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common name

Pale Spikerush

scientific name*Eleocharis macrostachya***family**

Cyperaceae (rush)

habitat

vernal pools, wetlands

size

Plants are up to 24 inches tall; stem looks like a long green straw with a tiny pine cone-like flower at the tip.

fun facts

The stems are hollow when the plant is in water and solid when the ground is dry.

description

Member of the rush family. Rushes are closely related to grasses. Each flower is made up of a tiny **bract** and the stamens and pistil. The flowers are arranged in a cluster that looks like a tiny (up to 8 mm long) pine cone.

Pale Spikerush is the only grass-like plant in the vernal pools with a tiny brown scaly flower at the tip of its straw-like stem.

life cycle

Pale Spikerush is a perennial plant with long underground roots called **rhizomes**. It is one of the two vernal pool plants that lives longer than a few weeks. The plant can reproduce using seeds and it can spread by sending out rhizomes that produce more stems. Pale Spikerush blooms in late May.

ecology

Pale Spikerush prefers the deepest vernal pools where it can often be one of the dominant species. You can tell which parts of a vernal pool hold water the longest by finding the patches of Pale Spikerush.

When there is water in the vernal pools, its stems are hollow to transport air down to the roots. When the water is gone, the stems fill in with pith (hard

spongy-looking material) to make the stems stronger and harder to bend or break.

investigate

The cone-like flowers are wind pollinated. The stamens usually hang out of the flower in order to be exposed to the wind. Can you find flowers in which the stamens are hanging out? What is another perennial plant in vernal pools?

