

SMALL WHITE LADIES SLIPPER ORCHID (*Cypripedium candidum*)**Description**

The small white lady's-slipper is a perennial orchid with fibrous roots. The upright stems are solitary or colonial and 6-16 inches tall. There are usually 3 or 4 lance-shaped leaves clasping the stem. The larger leaves may be up to 6 inches long and 2 inches wide and are strongly ribbed. The flowers, usually one, rarely two per plant, are located terminally on the stems and are subtended by a leafy bract. The flowers resemble a small porcelain slipper. The inflated lip is white, delicately streaked with rose-purple and only 3/4 to 7/8 inches long. The sepals and petals are greenish-yellow with purplish stripes and are downy near the base.

Distribution

The small white lady's-slipper is a plant of the northeastern United States. Historically the orchid was likely found throughout eastern Nebraska and much of central Nebraska. There are historic collection records for the orchid from 17 Nebraska counties. In the past 15 years, the orchid has been collected from only four Nebraska counties: Howard, Pierce, Platte, and Sherman. There are only 7 known extant populations. Two populations are thought to have been destroyed in recent years by road construction projects. All known Nebraska populations have less than 200 plants each.

Habitat

All of Nebraska's known populations occur in native, sub-irrigated wet meadows. These sites have sandy loam soils and are dominated by typical wet meadow species including big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*) and sedges (*Carex* spp.). The majority of sites where the orchid occurs are relatively undisturbed hay meadows. The orchid appears to be intolerant of cattle grazing and has not been found in grazed pastures. Two populations of orchids near Columbus occurred in road ditches adjacent to native meadows. The small white lady's-slipper rarely occurs in such early successional habitats, but when they do they are usually adjacent to naturally occurring seed sources.

Status

Global: G4-Apparently Secure. Federally not listed. State Threatened. Nebraska: S1-Critically Imperiled. The conversion of wet meadows to cropland is a primary threat to remaining populations of the small white lady's-slipper. Another primary threat is the alteration of natural groundwater levels in meadows where the orchid occurs. Direct pumping of groundwater from irrigation wells can reduce groundwater levels in meadows. Reduced flows in streams adjacent to meadows can also reduce groundwater levels in the meadows.

The small white lady's-slipper has not been found in grazed pastures and it appears that cattle grazing has likely impacted the orchid's abundance. The orchid is also susceptible to herbicides and both their direct herbicide application as well as herbicide drift from adjacent croplands has likely impacted the species. The original habitat of small white lady's-slipper has been highly fragmented, resulting in small, isolated populations of the species. These small populations are vulnerable to being eliminated by chance human-induced or natural catastrophic events.

Management

The identification of the plant and careful management of the area in which it is found is extremely important to conserve this species. Protection and restoration of herbaceous wet meadows is an important step toward protecting it. Managed haying, protection from livestock grazing, and protection from herbicide damage are also priority activities.

More Information

<http://ecos.fws.gov/speciesProfile/profile/speciesProfile.action?spcode=Q0JD>