



Hairy Lettuce (*Lactuca hirsuta*) at edge of Acidic Cove Forest, Garrett County, Maryland. Photo by R.H. Simmons.

# Hairy Lettuce, a Rare Native Composite

by R.H. SIMMONS

**H**airy Lettuce (*Lactuca hirsuta*) was rediscovered in July 2022 in Garrett County, Maryland, along Rock Lodge Road at the edge of Acidic Cove Forest (USNVC: CEGLo05043), where a single plant was found. Nearby edge associates in the canopy include Northern Red Oak (*Quercus rubra*), Sweet Birch (*Betula lenta*), Canadian Hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*), Black Cherry (*Prunus serotina*), and Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*). The shrub layer includes Witch Hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*), Great Laurel (*Rhododendron maximum*), Smooth Blackberry (*Rubus canadensis*), Mountain Holly (*Ilex montana*), American Fly-honeysuckle (*Lonicera canadensis*), Gooseberry (*Ribes* sp.), and others. The herb layer includes



Hairy Lettuce (*Lactuca hirsuta*). Photo by G.P. Fleming.

White Baneberry (*Actaea pachypoda*), Thimbleweed (*Anemone virginiana* var. *virginiana*), Hairy Woodland Brome

(*Bromus pubescens*), Fibrous-rooted Sedge (*Carex communis*), Blue Cohosh (*Caulophyllum thalictroides*), and many others.

According to the Rare, Threatened, and Endangered Plants of Maryland (Frye 2021), Hairy Lettuce in Maryland was formerly listed as “SH X” (state historical, extirpated) and largely “represented by a few pre-to-early 1900s collections mostly from the vicinity of Great Falls”. There is also a very old collection of this plant from Baltimore County. Brown and Brown’s 1984 *Herbaceous Plants of Maryland* notes *Lactuca hirsuta* var. *sanguinea* as the most common variety in Maryland.

Reported distributions of Hairy Lettuce outside of Maryland are provided on the following page.

## North America

The Biota of North American Plants (BONAP) overall range map for *Lactuca hirsuta* shows a wide, but very scattered distribution for the species, as of 2014.

## New England

According to GoBotany, “Tall hairy lettuce is a native biennial uncommon throughout its range. In New England it can be found in dry fields, roadsides, forest edges, woodlands, and clearings. Although it has been collected in all six New England states, it is rare in all of them.”

## New York

The New York Natural Heritage Program reports that, “In New York, *Lactuca hirsuta* has been found in... Dry open woods and clearings (Gleason and Cronquist 1991, Fernald 1950)... The long term trend appears to be a significant decline.”

## Pennsylvania

The Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program reports that, “In Pennsylvania, [Hairy Lettuce] has been found scattered throughout the state. The Pennsylvania Biological Survey considers [it] to be a species of special concern, based on the relatively few occurrences that have been confirmed in the state.”

## Virginia

Ninety-nine percent of the Virginia material of this species is *Lactuca hirsuta* var. *sanguinea*, according to the Digital Atlas of the Virginia Flora.

## North Carolina

The North Carolina Vascular Plant Atlas reports that Hairy Lettuce is “Formerly uncommon in the northern Coastal Plain, and rare over the central and southern



Hairy Lettuce (*Lactuca hirsuta*). Photo by G.P. Fleming.

Coastal Plain, the eastern Piedmont, and in the Mountains. Certainly it has declined in the state, apparently alarmingly, and few if any recent botanists/biologists have seen it.

Thus, the editors are making a drastic suggested State Rank of S1? (from the NCNHP’s S3? rank) and believe that it should go onto a Watch List, and probably onto the Significantly Rare list. The disappearance of the species from NC mirrors that from some or many other areas within its fairly large range...”

## Illinois

Illinois Wildflowers reports that, “[Hairy] Lettuce is a rare native plant in Illinois and it is state-listed as ‘endangered.’ Thus far, this species has been collected from a single county [Pope County] in southern Illinois.”

## Missouri

Missouri Plants reports: that “This species is considered uncommon in Missouri...”

Sensing a trend here??? This could also be a sign that *Lactuca hirsuta* is a weak competitor compared to other native lettuce species. It seems to lack the aggressive weediness of Tall Lettuce (*L. canadensis*) and to be less shade-tolerant than either Tall Blue Lettuce (*L. biennis*) or Woodland Lettuce (*L. floridana*). The situation in the Allegheny Mountains may be totally different, but in the central Virginia Piedmont it is “frequent,” almost always occurring in small populations of scattered individuals. It seems to prefer habitats that are partially shaded to open—such as small forest openings, powerlines, and edges—that are not weedy and have good native diversity BUT lack heavy competition from dense grass sods or tall, colonial forbs.

As a result of its rediscovery in Maryland, the state rank of Hairy Lettuce has been changed to “S1” or “S1?” (“critically imperiled”). As to the state status ‘X’, which is unique to Maryland, much more field work is needed before an official state status can be determined.

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## REFERENCES

- Brown, M.L. and R.G. Brown. 1984. Herbaceous plants of Maryland. Baltimore: Port City Press, Inc.
- Maryland Natural Heritage Program. 2021. Rare, Threatened, and Endangered Plants of Maryland, C. Frye Ed., Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Annapolis, MD.
- Virginia Botanical Associates. 2023. Digital Atlas of the Virginia Flora. (<http://www.vaplantatlas.org>). c/o Virginia Botanical Associates, Blacksburg. Accessed 17 September 2023.