

September 2013 Plant of the Month



Blue Vervain

Verbena hastata L.

September's *Plant of the Month* is species with state-wide distribution that should be familiar to most of our botanists. Blue vervain, *Verbena hastata*, is a wide spread, perennial herb closely aligned with the Mints and Bladderworts in the Order Lamiales. It is a wetland plant with a FACW USFWS wetland designation. Blue vervain is a late season flower and is a common flowering sight in late August and September when our freshwater marshes and meadow erupt with flowers, anticipating the approach of autumn.

Blue vervain is found in all 21 NJ counties but is most common on the richer Northern New Jersey and Inner Coastal Plain wetland soils. Its presence on the outer coastal Plain is limited to richer meadows and freshwater marshes and is wholly absent from the fire prone central Pine Barrens with few exceptions. Fernald (1950) describes suitable habitat as meadows, shores and marshes. This accurately describes New Jersey's blue vervain habitat as well.

The blue vervain is a member of the Verbenaceae and is a member to one of only 3 genera: *Verbena*, *Lippa* and *Callicarpa*. New Jersey is host to two genera (*Verbena* and *Lippa*) and 7 vervaines: *Verbena bonariensis*, *V. bracteata*, *hastata*, *officinalis*, *simplex*, *stricta*, and *urticifolia*. Only three species (*V. hastata*, *simplex* and *urticifolia*) are native. It was used by many Native Americans for ailments such as emetic, cough remedy, stomach ache and other discomforts.

Be on the lookout for this common yet beautiful member of our flora. Its discovery is usually accompanied by other interesting wetland species making its presence a notable sentry for other interesting New Jersey wetland species.