



**Bruce Trail
CONSERVANCY**



American Hart's-Tongue Fern (*Asplenium scolopendrium americanum*)



Did You Know?

The Hart's-tongue fern is a species of special concern due to biological and anthropogenic factors.

Like all ferns, this one doesn't have seeds, or flowers! Instead, ferns reproduce with spores.

While most ferns have compound and lacey leaves, this one in particular has leaves that are simple and undivided.

Photo: B.Popelier (2014)

Habitat – Grows best in medium moisture and well drained areas in shaded deciduous forests over calcareous rock.

Size – Leaves can reach lengths of 10-60 cm long.

Range – Southern Ontario extending down into some eastern states.

Status – Ontario, S3- Special Concern/Canada, Special Concern



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Identification:

This specific fern is different from most others because its un-toothed evergreen leaves are long, leathery and glossy. The leaves are typically 20 to 40 centimeters long with their reproductive spores on the undersides. Their roots are rhizomatous (from an underground stem), and the leaves are evergreen. With that being said, the plant can develop up to 100 leaves per root zone if preferred growing conditions are present, but 1- to 40 are most common. The fern will usually be seen growing in rocky, moist but well drained areas with surrounding moss.



Photo: Mike Osborn

Interesting Facts

The common name is derived from the fact that the leaves resemble a deer's tongue. Hart is an old English word for a deer.

The sori (a cluster of sporangia: the reproductive structure of the plant) are located in clumped rows on the underside of the leaf. The sori pattern was thought to look like a centipede and the scientific name, scolopendrium, is latin for centipede.

The Hart's-tongue Fern is asexual during its first year of growth that allows the next generation to flourish that contains sex organs and is called a gametophyte. This is called alternating generations.

Hart's Tongue Fern on the Niagara Escarpment

The Bruce Trail Conservancy is continually acquiring and conserving land along the Niagara Escarpment, including areas where the Hart's Tongue Fern can be found. Ontario has the bulk of North America's population and most are found along the Niagara Escarpment. According to the Ministry of Natural



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Resources and Forestry, this fern has had more than 100 reported sightings in the province. To date, BTC ecologists have recorded well over 100 occurrences on BTC managed land alone and these have been shared with the province to add to their species records. It is not uncommon to come across this special fern as you hike along the Bruce Trail, just remember to enjoy it in its natural habitat, take a picture and leave it be as you continue on your journey.