

BOGDIVERSITY THURSDAY



—from Head Naturalist Clinton

Viburnums

POST #72—June 8, 2023

After an interruption due to midweek bird field trips, BogDiversity Thursday Posts are back! A lot has changed in one month in the Sax-Zim Bog and today's featured species are in full bloom right now. The focus species today are a group of seldom seen understory species of shrubs... the Viburnums!

In the Sax-Zim Bog there are three species of Viburnum, with an additional native species in far Northeastern Minnesota and a not-so-uncommon non-native subspecies. Pictured below are two of the three species found in the Sax-Zim Bog: American Highbush Cranberry and Downy Arrowwood. Let's take a closer look at these species below!

American Highbush Cranberry (*Viburnum opulus* var. *americana*) is an incredibly showy species of understory shrub. The common name of this species is a little misleading, as it is not related to cranberries (in the family Ericaceae)! If you look closely at the leaves of this species, it resembles a maple, with its three-lobed leaves. It is also not closely related to maples either, especially if

you take a close look at the flowers of these species! If we toss away the confusion of the common names and shapes of leaves, this is a wonderful native shrub with tons of value for pollinator species and birds! In the fall, this species turns a lovely deep red, with beautiful red berries eaten by thrushes, catbirds, thrashers, and more during migration.

The flowers of American Highbush Cranberry are lovely and fascinating! The flowers along the outer edge of the flower head are huge, with inner flowers being much smaller. Those gaudy outer flowers are sterile and likely serve as an attractant to pollinators. The smaller, inner flowers are reproductive and similar to the flowers you see on other viburnum species. This viburnum has a variety (think subspecies) from Europe that does get planted in horticulture and escapes regularly called Guelder-Rose (*Viburnum opulus* var. *opulus*) and it is very difficult to ID from the native species.

Downy Arrowwood (*Viburnum rafinesquianum*) is not nearly as showy as its cousin and is quite indistinct among the young trees in the understory of a deciduous or mixed forest. The leaves are not showy, but aggressively toothed with distinct venation. Right now, the easiest way to find this slender species is to seek out its large flower heads! The brilliant white clusters of flowers from this species peek out of the dark understory it prefers. While Downy Arrowwood does tolerate sun, it does usually become bushier with more light. The common name of this species refers to the use of this species by Native American communities for

arrows! Both Downy Arrowwood and American Highbush Cranberry can be easily seen near Winterberry Bog right now.

The third species of viburnum in the Sax-Zim Bog (not pictured below) has another name still! It seems the folks who named viburnums did not consult one another. Nannyberry (*Viburnum lentago*) is similar to Downy Arrowwood, as they both are not so showy members of the understory shrub communities of the northern deciduous and mixed forest. Like its cousins noted above, the beautiful white flowers attract a wide variety of pollinators from bees to beetles to butterflies and moths! And like its cousins, successful pollinator leads to large fruits that are attractive to birds and mammals in our area. Look for this species near the Welcome Center.

More information about these awesome shrubs below!

(Photos below of the noted viburnums by Head Naturalist Clinton)



What a beauty! The large outer flowers of American Highbush Cranberry are sterile and only the inner flowers are reproductive.



The other name you will find for American Highbush Cranberry is *Viburnum trilobum*, which references the leaf shape seen above!



Downy Arrowwood has lovely flowers, with many flower heads on an individual plants. The flowers are much larger than American Highbush Cranberry.



The serrated and deeply veined leaves of Downy Arrowwood is easy to spot, once you know what to look for!