



10-8-2009

### *Field Guide to the Sedges of the Pacific Northwest* by B.L. Wilson, R.E. Brainerd, D. Lytjen, B. Newhouse, and N. Otting

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#### Recommended Citation

Lang, Frank A. and Roché, Cindy (2009) "*Field Guide to the Sedges of the Pacific Northwest* by B.L. Wilson, R.E. Brainerd, D. Lytjen, B. Newhouse, and N. Otting," *Western North American Naturalist*. Vol. 69 : No. 3 , Article 21.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/wnan/vol69/iss3/21>

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Field Guide to the Sedges of the Pacific Northwest.** 2008. B.L. Wilson, R.E. Brainerd, D. Lytjen, B. Newhouse, and N. Otting. 2008. Oregon University Press, Corvallis. \$35.00; 431 pages. ISBN 978-0-87071-197-8.

Few plant groups strike greater fear into the hearts of amateur (or even professional) botanists than graminoids, especially sedges. (Admittedly, willows and dlyc's—damned little yellow composites—run a close second.) For those working in northwestern North America, help with the sedges has arrived, even though formal coverage of the book is Washington and Oregon.

The five botanists who created the *Field Guide to the Sedges of the Pacific Northwest* are known formally as the *Carex* Working Group and informally as the “Sedgeheads.” Their collective wit and wisdom about the genus *Carex* has resulted in an excellent book. Their field guide takes much of the pain, misery, and uncertainty out of sedge identification.

The guide begins with a general discussion of *Carex* ecology, ethnobotany, morphology, nomenclature, and classification. Morphology is clarified in the “Sedge Parts” section using Jean Janish's pen-and-ink illustrations of morphological structures (reprinted from Hitchcock et al. 1969). Preceding the key to 153 species is a “how to use it” section that facilitates successful use of a large, complicated dichotomous key.

The species accounts are conveniently arranged in alphabetical order by scientific name. There are two pages for each species: one page of text with a distribution map, and a facing page of remarkable color photographs and line drawings that illustrate various characteristics, either of the plant or of its habitat.

The text starts with scientific and common name, section within the genus, and the keys you might have used for identification. Next is a list of key features, a complete description, information on habitat and distribution, identification tips, and comments. Identification tips

discusses look-a-likes and comments include ethnobotanical notes, impacts of grazing and ecological importance.

Facing the text are close-up color photographs of the perigynia with a millimeter scale, the scale-like structures that subtend the perigynia, and the inflorescence. Also included are a habit drawing or photograph (sometimes of a herbarium specimen) and a habitat photograph.

Chapter titles called “Discussions of Excluded, Extirpated, and Not (Yet?) Discovered Species,” “Sedges with Distinctive Traits or Habitats,” “Collecting Sedges,” and “Ethnobotanical Uses” indicate that this tome emanated from years of passionate immersion in the world of sedges. The 26 lists of sedges with distinctive traits or habitats are a wonderful gift to incorrigible folks who always try to circumvent methodically working their way through dichotomous keys. Have a plant with hairy leaves? There is a list. Collected something from a serpentine fen? There is a list. Wetland plants with hairy perigynia? There is a list. Plants with gigantic perigynia? There is a list. And when you get to the end, there is a comprehensive index for those times you forget the scientific name of Wonder Woman Sedge and want to look it up!

This 6- by 9-inch book will fit in any backpack but might be a bit heavy for some as a field manual. Go to [www.carexworkinggroup.com/index.html](http://www.carexworkinggroup.com/index.html) for updates and corrections or to add your own suggestions, observations, or corrections.

The book compares favorably with *Field Guide to Intermountain Sedges* (Hurd et al. 1998). The formats are much the same and many of the same species are covered. Although *Sedges of the Pacific Northwest* has numerous good photographs, many in *Field Guide to Intermountain Sedges* are superior, especially close-ups of the perigynia that clearly show veins and other subtle features.

Our experience identifying sedges using the keys in *Sedges of the Pacific Northwest* were mostly positive and successful, although

members of the dreaded Ovales group were still cause for head scratching, but not hair pulling. To use this sedge key (or any other) with maximum ease, be sure to have plenty of unmounted material that you are not worried about tearing apart. Look for rhizomes when collecting and include them when taking specimens.

Now that the *Carex* Working Group has taken care of the sedges, who is going to put the willows, wild buckwheats, or other complicated plant groups at rest? *Field Guide to the Sedges of the Pacific Northwest* is an excellent model to follow.

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