

Once in a lifetime

It was a typical early September day, cool, crisp and sunny, as Alison Johnson and I made our way to Springdale located near Sussex. We were there to survey transect lines for watercourses, wetlands and other areas of interest. We had been at it for a few days already, jotting down bits of information here and there. But this late summer day was to be a once in a lifetime find.



It was nearing the end of the day and we were on our last transect trying to scamper up a steep (>20%), sandy, well-drained, northeast aspect slope. The forest consisted mainly of an overmature to mature stand of birch, red maple, poplars with immature pine and spruce. The scenery hadn't changed from the previous transects and I wasn't expecting much. And then, there, scattered through the leaf litter, it was. A small colony of roughly 50-100 rattlesnake plantains scattered in 5 patches. Elation! Finally, something really interesting, but little did I know just how interesting it was going to be.



I started jotting down notes and taking pictures while my colleague took a GPS reading. I was about to flag off the site, but alas, I had no flagging tape. I did though have my first aid kit, and through a stroke of ingenuity, I quickly took out the triangular bandage and scrawled “Rare Plant” and “Rattlesnake Plantain”, hoping this would be enough for when someone would need to come back. I took a voucher sample knowing the herbarium was in need of some, and we set off towards the truck.



It was 7:00 pm when we finally made it back to the office and my botanical colleague Garrett Bell was there working away diligently. I showed him my find and we decided to key it out together. Since there are only four known species of rattlesnake plantain in New Brunswick, it wasn't very hard, but the results were very surprising, "*Goodyera pubescens*". But that couldn't be... according to the Flora of New Brunswick (Hinds, 2000) that species is thought to have been extirpated since 1881. Curious, I shot off an email with attached pictures to three well known botanists, Rick Fournier, Sean Blaney and Gart Bishop, hoping for confirmation. Rick replied quickly and stated that it was certainly a possibility but it was best to confirm with the other botanists.



On Friday, still waiting for a response from Sean and Gart, I set off for the Herbarium to meet up with Bev Benedict. I showed her my sample and we made quick work of getting examples of the four other known species of rattlesnake plantain in New Brunswick. Luckily for me, they had the voucher sample taken in 1881 of *Goodyera pubescens*, and it was concluded without a doubt, that this HAD to be downy rattlesnake plantain. Excited, I wanted to take my specimen to a Botany Club outing that was scheduled for that Sunday, I knew others would be thrilled. On the Saturday, I received emails from both Sean and Gart stating they were pretty sure it was *Goodyera pubescens* and they were interested in having a closer look at it on Sunday.

Sunday rolled around and off I went with an international student from UNB, Jana Ebersbach to the Botany Club outing. After a few tense moments of not finding the spot, we arrived. I waited until the lunch break to make my reveal and it was finally confirmed, 100%, that this was truly *Goodyera pubescens*. I was also made aware that there had been two other discoveries since 1881. One in 1981, through a series of pictures that were taken in Odell Park and another located south of Petitcodiac in 2003. I was thrilled to have contributed to the botanical discoveries of New Brunswick, a province that I have only been living in since 2005.

