

The

Understory

Newsletter of the Pinellas Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society, Inc.

June - July 2009

President's Message: Pollinators & Planning

The Simpson stoppers are in bloom next to my driveway. When I park and get out, I'm amazed at the number and diversity of pollinating insects that are foraging on the plants. It makes me reflect how important it is to use native plants in the landscape in order to retain healthy populations of pollinators. By moving pollen around in the environment, these creatures play a large role in keeping natural plant communities viable as well as pollinating many of our food plants. For the most part, their activity goes unnoticed and our dependency on them is decidedly underappreciated. Many of our native wildflowers used for landscaping also attract and support pollinators. Wildflowers such as dotted horsemint, tropical sage, pineland heliotrope, pineland lantana, blanket flower, rosinweed, and ironweed are especially attractive to pollinating insects. We can experience much recreational enjoyment out of watching the play of pollinators at work in our yards and have the satisfaction of knowing that, by providing native plants



Lovebugs pollinating Simpson's stopper flowers
Photo by Bill Bilodeau

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which are actively being used in this way, we are helping to hold ecosystems together.

On a different note, our Chapter has just completed the busiest season of the yearly cycle as signaled by the passing of the Pinellas Living Green Expo. Thanks to all of you who participated in any of the many ways we function as an organization. One of the most important remaining tasks is to plan for next year - which will begin in midsummer. If you have suggestions for next year's speakers' topics and/or interesting places for field trips, please let me know at billbilodeau@verizon.net or 727-488-3163. We also need to plan for the September landscape tour which has been a big hit for the past two years. Please help us locate interesting native plant yards and/or volunteer to participate on the tour committee or the "day of the tour" activities. It is fun and a very direct way of informing the public about native plants. Contact Jim McGinity, tour coordinator, at jimmcginity@verizon.net or 727-733-2928.

From now until the end of September we must also seriously focus on meeting the requirement we have of contributing two hundred volunteer hours to the Cooperative Extension

Service so that we can continue to meet at this facility next year. If you have pledged to give ten hours, this is a reminder to please do so. If you have not pledged, we would welcome your contribution. There are many volunteer jobs that can be done, some of which are indoors. One significant outdoor task is to volunteer to help plant and care for new plantings in the native plant areas around the grounds. Our Chapter has recently been awarded a Chapter Grant from the state to add species to this valuable public area. We will need people to help Craig Huegel and the rest of the Extension volunteers assigned to plant and maintain these new plantings. There is no better way to get familiar with native plants than to work with them directly. This work occurs Wednesday mornings, but there are opportunities to help on other days if Wednesdays are not possible for you. Please contact Cindy Peacock or Jean Fields at Cooperative Extension Service 582-2100 for more information or to volunteer.

Many cheers on the return of the rains!



-- *Bill Bilodeau*

Chapter Award

by Bill Bilodeau

Our Pinellas Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society was the sole 2009 winner of the Chapter Award given by the state organization, the Florida Native Plant Society. It is awarded each year at the state conference which was recently held in West Palm Beach. The award is granted to a chapter that demonstrates outstanding service and innovative implementation in support of the FNPS mission to preserve, conserve, and restore the native plants and native plant communities of Florida. The plaque was given by FNPS president, Gene Kelly and received by chapter president Bill Bilodeau. Congratulations to the chapter board of directors and all members who contributed to chapter efforts and activities in recent years. You made us shine.

Meetings: [New Meeting Place! Pinellas County Extension, 12520 Ulmerton Road, Largo.](#)

Chapter Calendar

Meeting, Wed., June 6, 7:00 pm: Ferns

Please join us this Wednesday for a program on ferns presented by our own Debbie Chayet. Debbie, a long-time member, our Chapter Representative, and an employee of Pinellas County's Parks Department will help us to better identify the ferns of Pinellas County. In Debbie's own words: "My presentation for the June meeting is on ferns. I have titled it: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly. As the name implies, I will cover a few native ferns, a few invasive exotic ferns and end with "the Ugly" (cannot give away all the secrets)."

