

Rare Bryophytes in British Columbia: Inventory and Conservation Issues

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Mosses are an ecologically important component of the majority of our provincial ecosystems. The species composition and distribution of the mosses in British Columbia is fairly well known, mainly due to the work of Dr. W. B. Schofield and his students, who have scoured many areas of the province producing a series of comprehensive bryophyte inventories. Many others have also contributed to regional moss lists. To date, over 700 species of mosses are listed for the province. Included are about 30 genera and 170 species that are found nowhere else in Canada. New species to the province and to science are found occasionally, but this does not happen often. Mosses are gaining a higher profile in species-at-risk research, not only in Canada, for example with COSEWIC, but also around the world. British Columbia has listed some 120 species of rare and potentially endangered mosses, although, as research into moss distributions continues, we suspect that this number will decline. Many questions have been posed as to the value of investing time and funding towards the study of this group of plants. These include: Have they been studied enough with respect to their 'rareness'? Are there enough qualified experts to undertake status activities? Have smaller, less conspicuous species been missed in surveys? This talk focuses on the value of encouraging this type of research on species that aren't necessarily in the biodiversity 'spotlight'. Examples will be given showing how rare or at-risk mosses often indicate rare or at-risk habitats, and are often associated with other at-risk species. Emphasis will be placed on funding more thorough biodiversity surveys, not only for the benefit of moss research but also for other groups of organisms.