

# Bryophytes and Species at Risk in the Semi-Arid Interior of British Columbia

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## ABSTRACT

Arid-land bryophytes are poorly known both taxonomically and ecologically. Investigations have revealed, however, that there are at least 10 species that are considered at risk provincially, as well as nationally (Conservation Data Center 1998; Schofield 1998). All of these species are found in the semi-arid grasslands and steppe of the south-central portions of British Columbia from the southern Okanagan through to Kamloops, and disjunct into the Fraser-Chilcotin area west of Williams Lake, with at least 3 of the species having their only known North American distributions here. In most cases, the at-risk species are either difficult to find because of their small stature or sporadic distribution, or are taxonomically problematic. Also, bryophytes, although useful as indicators of ecological conditions and important in the habitat stability of some sites, are not usually ranked high on lists of human concern. In order to maximize the effectiveness of conservation efforts, there is a growing need for a better understanding of the ecological function and taxonomy of often overlooked arid-land groups, including not only bryophytes but also lichens, fungi, and insects. It is most important, therefore, when considering the difficulties in the taxonomy of these groups, that we focus on habitat conservation as a primary and broad goal, and not, at least in some cases, species conservation, per se. This will necessitate a coordination of a variety of field scientists, including not only bryologists and entomologists, but also scientists that are making progress with the understanding and conservation of so-called "mainstream" groups such as birds and vascular plants.

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