



## Updates from the Trail: July 2023

### Ripe for the Picking! - Native berries on Cape Cod

By Taylor Lanxon

Cape Cod in the summer is an enchanting place, and ripe with unique flora! As you wander along the trails, it is not uncommon to sight two of Cape Cod's native berries – lowbush blueberries and black huckleberries. There is so much to learn about the vital roles these berries play in sustaining Cape Cod's wildlife and ecosystems.

#### ***Lowbush Blueberry***

Lowbush blueberries (*Vaccinium angustifolium*), smaller in size than highbush blueberries, ranging from 6 to 24 inches in height and width. Their small, dark green leaves host bell-shaped white flowers that bloom in May, with berries that ripen in late summer. These plants support a variety of animals, including 30 species of birds as well as skunks, chipmunks, and hold a special pollinator value to bumble bees.

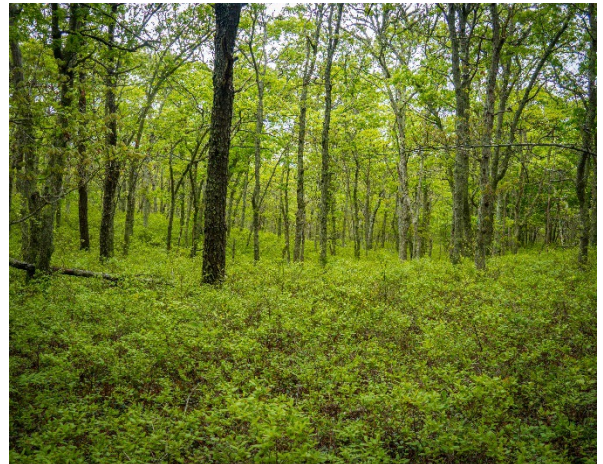
These shrubs are often found in meadows, ledges, and woodlands. Similar to their highbush counterparts, they serve as a host plant for pollinators like the Brown Elfin butterfly. Low bush blueberries are also celebrated for having one of the highest antioxidant capacities among fruits!



*Bell-shaped white flowers of lowbush blueberry.*

#### ***Black Huckleberries***

Black Huckleberry (*Gaylussacia baccata*) is a low-growing, deciduous shrub that thrives in sun to part shade, and is well known for its high drought tolerance. With stunning, orange bell flowers that bloom from April to June, it stands at 1-2 feet tall and 2-3 feet wide. Recognizable by the shimmering resin dots on the bottom of its yellow-green oval leaves, black huckleberries prefer acidic, sandy soil and grow in dry to partially moist open woods. The Black Huckleberry attracts blue jays and eastern bluebirds and is pollinated by honeybees, bumblebees, and caterpillars of Henry's Elfin butterfly as well as the Pink Sallow, Huckleberry Eye Spot, and Sweet Fern Geometer moths.



*An understory of black huckleberry can be seen along the Baker's Pond Trail.*

The abundance of Cape Cod's native berries represents a natural bounty gifted by this region's rich ecosystems. It is important to remember how crucial it is to preserve and nurture our environment, while encouraging a sustainable future for these captivating berries and the unique ecosystems they thrive in!