



Maine Department of Conservation  
Natural Areas Program

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*Astragalus alpinus* L.

**Alpine Milk-vetch**

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**Habitat:** Calcareous ledges and gravels. [Non-tidal rivershore (non-forested, seasonally wet)]

**Range:** Restigouche River (Quebec and New Brunswick), St. John and Aroostook Rivers (Maine), Connecticut River (New Hampshire and Vermont). Typical variety occurs in arctic regions, south to Newfoundland.

**Phenology:** In Maine, begins flowering in early June, continuing through July. Legumes mature late July through the fall.

**Family:** Fabaceae

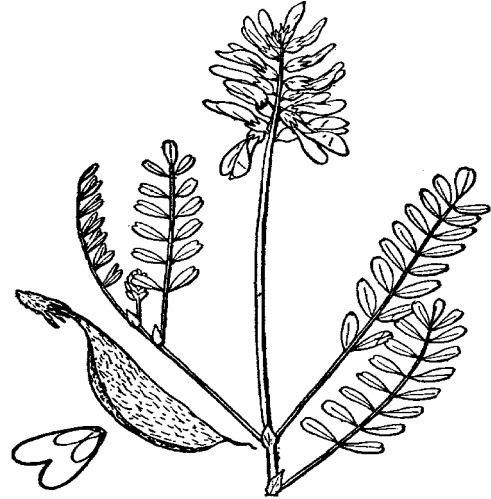


Illustration from Britton & Brown's Illustrated Flora of the Northern United States and Canada, 2nd ed.

**Aids to Identification:** Alpine milk-vetch is a loose, straggling plant restricted (in Maine) to a few river-shore areas. The compound leaves are composed of 5-11 pairs of oblong leaflets. The purplish-white, pea-like flowers are borne in a dense, short raceme (cluster). The legumes, or pods, are slender, curved and gradually tapering, and hairy. The stems are creeping, branching and may form mats up to a meter across. The falcate legume with a deep groove separates *Astragalus alpinus* from the other *Astragalus* species that occurred historically in Maine.

**Ecological characteristics:** This plant is both naturally restricted in its range and at its southern limit in Maine. At its known locations in Maine (along the St. John & Aroostook Rivers), it grows on gravelly banks or beaches where it is frequently subjected to ice-scouring and/or high water. Associates include other subarctic species here at their southern limit, such as *Hedysarum alpinum* var. *americanum*, *Tanacetum bipinnatum* ssp. *huronense*, and *Primula mistassinica*.

**Synonyms:** In Maine, the species is represented not by the nominate variety but by the variety *brunetianus* Fern.

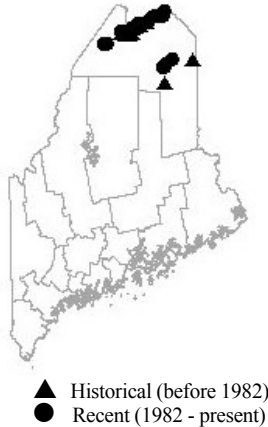
**Rarity of *Astragalus alpinus***

<b>State Rank:</b>	S3	Rare in Maine
<b>New England Rank:</b>	Division 1	Globally rare plant occurring in New England. Only a few occurrences exist within the region.
<b>Global Rank:</b>	G5T3	Species is widespread, abundant, and secure globally. Subspecies is rare or uncommon globally.

## Status of *Astragalus alpinus*

<b>Federal Status:</b>	None	No Federal Status.
<b>State Status:</b>	Special Concern	
<b>Proposed State Status:</b>	Special Concern	Rare in Maine, based on available information, but not sufficiently rare to be considered Threatened or Endangered.

### Known Distribution in Maine:



This rare plant has been documented from a total of 11 town(s) in the following county(ies): Aroostook.

**Dates of documented observations are:** 1909, 1976 (9), 1980, 1982 (4), 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1989 (2), 1991 (2), 1993 (6), 1998, 1999, 2001 (10)

### Reason(s) for rarity:

Naturally restricted range, at southern limit of range, habitat declining.

### Conservation considerations:

Maintain hydrologic integrity of its rivershore habitat, including natural disturbance by water and ice. Populations could be harmed if all-terrain vehicle use of its habitat increases.

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The information in this fact sheet was downloaded from the Natural Areas Division's Biological and Conservation Database on 05 MAY 2004. We are grateful to our Botanical Advisory Group for additional information on particular species, and in particular, to Arthur Haines for his assistance with identifying characteristics and taxonomic questions. Nomenclature follows Haines and Vining's *Flora of Maine* (V.F. Thomas Press, 1998); where older works refer to a plant by another name, it is given under "Synonyms". The Natural Areas Program, within the Department of Conservation, maintains the most comprehensive source of information on Maine's rare or endangered plants and rare or exemplary natural communities, and is a member of the Association for Biodiversity Information.

If you know of locations for this plant or would like more information on this species, please contact the Natural Areas Program  
State House Station 93, Augusta, Maine 04333; telephone (207) 287-8044.

