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Ericaceae: *Empetrum eamesii* Fern. & Wieg. (rockberry, red-fruited crowberry, purple crowberry, pink crowberry)

Empetrum eamesii is one of three crowberries in Nova Scotia; others are *Empetrum nigrum* (black crowberry) and *Corema conradii* (broomcrowberry).^{1,2} They are low, evergreen shrubs with small, needle-like [ericoid leaves](#) and reduced, wind-pollinated flowers which open in spring. *Empetrum eamesii* is the less common of the two species of *Empetrum* in Nova Scotia. Both bear solitary or a few flowers in axils of leaves (versus terminal flowers in *C. conradii*). The white, tomentose (hairy) young branchlets of *E. eamesii* distinguish it from *E. nigrum* (not



tomentose).

E. eamesii

E. nigrum

Two subspecies are currently recognized:

- *E. eamesii* ssp. *atropurpureum* (purple crowberry) with dark red or purple fruits
- *E. eamesii* ssp. *eamesii* (rock crowberry, pink crowberry) with light brown, pink or red fruit.

(Fruits are black in *E. nigrum*.) Hybrids are found between the subspecies, also between *E. eamesii* and *E. nigrum*. *E. eamesii* ssp. *atropurpureum* is found on "exposed sand dunes, infrequently around bogs, and

occasionally in rocky habitats", while *E. eamesii* ssp. *eamesii* is reported to be "characteristics of exposed headlands on top of lichen-bearing rocks with thin soil."³ Both subspecies appear to have limited distributions in N.S.: both occur in northern Cape Breton, and on the Chebucto peninsula; *E. eamesii* ssp. *eamesii* has also been reported from the Canso area.³ *E. eamesii* ssp. *atropurpureum* occurs in all provinces of Atlantic Canada, and in Quebec, northern New England, northern New York, Michigan, Minnesota, Ontario and Saskatchewan; *E. eamesii* ssp. *eamesii* is restricted to Quebec, N.S., P.E.I.² and Labrador & Newfoundland.⁴ *E. eamesii* is yellow listed (sensitive) under the [Nova Scotia DNR General Status Rankings](#).

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Click on images for larger versions.

April 28, 2009. Chebucto Head

Photographer: [JackPine](#).



Flowering male plants amongst *J. horizontalis*



Patch of female plants (the greener patch in the middle).

Patches of male plants were common and had abundant flowers; female patches were much less common and had fewer flowering plants.



Flowering female plants

July 5, 2008. Chebucto Head
Photographer: [JackPine](#). [Notes](#)



Barrens habitat.

E. eamesii carpet; flowering *Potentilla tridentata*.





E. eamesii, left; *E. nigrum*, right: portions of branches with upper surfaces of leaves showing (mostly). As at left: lower surfaces (mostly).

Dec. 2, 2008. Chebucto Head
Photographer: [JackPine](#). [Notes](#)



Left: Twigs. Bar is 5 mm.
Above: Leaves. Bar is 2 mm.
See also [Three Crowberries](#)



Habitat: *E. eamesii* occurs amongst *Juniperus horizontalis* on sloping outcrop by the sea; *E. nigrum* replaces *E. eamesii* in the lower lying *J. horizontalis*. [Details](#).

E. eamesii and *Juniper horizontalis*.



Abundant flower buds, one (right) opening.



Habitat: *E. eamesii* on rounded, exposed rock surface with *Juniperus horizontalis*/*Juniperus commune* (left).

E. eamesii was mixed with *J. horizontalis* (bottom left photo) but not with *J. commune* (bottom right). There was no *E. nigrum* at this site.





Habitat: A mat of *E. eamesii* formed the leading edge of vegetation on a large erratic. [Details](#)

Mat pulled back to illustrate thin humic layer and branching of *E. eamesii*.



Habitat: On upper part of exposed granite surface; *Corema conradii* on lower part with no overlap.

E. eamesii in foreground, *C. conradii* in background (looking down the rock slope).

Selected Web Resources

- [Taxonomic Status \(ITIS\)](#) Copy the species name above and paste it into a form on this ITIS Canada page to confirm the nomenclature and list synonyms.
- [NatureServe Explorer](#) Copy the species name above and paste it into a form on this page to view a map of its distribution within North America and its conservation status by province and state.
- [A Digital Flora of Newfoundland and Labrador Vascular Plants. Ericaceae: Heath Family \["Empetraceae Section": Crowberries\]](#)

Notes & References

1. A recent revision of Ericaceae places the crowberries, formerly included in the family Empetraceae, in the family Ericaceae, subfamily Ericoideae, tribe Empetrea. See Kron, K.A. et al. 1992. Phylogenetic classification of Ericaceae: molecular and morphological evidence. *The Botanical Review* 68(3): 335-423.
2. *E. rubrum*, as cited in the 3rd ed. of Flora of Nova Scotia, is synonymous with *E. eamesii*. Southern hemisphere *E. rubrum* is a separate taxon altogether, see Li, J., et al. 2002. Phylogenetic relationships of Empetraceae inferred from sequences of chloroplast gene matK and nuclear ribosomal DNA ITS region. *Molecular Phylogenetics and Evolution* 25(2): 306-315.
3. Roland, A.E., Zinck, M. and Owen, E. 1998. *Roland's Flora of Nova Scotia*, 3rd Ed. Halifax: Nimbus & Nova Scotia Museum.
4. *E. eamesii* is not indicated to be present in Newfoundland in the NatureServe Explorer listings, however John Maunder documents a number of sites where it occurs; see [Digital Flora of Newfoundland and Labrador Vascular Plants. Ericaceae: Heath Family \["Empetraceae Section": Crowberries\]](#) (http://www.digitalnaturalhistory.com/flora_empetraceae_index.htm). [Accessed 3 Dec. 2008]

Page posted 17 Dec. 2008. Modified 28 Apr. 2009.

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