

The Los Angeles Micro-Deserts of the Patuxent River: Using Landscape History, Insect and Plant Specimens, and Field Work to Detect and Define a Unique Community

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## INTRODUCTION

The Patuxent River watershed drains 2414 square kilometers from seven counties in Maryland; running approximately 114 km in length; and flows southeast into the Chesapeake Bay along its western shore. The watershed is in proximity to and partially drains the urban centers of Washington D.C., Annapolis, and Baltimore, Maryland. As a consequence of the region's early settlement and proximity to large cities, this area has been visited, explored, and documented by numerous naturalists.

Recently, the authors of this paper independently concluded that the conservation value of the land along the Patuxent River is not restricted to its highly visible bottomland forests and tidal marshes. Each had discovered a scattering of uncommon plants and insects along the upper riverside terraces, particularly on the northeastern side. The flora and fauna of these sites exhibit affiliations with open-country and prairie-like habitats rather than with the forests and cultivated lands that make up the weight of the region's landscape. A number of the uncommon insect species found are regionally disjunct, many with nearest known populations many kilometers away. With plants the pattern is expressed more in shifts towards dry site and sand specialists.

Within these small residual 'microdeserts', rare invertebrates co-occur with uncommon plant communities; together such co-occurrences of rare species from different taxa would imply that these largely ignored sites are of possible conservation concern. We present here a review of the historical context of these