

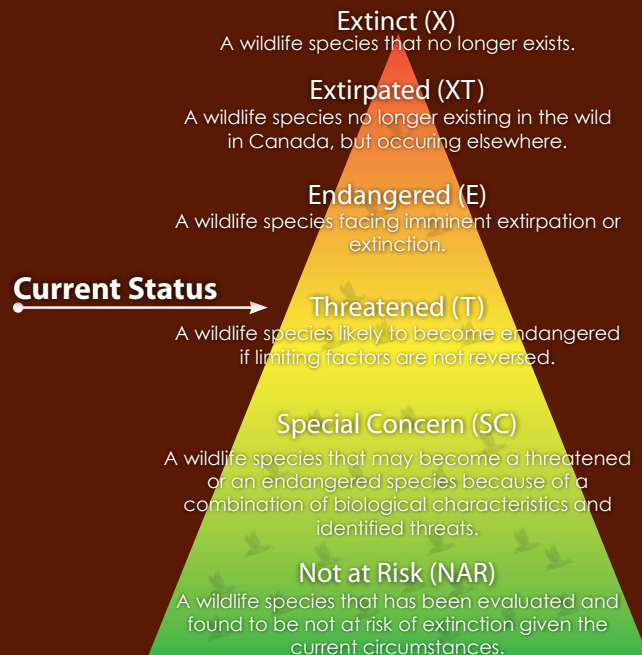
What is COSEWIC?

Committee on the Status of Endangered
Wildlife in Canada

An independent committee of wildlife experts and scientists from federal, provincial and territorial governments, universities, and non-government organizations, COSEWIC uses a scientific process to assess the risk of extinction for wildlife species. It meets annually to review status reports on species suspected of being at risk and provides assessments to government and the public.

What is the Species at Risk Act?

The *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) was created to prevent wildlife species from becoming extinct. The Act protects species at risk and their critical habitats. SARA also contains provisions to help manage species of special concern to prevent them from becoming endangered or extinct.



Community Members

Have you seen the St. Lawrence Aster in this area or know any stories about the Aster? If so, please call us or send us an email at the information below.

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St. Lawrence Aster

Symphotrichum laurentianum

Description

The Gulf of St. Lawrence Aster is a fleshy annual plant. The stem of this herbaceous plant measures up to 40 cm in height and it can be simple or divided into several clusters of branches or, occasionally, of elongated branches.



Gulf of St. Lawrence Aster

The leaves are very soft, fleshy and smooth. The leaves emerge directly from the stem and measure 1.1 to 6.5 cm in length by 2 to 9.8 mm in width. The contour is whole and the leaves can vary in shape from an elongated narrow lance to a spatula. The tip of the leaves is more or less rounded and often ends abruptly in a short stiff point.

Flowers are grouped in a single flower head, giving them the appearance of a single flower. Each branching of the stem bears a head measuring 0.5 to 1.4 cm in width. The flowers are surrounded by small green leaves, called bracts, joined in a bell-shaped receptacle at the base of the head.

The Gulf of St. Lawrence Aster produces dry fruits, which are covered with small fine hairs.

Distribution and Population

The presence of the Gulf of St. Lawrence Aster is limited to the Gulf of St. Lawrence region. This species is found only in Quebec, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. There are a total of 29 known populations: 15 in the Magdalen Islands archipelago (Quebec), 8 on Prince Edward Island and 6 in New Brunswick. In addition to these existing populations, there were formerly four historical occurrences. In these sites, the habitats have been destroyed or specimens have not been observed in 25 years; one site was in the Magdalen Islands, two in Prince Edward Island and one in New Brunswick. In Quebec, this species has been observed only in the Magdalen Islands. The

specimens observed in the archipelago are virtually all located in three sites: the Havre aux Basques lagoon, the Bassin aux Huîtres and the Barachois salt marsh at Fatima.

In New Brunswick, they are located at: Miscou Island (south Malbaie), Tracadie region (Val-Comeau), and Kouchibouguac National Park. Most of the eight populations on Prince Edward Island were observed in the Prince Edward Island National Park.

Habitat

All known Gulf of St. Lawrence Aster populations occur in coastal habitats such as beaches, lagoons, dunes, dune slacks and dry stretches of salt marshes. This annual grows in moist, mostly sandy soil where flooding only occurs during extremely high tides and storms. It grows in slightly sloped, open terrain near sea level in areas where the dunes provide a fair degree of shelter from the wind.

Threats

Competition with other species plays a major role in the dynamics of Gulf of St. Lawrence Aster populations. The reduction of available light due to an increase in plant cover is among the main factors that influence its growth.

In addition, natural disturbances caused by waves, ice and storms play a major role in habitat maintenance. In particular, fluctuations in high-tide levels can flood populations and storms can bury them completely in sand, causing their disappearance.

Identification

The Rayless Annual Aster (fig. 2) is similar, and often confused with, the Gulf of St. Lawrence Aster (fig. 1). One of the ways to tell the difference between the two plants is to look closely at the leaf edges. On the Rayless Alkali Aster, the edges are bristled and they are not on the Gulf of St. Lawrence Aster.

Rayless Alkali Aster
bristled edges



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Gulf of St. Lawrence Aster
clean edges



Gulf of St. Lawrence Aster

Fig. 2



Rayless Alkali Aster

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