THE CHANGING DISTRIBUTION OF THE GENUS *NAJAS* (NAJADACEAE) IN OHIO\(^1\) \(^2\)

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**ABSTRACT**

Over the past 70 years, the distributions of the species in the genus *Najas* in Ohio have undergone changes. *Najas gracillima* and *N. flexilis*, native species of northern, cool, clear waters, have disappeared or become reduced in abundance, while *N. marina* and *N. minor*, European species, and *N. guadalupensis*, a southern native species, have invaded, spread, and/or have become more common in the state. Factors apparently responsible for these changes are (1) an increase in the numbers of artificial ponds and lakes, (2) an increase in the turbidity of Ohio waters, and (3) a gradual warming and overall general eutrophication of Ohio river and lake waters. Dated dot-distribution maps show the Ohio distributions of these species. Notes on the distribution of the species in nearby states are given.

The genus *Najas* comprises those delicate underwater plants similar in certain respects to the more familiar and more common aquatic plants, the pondweeds (*Potamogeton*), but differing most obviously in their opposite leaves. The distribution of *Najas* in Ohio is treated in a recent publication (Braun, 1967) and in an older paper (Clausen, 1936). However, the maps presented in these publications are inadequate, because certain critical herbarium specimens were overlooked and because some specimens to which they referred had been misidentified. In addition, the distributions of the species are undergoing changes, as shown by data from our recent field work on aquatic plants in central and northwestern Ohio, and by a study of the available herbarium specimens. Five species of *Najas*, *N. gracillima*, *N. flexilis*, *N. marina*, *N. guadalupensis*, and *N. minor*, are known in Ohio. Specimens in The Ohio State University Herbarium reveal that *N. gracillima* was collected in the state as early as 1898, *N. minor* as early as 1932, and *N. marina* not until 1959.

The identification of specimens of *Najas* can be difficult. Whenever possible, specimens should be collected during fruiting, because the shape and surface markings of the fruit and the length of the mature style are the most dependable characters for identification. Owing to the variability of individual plants within a species, it is best that any single specimen be identified on the basis of at least two characters, preferably one vegetative and one reproductive. Caution must be especially exercised when identifying specimens in vegetative condition. For example, *N. minor* superficially resembles *N. gracillima* in early growth stages, and the often-mentioned recurved-leaf character of *N. minor* usually does not appear until late in the growing season, during August, September, or October. Reliable keys and illustrations have been presented by Fassett (1957) and by Braun (1967).

A brief discussion of the distribution and general ecology of each species of *Najas* in Ohio follows. Distribution maps and cited voucher herbarium specimens accompany the discussion of each species. All herbarium specimens of *Najas* have been studied from the following Ohio herbaria, most of whose identities are given by the abbreviations in Lanjouw and Stafleu (1964): Bowling Green State University (BGSU), Denison University (DEN), Franz Theodore Stone Laboratory (PTSL), Kent State University (KE), Miami University (MU), Oberlin College

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Najas gracillima (A. Br.) Magnus

*Najas gracillima* occurs on the North Atlantic Coastal Plain and inland in the Great Lakes region. According to Clausen (1936), the inland distribution in 1936 was limited to Wisconsin and Minnesota. However, *N. gracillima* has been known from specimens in Ohio since 1898, but has not been collected since 1918 and probably does not occur in the state today. Three collections, all from the northern part of the state, are known to have been made from natural lakes and ponds in Ottawa, Portage, and Wayne Counties (fig. 1). These locations are within the expected range of species other than *Najas* that occur both on the North Atlantic Coastal Plain and inland about the Great Lakes region, primarily north of the glacial boundary. Examination of the specimens (at OS) from Adams, Brown, Clermont, and Clinton Counties, used as a basis for mapping by Braun (1967), shows that they are really young plants of *N. minor* (the morphological differences between these two species are summarized in the discussion of *N. minor*).

