

# Dwarf Mistletoe

## *Arceuthobium pusillum*

### Description

Dwarf Mistletoe is a tiny perennial that grows as a parasite on the branchlets of Black Spruce (*Picea mariana*), often causing the infected tree to produce a dense tuft or mass of abnormal branchlets known as a “witch’s-broom”. Severe infections can result in mortality of the tree. The stems of the Dwarf Mistletoe are greenish, brownish, or reddish and mostly less than ¾ inch (2 cm) in length. The leaves are oppositely arranged, non-green, and scalelike. The flowers, which appear mostly in spring, are individually minute and unisexual, with the male and female flowers occurring on separate plants. More conspicuous than the flowers are the greenish or brownish fruits, which are 1/8 inch (2-3 mm) in length and contain a single seed, which at maturity is ejected and because of its sticky surface can adhere to the spruce needles and branchlets. This plant is a relative of the Christmas mistletoe, which has well-developed green leaves, white fruits, and is indigenous to southeastern Pennsylvania but has not been seen in the wild for many years.



Photo source: Charlie Eichelberger (PNHP)

### Distribution & Habitat

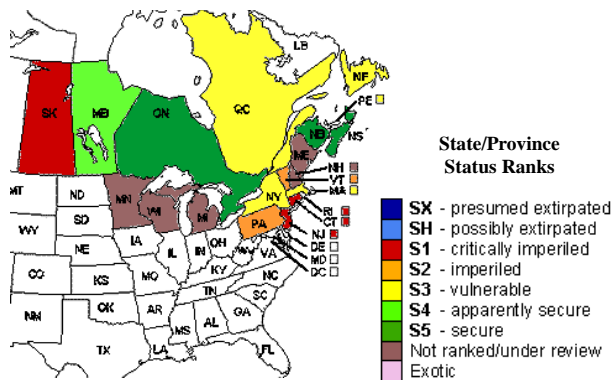
Dwarf Mistletoe ranges from Newfoundland to Saskatchewan and south into New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and the Great Lakes states. In Pennsylvania, it represents a northerly species, and has been documented historically in the glaciated northeastern counties. It grows in bogs and peaty wetlands where its host, Black Spruce, occurs.

### Current State Status

The PA Biological Survey (PABS) considers Dwarf Mistletoe to be a species of special concern, based on the limited number of locations recently confirmed and the specialized habitat. It has a PA legal rarity status and a PABS suggested rarity status of Threatened.

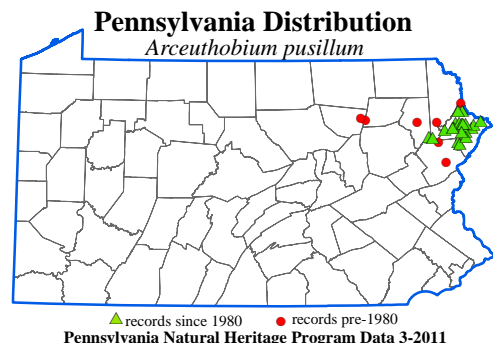
### North American State/Province Conservation Status

Map by NatureServe



### Conservation Considerations

The viability of populations of Dwarf Mistletoe and its habitat may be enhanced by creating buffers and protecting the natural hydrology around bogs. Dwarf Mistletoe is an indicator of bog habitats that feature various orchids, insectivorous plants such as sundew, bladderwort, and pitcher plant, and other interesting species.



### NatureServe conservation status ranks

G5 – Globally secure; S2 – Imperiled in Pennsylvania

### References

- NatureServe. 2011. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 7.1. NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available <http://www.natureserve.org/explorer>.
- Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program. 2011.
- Rhoads, A.F. and W.M. Klein, Jr. 1993. The Vascular Flora of Pennsylvania. American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- Rhoads, A.F. and T.A. Block. 2007. The Plants of Pennsylvania: An Illustrated Manual. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

