

Pitcher's Thistle

Rare Beauty at Risk



Pitcher's Thistle

It's Latin name is:

Cirsium pitcheri

That might not seem important, but it is if you're talking to a scientist!

The Pitcher's Thistle (*Cirsium pitcher*) is a native flower that grows on the open sand dunes and low beach ridges of the Great Lakes' shores.

For thousands of years, this thistle has coped with blowing sand, low soil nutrients, and herbivorous mammals and insects. Today however, the Pitcher's Thistle's greatest threat is human activity.

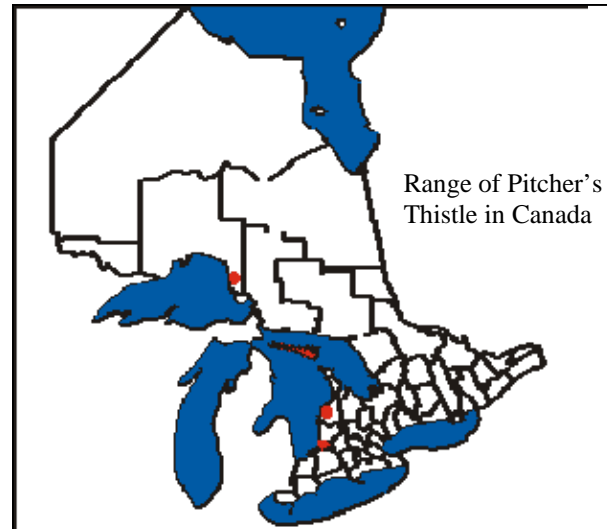
While parks, like Pinery and Inverhuron Provincial Parks can protect important species within their boundaries, in unprotected areas, shoreline development, all terrain vehicle use and trampling have led to the destruction of dunes and the loss of critical Pitcher's Thistle habitat and plant populations.

As a result, the Pitcher's Thistle has been declared an endangered species in Canada.

Even though it is related to other thistles found in fields or roadsides, Pitcher's Thistle

is a separate species that is found only on the open sand dunes and low beach ridges of Great Lakes shores.

It's not as prickly as its thistle cousins, and it has distinctive blue-green leaves covered with fine white hairs that give the plant a downy appearance. The dense layer of hairs provides insulation and humidity around the leaf cells so they remain turgid.



Pitcher's Thistle only grows in the Great Lakes region, mainly along the shores of Lakes Huron and Michigan. The plant's life cycle includes a long 5 to 8 year growth period, and once its seeds form and disperse, the entire plant dies.

At first glance this plant might not seem special, but it is really important to the ecology of the dunes where they live, and they stabilize the sand, and that helps prevent erosion.

The main threat to the Pitcher's Thistle is human activity that either damages the plant or its habitat (sand dunes). Protecting dunes and helping people become aware of this endangered plant will help its survival.



This totally awesome information on Pitcher's Thistle has been brought to you by:

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