

All botanists' dream of a day in the field when they discover a unique, pristine habitat that is full of rare plants! Considering the current state of the environment, days like these are hard to come-by. Many botanists are fortunate enough to have such special days during their careers, and one botanist who did is Albert Commons (1829 – 1919). Commons was a local botanist from the Centerville area of New Castle Co., Delaware, and was a very important figure in the history of Delaware botany and contributed much to our current knowledge of the flora of the state. Although Commons had many successful days in the field, there were two days that were particularly noteworthy, August 5, 1874 and September 10, 1875.

On August 5, 1874, Commons visited southwest and south-central Sussex Co. in and around the towns of Laurel, Pepperbox, Little Hill, and Gumboro. He explored habitats he described as “sandy swamps,” “ponds,” “wet sand,” “pine barrens,” “bogs,” “wet places,” “dry sand,” and “dry woods.” On this day he collected 19 species, in addition to others that are today rare in the state and are considered to be of conservation concern by the Delaware Natural Heritage Program (see table below). One species is known today in the state from only a single population (*Minuartia caroliniana*). Two species have not been reported in the state since Commons collected them on this day 130 years ago, *Lophiola aurea* and *Xerophyllum asphodeloides*. One species, *Rhynchospora knieskernii* is today listed as threatened by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and two are considered to be globally rare by The Nature Conservancy (*Eupatorium resinosum* and *Rhynchospora knieskernii*). The majority of the species Commons collected on this day are at, or near their northern limits of natural distribution (12), and three are at, or near their southern limits of natural distribution.

On September 10, 1875, Commons spent time in southeast Sussex Co. in and around the areas of Baltimore Hundred, which includes the town of Frankford, and the areas of Indian River and Cedar Neck. He explored habitats he described as “salt marshes,” “sea beach's,” “ocean shores,” “wet places,” “low and sandy pine barrens,” “pond,” and “swamp.” On this day he collected 27 species, in addition to others that are today rare in the state and are considered to be of conservation concern by the Delaware Natural Heritage Program (see table below). Two species are known today from only single populations in the state (*Amaranthus pumilus* and *Polygonum glaucum*). Five species have not been reported in the state since Commons collected them on this day 131 years ago (*Eupatorium resinosum*, *Gentiana autumnalis*, *Oclemena nemoralis*, *Rhynchospora knieskernii* and *Triglochin striata*). Two species (*Amaranthus pumilus* and *Rhynchospora knieskernii*) are today listed as threatened by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and five are considered to be globally rare by The Nature Conservancy (*Amaranthus pumilus*, *Eupatorium resinosum*, *Gentiana autumnalis*, *Polygonum glaucum* and *Rhynchospora knieskernii*). The majority of the species Commons collected on this day are at, or near their northern limits of natural distribution (17), and three are at, or near their southern limits of natural distribution.

Any botanist would be envious of such days in the field, but any botanist would also be very impressed with the botanical field skills of Albert Commons. I would like to acknowledge Dr. Arthur Tucker and Dr. Norman Dill for the following publication which

reconstructed Albert Commons' field activities for the days discussed: Tucker, A.O., and N.H. Dill. 1993. The collections of Albert Commons on Delmarva, 1861-1901, with attention to August 4-5, 1874 and September 9-10, 1875. *Bartonia* No. 57: 9-15.

William A. McAvoy
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August 5, 1874

Scientific Name	Common Name
<i>Cyperus compressus</i>	poorland flatsedge
<i>Cyperus dentatus</i>	toothed sedge
<i>Eleocharis equisetoides</i>	horse-tail spike-rush
<i>Eleocharis melanocarpa</i>	black-fruited spike-rush
<i>Eupatorium resinsum</i>	pine barren boneset
<i>Hypericum denticulatum</i>	coppery St. John's-wort
<i>Lophiola aurea</i>	golden crest
<i>Minuartia caroliniana</i>	pine barren sandwort
<i>Najas gracillima</i>	thread-like naiad
<i>Paronychia fastigiata</i>	cluster-stemmed nail-wort
<i>Pityopsis graminifolia</i>	grassleaf golden aster
<i>Quercus ilicifolia</i>	scrub oak
<i>Rhynchosia tomentosa</i>	hairy snoutbean
<i>Rhynchospora knieskernii</i>	Knieskern's beak-rush
<i>Rhynchospora torreyana</i>	Torrey's beak-rush
<i>Schoenoplectus etuberculatus</i>	Canby's bulrush
<i>Smilax pseudochina</i>	long-stalk greenbrier
<i>Viola pedata</i>	bird's-foot violet
<i>Xerophyllum asphodeloides</i>	eastern turkeybeard

September 10, 1875

Scientific Name	Common Name
<i>Agalinis maritima</i>	saltmarsh false-foxglove
<i>Amaranthus pumilus</i>	seabeach amaranth
<i>Aristida lanosa</i>	woolly three-awn
<i>Asclepias lanceolata</i>	smooth orange milkweed
<i>Centella erecta</i>	erect coinleaf
<i>Dichanthelium aciculare</i>	needle-leaf witchgrass
<i>Eriocaulon decangulare</i>	ten-angle pipewort
<i>Eryngium aquaticum</i>	marsh rattlesnake master
<i>Eupatorium resinsum</i>	pine barren boneset
<i>Gentiana autumnalis</i>	pine barren gentian
<i>Lachnanthes caroliniana</i>	Carolina redroot
<i>Myriophyllum pinnatum</i>	cutleaf water-milfoil
<i>Oclemena nemoralis (Aster nemoralis)</i>	bog aster
<i>Paspalum dissectum</i>	Walter's paspalum
<i>Pityopsis graminifolia</i>	grassleaf golden aster
<i>Polygonum glaucum</i>	seabeach knotweed
<i>Polygonum ramosissimum</i>	bushy knotweed
<i>Prenanthes autumnalis</i>	slender rattlesnake-root
<i>Rhynchospora knieskernii</i>	Knieskern's beak-rush
<i>Rhynchospora scirpoides</i>	long-beaked bald-rush

<i>Salicornia bigelovii</i>	dwarf glasswort
<i>Scleria muehlenbergii</i>	Muhlenberg's nutrush
<i>Scleria pauciflora</i>	few-flowered nutrush
<i>Spiranthes tuberosa</i>	little ladies'-tresses
<i>Symphotrichum concolor</i> (<i>Aster concolor</i>)	eastern silvery aster
<i>Triglochin striata</i>	three-ribbed arrowgrass
<i>Utricularia inflata</i>	swollen bladderwort

Nomenclature for plant names follows: McAvoy, W.A. In Preparation. The Flora of Delaware, an annotated checklist, second edition. Delaware Dept. of Natural Resources and Environmental Control, Dover, Delaware.