

April 2012 Guess that Plant



The April 2012 *Guess that Plant* was ***Tragus racemosus* (L.) All.**

The April **Guess that Plant** was difficult species even for the well trained eye. Few of us have seen this little grass which makes the challenge that much harder. The plant is an unusual grass named *Tragus racemosus*, also known as stalked burgrass.

Tragus is native in the dry Mediterranean region through southwest Asia. This grass has dispersal mechanism created by curved hooked seed coats that are ideal attaching to curly hair, say on sheep or your socks. It is suspected the plant made its way around the world using this hooked seed coat. It has a sporadic presence in New Jersey. The Flora of North America doubts its persistence although it has been on ballast and rubble in ship yards and industrial sites since the late 19th century. We currently have it in Camden, Gloucester City, as well as across the Delaware River in the port of Philadelphia.

There is a suite of alien plants that are limited to the ports of Philadelphia, Camden/Gloucester and the cities lining the Hudson River where ballast stones from private sailing ships deposited their ballast stones to take on equal weight in cargo for the return voyage. That ballast became substrate that supports some of the plants from its native port. And so went the movement of these ballast species. Today's ballast methods no longer produces these restricted species, which may be a good thing knowing the dangers invasive species pose to our native ecosystems.