Since the time of Clausen's work (1936), *N. gracillima* has been found in Michigan (specimens seen at MICH), Illinois (Fore and Mohlenbrock, 1966), Indiana (Deam, 1940), and Missouri (Steyermark, 1963). The specimens of *N. gracillima* collected in 1952 and 1961 from Illinois (Fore and Mohlenbrock, 1966) are only partially correctly identified. We have had access to two of the cited specimens; the one from Ford County (*Hiltibran*, ILLS) is *N. minor*, and the one from Williamson County (*Evers 34356B*, ILLS) is a mixture of *N. minor* and *N. gracillima*. The specimen collected in 1935 (*Kriebel 3477*, IND) and cited by Deam (1940) from Lawrence County in southern Indiana is correctly identified. *Najas gracillima* has recently been found in southern Indiana (Jackson County) in Knob Lake (7 Sep 1958, *Stares 2123*, BUT; 19 Jul 1970, *Stares 3100*, BUT, OS). The plants collected in 1937 and 1939 from Missouri (Steyermark, 1963) are probably correctly identified, although we have not examined these specimens.

Ohio specimens examined:

**OTTAWA CO.**: Portage River near Port Clinton, 20 Aug 1898, *Pieters* (BGSU, MICH).  
**PORTAGE CO.**: 3-6 ft of water, Sandy Lake, 3 Aug 1918, *Hopkins* (OS).  

*Najas flexilis* (Willd.) Rostk. & Schmidt

*Najas flexilis*, once probably the most common and widespread naiad in Ohio, is now apparently becoming rare. A native northern species in its total distribution, in Ohio its occurrence is primarily in natural lakes north of the Wisconsin glacial boundary (fig. 1). *Najas flexilis* is a species that usually occurs in clear, cool waters, and has been collected from fewer than 12 locations in the state during the past 20 years. We have not been successful in attempts to find *N. flexilis* in localities in central and western Ohio where it was collected at the turn of the century. Locations that have been checked are Buckeye Lake, Brush Lake, Indian Lake, Grand Lake St. Marys, Sandusky Bay, and Put-in-Bay harbor in Lake Erie. In many of these places, the water is now quite muddy or turbid. *Najas flexilis* has, however, been found in recent years at East Harbor along Lake Erie, where it occurs in shallow, temporary pools on an extensive sand-mud flat formed by deposition of bottom dredgings in 1968. Other contemporary collections come from the extreme northern part of the state in Williams, Ottawa, Erie, Huron, Lorain, and Portage Counties, and in the central western part of the
FIGURE 1. Distribution of *Najas gracillima* (A) and *Najas flexilis* (B) in Ohio based on all specimens examined. The single line represents the maximum extent of continental Pleistocene glaciation; the hashured line represents the maximum extent of Wisconsin glaciation. Each specimen is mapped by a dot at each locality and by the last two digits of the year in which it was collected.
state at Doke Lake in Logan County. Most of these location sites are man-made ponds or natural lakes where the water is relatively clear.

Ohio specimens examined:


Najas marina L.

Nagas marina is known in Ohio from only two localities, both in Erie County (fig. 2). Here the plants are rather common in highly calcareous water of several permanent artificial ponds. Although Braun (1967) treated N. marina as native to Ohio, this is a European species which is probably of recent introduction since it was not previously reported from this well-studied portion of western Lake Erie in Ohio (Moseley, 1899; Pieters, 1901; Core, 1948; Stuckey, 1968). The earliest known collection is dated 1959. The 1949 report of N. marina by Anderson (1950) from Middle Harbor in Ottawa County should probably, on the basis of our detailed floristic surveys and the absence of a voucher specimen, be referred to N. minor. The latter has been found at adjacent East Harbor on several occasions since 1949, but N. marina has not been found at either locality.

