



Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program

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Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

Crested Fringed Orchid *Platanthera cristata* Michaux

State Status: **Endangered**
Federal Status: **None**

DESCRIPTION: Crested Fringed Orchid is a wand-like, hairless plant with fleshy roots, measuring 12-24 inches (30-60 cm) tall. The two to four lower stem leaves are narrow (.4-1 inch, 1-2.5 cm wide), long (2.8-8.4 inches, 7-21 cm), and pointed. The upper leaves are much smaller than the lower leaves and tend to hug the stem. The flower cluster (inflorescence) is compact, measuring 1.2-4.7 inches (3-12 cm) long and about 1.2 inches (3 cm) in diameter. The inflorescence is densely flowered and forms a spike-like raceme with as many as eighty small orange flowers per inflorescence. Petals are shallowly fringed around the margin and project over the sepals. The spur, an elongated structure containing nectar, is very short and slender. The flowering season in Massachusetts is throughout the month of August.

SIMILAR SPECIES: The White Fringed Orchid (*P. blephariglottis*) has a flower similar to the Crested Fringed Orchid except in color. The Orange Fringed Orchid (*P. ciliaris*) is larger than the Crested Fringed Orchid and has a broader, less compact, and often proportionately shorter raceme of flowers. The flowers of the Orange Fringed Orchid may be greater than twice the size of the flowers of the Crested Fringed Orchid and are much more deeply fringed.

HABITAT IN MASSACHUSETTS: Crested Fringed Orchid is usually found in moist acidic soil in bogs, wet meadows, swamps, and depressions in pinelands. The one verified occurrence in Massachusetts is found in narrow sedge-grass wetlands in old stabilized dunes. Surrounding prominent plants include rushes, irises, Cross-leaved Milkwort, goldenrods, and Marsh Fern. Others include asters, Slough Grass, Cranberry, and Canada Reed Grass. Typical shrubs of the surrounding edge are Swamp Azalea, Viburnum, Maleberry, and Sheep Laurel.



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RANGE: Crested Fringed Orchid is found from southeastern Massachusetts to Tennessee and Arkansas, south to central Florida and along the Gulf Coast to Texas.

POPULATION STATUS: Crested Fringed Orchid is listed as Endangered in Massachusetts. There has been one recent (since 1984) verified occurrence and two historical (before 1984) occurrences. All of these were found in southern Bristol County. The Crested Fringed Orchid is also considered rare in Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New Jersey, New York, and Virginia. The species is presumed to be extirpated from Pennsylvania. Probable threats to the orchid include competition from the overgrowth of shrubs and disturbance from pedestrian traffic.

Updated 2019

A Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

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