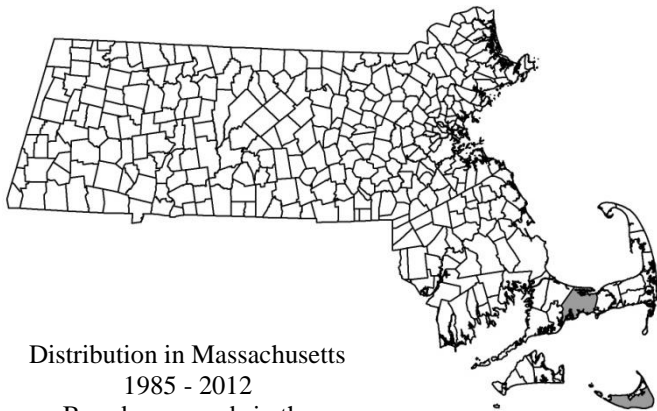
Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

Slender Marsh Pink *Sabatia campanulata* (L.) Torrey

State Status: **Endangered**

Federal Status: **None**

DESCRIPTION: Slender Marsh Pink is a handsome pink-flowered perennial of sandy coastal plain pond shorelines. It is a member of the Gentian family (Gentianaceae), rather than the Pink family (Caryophyllaceae). Slender Marsh Pink grows from a branched caudex, a short woody base at or just below ground level. The stems arising from the caudex are 20 to 60 cm (8–24 in) tall and often have several widely spreading alternate branches. A winter rosette of short ovate leaves does not persist into the growing season. Stem leaves are sessile, opposite, and generally have three veins. The leaves below the branches are 2 to 4 cm long and vary from oblong lower on the plant to lance-shaped higher up; the uppermost leaves are much narrower. The five pink petals are 10 to 15 mm long and half as wide, with yellow bases which together form a yellow eye in the middle of the flower; rarely, petals are white. The narrow sepals (green petal-like structures underneath the petals) are fused at their bases into a short, spreading tube approximately as long as the petals. Slender Marsh Pink is one of our rarest plants, known from only three locations in Massachusetts.



Distribution in Massachusetts
1985 - 2012
Based on records in the
Natural Heritage Database



Slender Marsh Pink has five pink petals with yellow bases that form a yellow “eye” in the middle of the flower (left); leaves are opposite and sessile, with rounded bases (right). Photos by Bruce Sorrie.

AIDS TO IDENTIFICATION: In coastal plain pondshore habitats, Slender Marsh Pink is distinguished from other *Sabatia* species by the following characteristics:

- Five pink petals with yellow bases, forming a yellow “eye”
- Basal rosette that does not persist through the growing season
- Stem leaves that are sessile with rounded bases

SIMILAR SPECIES: Annual Sea Pink (*S. stellaris*) is an annual that occurs in brackish marshes; the sepals are about half as long as the petals, and the petals are wider and obovate (egg-shaped and widest above the middle). The leaves of Slender Marsh Pink are rounded near the base; in Annual Sea Pink, they taper to the base. Slender Marsh Pink is known to hybridize with Plymouth Gentian (*S. kennedyana*), a species of Special Concern in Massachusetts. Plymouth Gentian has flowers with eight to twelve petals, a persistent basal rosette, and is usually found in shallow water.

A Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

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Please allow the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program to continue to conserve the biodiversity of Massachusetts with a contribution for ‘endangered wildlife conservation’ on your state income tax form, as these donations comprise a significant portion of our operating budget.

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POPULATION STATUS IN MASSACHUSETTS:

Slender Marsh Pink is listed under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act as Endangered. All listed species are protected from killing, collecting, possessing, or sale, and from activities that would destroy habitat and thus directly or indirectly cause mortality or disrupt critical behaviors. Slender Marsh Pink is currently known from Barnstable and Nantucket Counties, and it occurred historically in Plymouth County.

RANGE: Slender Marsh Pink is found from Massachusetts and New York south through the Atlantic coastal and Gulf states. It also occurs in Indiana, Kentucky, and Tennessee.

HABITAT: Slender Marsh Pink inhabits shores of coastal plain ponds in substrates ranging from pebbly sand, at the point of highest water where pond shore vegetation meets upland vegetation, to organic muck closer to the pond edge, often under pitch pine. In New York, Slender Marsh Pink also occurs in brackish tidal settings, and it should be looked for in similar habitats in Massachusetts as well.

Associated species include: Slender-leaved Goldenrod (*Euthamia caroliniana*), Freshwater Cord-grass (*Spartina pectinata*), Canada Rush (*Juncus canadensis*), Canada Bluejoint (*Calamagrostis canadensis*), American Cranberry (*Vaccinium macrocarpon*), Highbush blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*), Thread-leaf Sundew (*Drosera filiformis*), Brown Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora capitellata*), and Northern Meadow-beauty (*Rhexia virginica*). Plants of the adjacent upland include Pitch Pine (*Pinus rigida*), Sweet Pepperbush (*Clethra alnifolia*), Black Tupelo (*Nyssa sylvatica*), and Inkberry (*Ilex glabra*).

THREATS AND MANAGEMENT

RECOMMENDATIONS: Slender Marsh Pink is at the northern edge of its range in Massachusetts and may be unable to overwinter during periods of severe cold. This species and others characteristic of coastal plain pondshores are associated with the sandy margins of ponds that are exposed during periods of low water. Artificial withdrawal of water and other changes in ground and surface water hydrology may alter the specialized cycle of flooding and drawdown required by these species. Slender Marsh Pink may also be damaged by off-road vehicles, raking and clearing of shoreline vegetation for beach use, loss of habitat for storage of

boats, and heavy recreational use. These activities should be prohibited in coastal plain pondshore habitats, and signs to discourage trampling should be installed where trails occur near known populations. If deer browse is detected, a wire cage may be useful to protect robust individuals. Best management practices should be implemented to prevent or reduce nutrient enrichment from lawn fertilizers, faulty septic systems, and flocks of grazing ducks or geese. Monitoring for invasive species is needed for early detection and control, and all management should include monitoring to establish efficacy of management protocols. All active management of rare plant populations (including invasive species removal) is subject to review under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act, and should be planned in close consultation with the Massachusetts Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program.

Flowering in Massachusetts

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec

REFERENCES:

Gleason, H.A., and A. Cronquist. 1991. *Manual of Vascular Plants of Northeastern United States and Adjacent Canada*, 2nd edition. The New York Botanical Garden, Bronx, NY.

NatureServe. 2010. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 7.1. *Sabatia campanulata*. NatureServe, Arlington, VA. <http://www.natureserve.org/explorer>.

Zarembo, R.E. 2004. *Sabatia campanulata* (L.) Torrey (Slender marsh-pink) Conservation and Research Plan for New England. New England Wild Flower Society, Framingham, MA.

Updated 2015

A Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan

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