Not only does Najas marina appear to be a recent introduction in Ohio, but it also has been reported, in recent years from other nearby states, where it was not mapped by Clausen (1936). The earliest known collection reported for Wisconsin comes from Sheboygan County in 1941 (Ross and Calhoun, 1951) and for Illinois from Lake County in 1964 (Winterringer, 1966). In Michigan, specimens are known from lakes in Montcalm, Newaygo, and Ogemaw Counties as early as
FIGURE 2. Distribution of *Najas marina* (A) and *Najas guadalupensis* (B) in Ohio based on all specimens examined. Each specimen is mapped by a dot at each locality and by the last two digits of the year in which it was collected.
1938-41 (Montcalm Co.: Crystal Lake, 28 Jul 1941, Roelofs 359, MICH.; Mud Lake, 30 Jul 1941, Roelofs 377, MICH. Newaygo Co.: Brooks Lake, 5 Oct 1940, Bauzin 2293, BLH, MICH, MSC. Ogemaw Co.: Peach Lake, 29 Jun 1938, Locke 32, MICH). On his 1940 specimen (at MICH) from Brooks Lake, Bauzin noted, "It is slowly replacing other plants in the lake." Later Michigan records come from the Erie Shooting Club Marsh at the west end of Lake Erie in Monroe County (6 Aug 1964, King, MICH) and from a marl pool, T14N, R3W, Sec. 6, south of airport, Mt. Pleasant in Isabella County (15 Oct 1964, Hohn CMC 4575). The collections of N. marina from these three Great Lakes states also suggest recent introduction and establishment of this plant.

Ohio specimens examined:

ERIE CO.: Near shore of man-made ponds in Resthaven Area, not abundant, 14 Jul 1959, Fisher 1829 (OS); in shallow water, Resthaven Wildlife Area, 22 Aug 1961, Pinkava 6196 (OS); locally common in marl pond, a portion of Resthaven Wildlife Area, Margaretta Twp., ca 1.5 mi n of Castalia, 4 Oct 1968, Stuckey 8518 (OS); one small colony seen, clear water ca 1.5 ft deep rocky bottom covered with ca 4 inches silt, permanent pond in West Quarry, south central portion of Kelleys Island, 14 Aug 1990, Haynes 3422 (OS); locally common in shallow water on s edge of marl pond on w side of N-S road in the sw corner of the Resthaven Wildlife Area (Castalia Prairie), ca 1 mi w of Castalia, 19 Aug 1990, Stuckey 8849 (OS).

Najas guadalupensis (Spreng.) Magnus

In Ohio, N. guadalupensis, a southern species native to the Western Hemisphere, was mapped by Braun (1967) at scattered locations in southern, southeastern, and eastern Ohio, but she did not show northwestern Ohio specimens collected in 1898 and 1899 from western Lake Erie in Ottawa County and from the St. Marys Reservoir in Augliaize County. Recent collections from central and northwestern Ohio come from large artificial lakes in Defiance and Williams Counties (Stuckey 5899, 8518, 5257); from small man-made ponds in Delaware, Ottawa, and Wyandot Counties (Roberts 835, 829, 895); and from sites in Augliaize, Fairfield, Logan, and Union Counties (Haynes 3422, 3470, 3410, 3398). With an increase in these kinds of habitats (artificial lakes and ponds), this species is becoming more common (fig. 2). Najas guadalupensis is also known from man-made lakes and ponds in Illinois (Stookey, Fore, and Mohlenbrock, 1964; Fore and Mohlenbrock, 1966).

Ohio specimens examined:


*Najas minor* All.

*Najas minor*, an European species, invaded North America about 40 years ago and is now the most common naiad species in Ohio, where it is known from 40 counties. This species, which thrives in eutrophic waters and tolerates pollution to some degree (Merilainen, 1968), occurs on mud and silt bottoms in the shallow parts of large rivers, reservoirs, and ponds. The gradual eutrophication of Ohio waters and the creation of numerous artificial lakes and ponds have provided habitats conducive for the invasion, survival, and establishment of *N. minor* throughout Ohio. Many of the more recent collections have come from artificial lakes and ponds which are of recent construction. In Illinois, *N. minor* occurs in similar habitats (Stookey, Fore, and Mohlenbrock, 1964; Fore and Mohlenbrock, 1966).

What was presumably the earliest North American record of *N. minor* was collected by R. T. Clausen in New York's Hudson River at the mouth of the Mohawk River in 1934 (Clausen, 1936). However, two specimens of *N. minor* from a single collection made by Lawrence E. Hicks on 28 August 1932 in Ashtabula County, Ohio, and misidentified until now as *N. marina*, have been found in The Ohio State University Herbarium. Hicks' record verifies that the species occurred a considerable distance farther westward at least two years earlier than previously known. Since 1932, *N. minor* has spread throughout most of Ohio, reaching the southern part of the state in the 1950's and the northwestern part of the state in the 1960's. The majority of the collections of *N. minor* have been made since 1953.

