Announcing: Atlas of Vascular Plants in Kentucky (Jan 2012)

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This current draft of the Kentucky Atlas is being made available to the botanical public for a three month trial period at the following site: http://bluegrasswoodland.com; this site currently just lists links to downloadable files that consitutue the Atlas. Please send comments to the following address (not my regular email): kyatlas@insightbb.com.

Max Medley is my coauthor, and he initiated most of this work during the 1980s, but I have done most of the actual mapping since then. Although we have shared much data and have similar taxonomic outlooks (with a proclivity to splitting), I take responsibility, in general, for the specific interpretations and opinions expressed in the taxonomic notes. I have not gone along with as much splitting in *Rubus* as he would have liked (following Bailey and Davis). Max lives 'off-the-web' in Dalton, Georgia, now compiling a floristic list for that state.

There are significant taxonomic issues, of course, in the flora of Kentucky. These are not resolved here, but notes on alternative views and pending treatments are offered in many cases. These notes may confuse some readers who yearn for simple clear standards, but it is important in detailed botanical work to address them with an open (parsimonious) mind. Taxonomic issues that I will now try to resolve with regular publications include species in *Monarda* (*clinopodia* group), *Rudbeckia* (*fulgida* group) and *Helianthus* (*strumosus* group); see also *Houstonia* (*nigricans* group), *Solidago* (*flexicaulis* group) and *Symphyotrichum* (*dumosus* group). In addition, several new combinations for species or varieties are informally suggested in the Index. It is hoped that some of these names will become adopted by other authors, relieving us of formal duties.

There is a long tortuous history behind this project, and that will undoubtedly continue. Although this current draft is being offerred freely as a citable document, it will evolve further. I feel fairly content about most of the content, but presentation can certainly be improved. The Indices are outputs from Microsoft Access (software of 2000-2007), and the text fields do not yet have italics for latin names. The Maps are output from Arcview 3.2 (software of 1995-2000), and there are obvious minor issues in some of the spacings between names and maps. Authorship can develop; we are open to further collaboration. Data from the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission should be integrated to a deeper degree, if more exchange can be worked out. Tom Barnes (Dept. of Forestry, Univ. of Kentucky) has offered many photos for an illustrated version, as have several other people. The University of Kentucky itself remains a mysteriously uncommitted potential partner—after almost 40 years of familiarity with that institution I have yet to detect leadership there in Natural History (and the herbaria deserve a lot more work).

Ideally, this project will evolve into a fully fledged website, with varied outputs. Currently, the documents include, perhaps for the first time in any North American floristic work, alternative arrangements in alphabetic versus taxonomic order. Also, I have converted to 'landscape' format in the text files, which is more convenient for viewing on computer screens. For many purposes, it will also be useful to integrate maps into the text, under each species' entry. And ultimately a single page could be designed for each species, with selected best photos, more formal description and other notes. Moreover, I envisage a website that can allow input from associates so that comments, corrections and new data can be submitted for private or public viewing. Ultimately, the project could be turned over to a committee, and then more formally linked with broader regional efforts (ideally in the Ohio Valley), covering other southeastern states and the whole of North America.

I am particularly keen to apply results in matters of ecology (exploring relationships to phylogeny) and conservation. There is a critical need to make better connections between the details of botany and: (1) the recovery of imperiled species; (2) the restoration of degraded habitats; and (3) the regional design of conservation across large landscapes. At the species level itself (1), there is an urgent need to update listings of globally and locally rare species, to oversee plans for recovery of truly endangered species, and to develop propagation in botanical gardens. There is little coordination of such activities in this state. The Kentucky Native Plant Society could perhaps adopt such goals as central to its mission.