

BOOK REVIEW

MICHAEL MURPHY, GREG SPYREAS, AND PAUL MARCUM. 2025. ***Carex of Illinois and Surrounding States: The Oval Sedges***. (ISBN 978-0-252-08846-9 (pbk, alk.); ISBN 978-0-252-04769-5 (ebook). Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois Press-Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield. 1325 South Oak St., Champaign, Illinois 61820-6903, U.S.A. www.press.uillinois.edu. (Orders: press.uillinois.edu/books/?id=p088469). \$29.95 US, paperback; \$14.95 eBook, 144 pp., 500 color photographs, 8.5" × 11".

This incredible book follows recent publications of excellent photographic field guides that cover the Midwest: (e.g., P.E. Rothrock. 2009. *Sedges of Indiana and the adjacent states-the non-Carex species*-(Vol. I); W.R. Smith and R. Haug. 2018. *Sedges and rushes of Minnesota: The complete guide to species identification*; P.E. Rothrock. 2021. *Sedges of Indiana and the adjacent states—the Carex species*-(Vol. II); J. Ogle, T. Witsell, and J. Gentry. 2022. *Trees, shrubs, and vines of Arkansas*. Reviews of each are provided by McKenzie (2009, 2020, 2021, 2022). Any book on the genus *Carex* that includes stellar reviews and/or input from three of most renowned experts on the genus: A. Reznicek, A. Hipp, and P. Rothrock has to be good, and this field guide will not disappoint!

For anyone trying to learn species of *Carex*, distinguishing Ovalian/Oval sedges can be confusing, daunting, nerve wracking, and downright frustrating, especially given the variation in congested or open spikes and inflorescences. This book goes a long way in eliminating most of the confusion and frustration. It is so comprehensive, and well organized, written, and illustrated that it is hard to figure out where to start on the compliments. The book includes excellent illustrations and photographs of all aspects of the *Carex* plant, including roots, sheaths, inflorescences, staminate and pistillate scales, perigynia, and achenes. Included in the species accounts is information on county distribution in Illinois, status in adjacent states, wetland indicator status, c-values (i.e., coefficients of conservatism), and habitat. One of the strengths of the book is the excellent discussions on how to separate similar species. Photographer Christine Cline provides stunning photographs of perigynia, pistillate scales, and achenes sufficiently large enough that you can easily see differences in size, shapes, and venation. The guide covers 26 taxa (two varieties of *C. tribuloides* are discussed) and 25 species known or suspected (e.g., *Carex molestiformis*-records exist but no Illinois voucher specimen was found by the authors in researching the book) to occur in Illinois. Because most of these species occur throughout the Midwest, this will be a useful reference in states bordering Illinois. The authors provide different state designations for surrounding states based on presence (P) or absence, rarity (R) (i.e., state listed as rare, endangered, threatened, or a species of conservation concern), introduced (I) or native, or only known from historical (H) records. A glossary is provided and there are even 16 (pages 111–127) of blank pages in the back of the book available for taking field notes. Separately, the comparative photos of perigynia on pages 20 and 21, 90 and 91, 93 and 94; photos of venation on the ventral service of perigynia of *C. molestiformis*; as well as comparison photos of achenes of *C. molesta* vs. *C. molestiformis* on page 93, alone are worth the cost of the book!

The authors take a unique approach in being able to distinguish one Ovalian sedge from another. Rather than use a dichotomous key, they divide species into separate id groups based on three characters (provided as three-digit codes): 1) perigynium shape, 2) pistillate scale tip shape, and 3) inflorescence length and number of spikes. Different groups are illustrated on pages 14, 16 with an accompanying photographic perigynia reference guide on pages 20 and 21. Quick id groupings are provided on pages 18 and 19. Due to some variation in perigynia size and shape, the degree the summit of pistillate scales are tipped, or difference in inflorescence length or number of spikes, various species are listed in multiple groupings. Once a botanist identifies a group, final identification is made by comparing illustrations and photographs of each species in a group provided in the separate species accounts.

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The book is lightweight and lamination of the front and back covers would enable field use. The back cover provides a convenient and readily accessible metric rule for field use.

The book is so well done that there is little to quibble about. In the species account for *C. straminea*, two items could have been added. Along with *C. alata*, this species is another indicator species for high quality sink-hole ponds (Yatskievych 1999) and it is usually the earliest Ovalian sedge in Missouri to flower and produce mature achenes. It would be interesting to compare the necessary time needed to identify a species using the Murphy et al. (2025) grouping system versus a dichotomous key. Overall, these comments are minor compared to the excellence of this book. Botanists can never have too many field guides and this book should be on the shelf of every Midwestern botanist!

LITERATURE CITED

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