



Photos by Phyllis Higman



Status: State threatened

Global and State Rank: G5/S1S2

Other common names: Dewdrop; robin-run-away; star-violet

Family: Rosaceae (rose family)

Taxonomy: The sole species of the genus, *D. repens* was referred in the past by some taxonomists to the genus *Rubus* as *R. repens* (L.) Kuntze (Voss 1985).

Total range: Distributed primarily in the Northeast and Midwest, false violet occurs from Nova Scotia and Quebec to Minnesota, ranging south through Pennsylvania and New Jersey to West Virginia and barely into North Carolina. It is considered rare in Connecticut, Michigan, Ohio, North Carolina, Rhode Island, and Virginia.

State distribution: Despite a number of historical published reports noting its occurrence in Cheboygan, Emmet, Macomb, and Washtenaw counties, and an erroneous report from Oakland County, this species has been confirmed with herbarium specimens only from Antrim and Crawford counties (Voss 1985). The Antrim County occurrence is documented by a single collection

from “Bellaire” in 1894, while three occurrences were documented by Gorton et al. in 1975, 1976, and 1977 in Crawford County. The Crawford County occurrences were noted as locally abundant. The species has also been reported from a Michigan Nature Association preserve in Ogemaw County (MNA Sanctuary Guide), and in 1994, two additional records were reported from Alcona and Newaygo counties by U.S. Forest Service staff.

Recognition: *Dalibarda repens* is a low, herbaceous perennial, producing small violet-like tufts of rotund to heart-shaped leaves, and stalked flowers that arise from slender, creeping stolons (horizontal, above-ground stem). The **densely hairy** leafstalks reach 3-10 cm in height and have well-developed stipules at their base. The blades are **sparsely hairy and 3-5 cm long** with **finely scalloped (crenulate) margins**. Small flowers, produced singly on erect **hairy peduncles** are of **two types**; open flowers with five, 4-8 mm long, white petals and numerous stamens, and cleistogamous (closed) flowers which lack petals and are borne on shorter, curved stalks. The somewhat cup-like receptacle base of both flower types is **densely hairy**.

This species, as suggested by its common name, is very similar in overall appearance to true violets (*Viola* spp.). However, the leaves of *Dalibarda* can be differentiated from *Viola* by their densely hairy petioles, larger



stipules, and more finely scalloped leaf margins. In addition, the radially symmetric, five-petaled flowers, also contrast markedly from the bilaterally symmetric, irregular flowers of *Viola*. These characters easily distinguish *Dalibarda* from any violet.

Best Survey Time/Phenology: *Dalibarda* can be sought vegetatively in early June prior to the emergence of taller groundcover plants that obscure it, or during the flowering period from late July through late August, when the white petals are visible.

Habitat: Throughout its range, false violet is a species of swamps and moist woodlands. In Crawford County it was found near the Au Sable River, where it grows in pine needle litter and humus over sand in a moist coniferous woods. Overstory dominants are *Pinus strobus* (white pine), *Pinus resinosa* (red pine) (including scattered old-growth), *Abies balsamea* (balsam fir), *Acer rubrum* (red maple), *Picea mariana* (black spruce), and *Betula papyrifera* (paper birch). Common groundcover associates include *Coptis trifolia* (goldthread), *Epigaea repens* (trailing arbutus), *Cornus canadensis* (bunchberry), *Gaultheria procumbens* (wintergreen), *Vaccinium angustifolium* (low-bush blueberry), *Lycopodium clavatum* (ground-pine), *Clintonia borealis* (bluebead lily), and *Pteridium aquilinum* (bracken fern). These groundcover species indicate at least moderately acidic conditions.

Biology: The flowering period for false violet in Michigan appears to be quite variable. The original 1976 and 1977 collections from Crawford County sites were noted in flower in mid-August, whereas in 2002, one of these was flowering on July 16 and forming fruit by July 31. The normal, petaliferous flowers are usually sterile, while fruits typically form only on the self-pollinating, cleistogamous flowers.

Conservation/management: The three colonies in Crawford County lie in a little-used area of a state park. One of these was confirmed in 2002, however the status of the other two is not currently known. These should be revisited, as should the Antrim County site which is known only from a 1894 collection. It should also be sought in other counties in northern Lower Michigan, where there appears to be much additional potential habitat.

Research Needs: Since only one occurrence has been confirmed in recent years (2002) and several reports for this species remain undocumented, a dedicated survey effort for this species is of high priority in order to ascertain it's current status in Michigan. Research on virtually every aspect of its biology and ecology are also needed in order to determine critical conservation needs.

Related abstracts: Dry-mesic northern forest, pine-drops, merlin, northern goshawk, osprey.

Selected references:

Gorton, P. B., D. and K. Townsend. 1977. *Dalibarda repens* confirmed in Michigan. Mich. Bot. 16:189-190.

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