*Najas minor* shows considerable morphological variation. In particular, young plants are vegetatively similar to and have been misidentified as *N. gracillima*. Young plants of *N. minor* are very limp and flexible, the leaves are generally rather straight and long, the fruits are either not yet formed or are immature, and when the plants are removed from the water, the leaves become matted together. Older plants of *N. minor* are quite stiff, very brittle, and break easily; the leaves are usually somewhat to strongly recurved, the fruits (if present) are usually mature, and when the plants are removed from the water, the leaves retain their spreading position. The young limp plants are usually found early in the season, in late June, July, and early August, whereas the older stiff plants are found later in the season, in late August, September, and October. Although Braun misidentified several July-early August specimens of *N. minor* (limp plants) from southern Ohio as *N. gracillima*, she properly identified September-October specimens (stiff plants) from the same area as *N. minor*. We have observed a few early-season plants with the limp, flexible appearance, but all of these have had fruits sufficiently mature to verify that they are indeed *N. minor* (examples of these specimens are Braun 15 Jul 1960, Cusick 27 Jul 1963, Hawk 138, Stuckey 7643, all at OS). Field observations, comparisons of many herbarium specimens, and collections of plants
at regular intervals from two locations (at the Delaware Wildlife Area, Delaware County, by Mr. Roland G. Hawk, and at East Harbor State Park, Ottawa County, by Ronald L. Stuckey) have revealed that these morphological changes occur in populations and/or clones of *N. minor* throughout the growing season. Meriläinen (1968) has listed the distinguishing morphological characters of *N. minor* and *N. gracillima*.

The distribution of *N. minor* in North America has been mapped by Meriläinen (1968). His map shows that the species is scattered in six areas of eastern North America, and that it is very common in the lower two-thirds of Illinois, but is absent from Ohio and Indiana. The concentration of records for Illinois is probably the result of the recent survey of aquatic plants in that state (Winterringer and Lopinot, 1966). With the now-added distribution for Ohio (fig. 3), this leaves Indiana and the states surrounding Ohio and Illinois with few or no records. We have checked the specimens of *Najas* in the Indiana University Herbarium and

![Figure 3](image.png)

**Figure 3.** Distribution of *Najas minor* in Ohio based on herbarium specimens examined. Each specimen is mapped by a dot at each locality and by the last two digits of the year in which it was collected.
have found no Indiana records of _N. minor_ there, although there are several collections known from Knob Lake (7 Sep 1958, _Stares_ 2123, BUT; 7 Sep 1960, _Stares_ 2121 &b, BUT, OS; 30 Aug 1970, _Stares_ 3108a, BUT) and Starve Hollow Lake (4 Oct 1959, _Stares_ 2207, BUT, OS; 30 Aug 1970, _Stares_ 3111, BUT) of Jackson County in southern Indiana. Meriläinen (1968) calls attention to the absence of _N. minor_ from Wisconsin, where he had access to field data and herbarium records. The species is apparently rare in Michigan, where it is known from specimens obtained in only one locality (Pt. Mouillee State Game Area, Lake Erie, Monroe County, 5 Aug 1949, _McDonald_ 5318, MICH, MSC, and 28 Jul 1950, _McDonald_ 5783, MICH, MSC). The general distribution pattern that is becoming apparent suggests that _N. minor_ is invading and is becoming established in east-central United States where the waters of the streams, ponds, and lakes are commonly warmer, muddier, and more turbid than are the cooler, clear waters of the northern streams, ponds, and lakes in Wisconsin and Michigan. The species is probably more common in Indiana than known records show, and plants should be sought in nearby states to the south.

Ohio specimens examined:

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SUMMARY

Two general overall trends appear in the changes in the distribution of Najas in Ohio. One is the reduction and/or disappearance of the native, northern, cooler and clearer water species, N. gracillima and N. flexilis. This trend may be expected because there has been an increase in turbidity, a gradual warming, and an overall general eutrophication of Ohio river and lake waters. These new conditions have favored a second trend—the invasion, establishment, and/or spread of the European species, N. marina, and N. minor, and the southern native species, N. guadalupensis. It is probable that similar changes are taking place in the distributions of species of other genera of Ohio aquatic plants.

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LITERATURE CITED