

BOGDIVERSITY THURSDAY



—*from Head Naturalist Clinton*

Bog Birch

POST #21—March 10, 2022

Birches are a recognizable group of trees across their range, especially in Northern Minnesota. In the Sax-Zim Bog, we have documented four species of birch and one hybrid birch. Today's Biodiversity Thursday features one of the least familiar birch species: Bog Birch!

Bog Birch is a shrub with multiple small stems, while most of its relatives are fairly large trees, with singular, robust trunks. This shrub tends to hide on the landscape, tucked between alders (*Alnus* sp) and willows (*Salix* sp) in wetlands. Bog Birch is fairly common and widespread in Minnesota found everywhere except the southwestern parts of the state.

This shrub has distinctly small, serrated leaves, with abundant, spiky catkins. Typically, Bog Birch doesn't grow more than 8 feet tall and also lacks peeling bark, typical of most birches. An alternate name for this species is Swamp Birch, as it typically does not grow in acidic bogs! It prefers fens, swamps, and marshes, but can grow in bogs with low acidity.

Collectively, birches support great butterfly and moth diversity. Bog Birch is no exception and is the host to a butterfly species that we have yet to find in the Sax-Zim Bog: Frigga Fritillary! This attractive and rare bog specialist butterfly has been found north and southwest of the Sax-Zim Bog, but we have yet to cross paths with this species... maybe this will be the year we find it??

More information on photos below!

(Photos of Bog Birch by Head Naturalist Clinton)



Bog Birch have distinctly small and serrated leaves. In the winter, Bog Birch tends to hold onto a few of their leaves, which have some texture to their upper surface.



Not very obvious on the landscape from afar, you must get fairly close to a Bog Birch before it becomes obvious. They have abundant, short branches and are generally found in small clusters.



A beautiful shrub, Bog Birch rarely makes dense thickets, unlike willows (*Salix* sp) and alders (*Alnus* sp).



The male and female catkins can be found on the same branch. The female catkins, which produce seeds, are distinctly spiky and contain hundreds of seeds, attractive forage for Common Redpolls, Pine Siskins, and American Goldfinches.