

Colicroot (*Aletris farinosa*)

Status and Protection

Colicroot is listed as a threatened species and receives protection in Ontario under the *Endangered Species Act, 2007* (ESA) and in Canada under the federal *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). Protection prohibits actions such as killing, harming, possessing, selling or trading of the plant.

Description

Colicroot is a member of the Liliaceae (Lily) family and is the only member of its genus in Canada. It is a low growing perennial herb with long stems (50 – 100 cm) topped with numerous white tubular flowers on the middle and upper part of the stem. Basal leaves (8 – 20 cm long) are narrowly lanceolate or acuminate (narrowing gradually to a point) and parallel veined. Colicroot can occur either in small colonies or in large populationsⁱ.

Colicroot is intolerant of shading by woody plants and competing herbaceous vegetation, and as such benefits from disturbance and open habitat management techniques such as prescribed burning. Its flowers appear and are visible from June to July and persist after blooming, enclosing the capsular fruitⁱⁱ. The fruit has many seedsⁱⁱⁱ. Colicroot reproduces from seeds, as well as vegetatively from buds that form on the rhizomes. Insects such as bumblebees and bee flies pollinate the flowers, and seeds are dispersed by the wind.



Distribution

Colicroot is widespread in eastern North America, from New England west to southern Wisconsin, and south to eastern Texas and northern Florida. In Canada, it only occurs in Southwestern Ontario, and primarily within the Essex, Lambton, Elgin and Norfolk Counties^{iv}. The largest known Ontario populations are found in Lambton County and within the Windsor area in Essex County^v.

Habitat

Colicroot flourishes in open habitats such as Tallgrass Prairies with sandy soils of pH 5.0 – 7.0^{vi}. Colicroot can be found on lake shores and in swales, meadows, clearings, abandoned fields, prairies, and open thickets^{vii}. It also seems to do well in highly disturbed topsoil or sand pits^{viii}.

i - viii URS Corporation and LGL Limited. 2009. Colicroot (*Aletris farinosa*) Impact Assessment Report for the Detroit International River Crossing Study.