Meeting, Wed. July 1, 7:00 pm: The Value of Nature Speaker: Linda Taylor, owner of "It's Our Nature" and author of: *Great Women Exploring Nature: How Wild Florida Influenced Their Lives*, will speak on how the thread of Florida's wild nature wove itself into the lives of ten women. They include Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mina Miller Edison, Marjory Stoneman Douglas, Zora Neale Thurston, Myrtle Scharrar Betz, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, Anne Morrow Lindbergh, Jackie Cochran, Rachel Carson, and Marjorie Harris Carr.

Meeting, Wed., Aug. 5, 7:00 pm: The Beginning of Life - Understanding a Marine Estuary Speaker: Barbara Hoffman, MS, former FNPS President. Barbara will present a program about the seagrasses and other marine plants found in a coastal marine ecosystem, and the many creatures that are dependent upon them.

June Field Trip: Hiking Brooker Creek Wetlands, Saturday, June 13, 9 am.

The June field trip will be led by Chapter member, Craig Huegel. Craig has made special arrangements with the Preserve staff to explore an area normally off limits to the public. This is an expansive Wetland area in the southern part of the Preserve that is especially rich in native ferns. Because it is a wetland and off trail, the walking will be more difficult than normal and may involve walking in water at times that is shin deep. **Please reserve your place on this very special field trip by contacting Craig directly - Huegelc55@aol.com or by phone 422-6583.** Bring insect repellent and drinking water, and be prepared to get wet and muddy.

Meet at the southern entrance of the Preserve at 9 am. Go north to Tampa Road and take it east towards Oldsmar to Forest Lakes Blvd. Turn north (left) and go to Pine Ave N. Turn left and go north to the end of the pavement. Oldsmar operates a City Park here and we will meet in their parking lot. Anyone wishing to carpool from Clearwater, should meet in the parking lot of Perkin's (on Gulf to Bay, just east of US 19) before 8 am. We will be leaving promptly at 8 am to make it to Oldsmar by the starting time. The hike should be over by noon. If you wish to bring a lunch, we can eat it at the City Park. There are no facilities inside Brooker Creek Preserve, so plan accordingly.

July Field Trip: Kayaking/Canoeing the Santa Fe River, Saturday, July 11

To carpool, meet at 6:45 am, at the Perkins at US 19 & Gulf to Bay (East side of US 19 across from Clearwater Mall). Please plan to arrive a bit early so we can depart on time. If you prefer to not carpool, we will meet at Adventure Outpost Outfitters **no later than 9:45 am**. The address is: Adventure Outpost Outfitters, 18238 NW Highway 441, High Springs, Florida. Call Alexa for directions. **Everyone who wishes to attend (with or without your own boat) must make reservations through Alexa (not Adventure Outpost) and make payment by July 6.** Payment will differ for those bringing their own boats. If you wish to pay by credit card, make reservations through Alexa first. Then she will direct you to Adventure Outpost Outfitters so that you can make payment. No one will be considered registered for this trip until reservations and payment have been completed before July 6. We are doing this to avoid the problems we had last time.

We will be kayaking/canoeing down the beautiful Santa Fe River, a refreshing spring-fed river which defines the northern boundary of Alachua County and flows through the heart of Florida's "spring country." Some of the better known springs of our state flow into it, including Ginnie Springs, Blue Spring, Poe Spring, Ichetucknee Springs, and, literally, dozens more. This river has the smallest population of alligators in the area. If you are disappointed by that, you will be happy to know that it probably has more turtle species, the most common ones being peninsular cooter, chicken turtle, and the occasional snapping turtle. We might also be fortunate enough to see some otters. We hope to get out and swim at one of the springs, so plan for that.

What to bring:

- Lunch to take on the river, plenty of drinking water; hat, **sunscreen**, bug spray, etc. (Part of the river trip will be shaded, but some will be in full sun.)
 - Water shoes appropriate for rocky or grassy bottoms (not flip flops).
 - You may want to bring a poncho, or raingear, in case we get one of Florida's unpredictable afternoon showers.
 - A waterproof bag is always handy for personal gear.
- Lif jackets, paddles, seats, and required whistles *are provided by the outfitter.*

This trip is termed 'easy' -- we will kayak with the current so not much heavy paddling is expected, but it is a nine mile trip. Come prepared for about a 4-5 hour trip on the water, plus travel time. The outfitters will drive us to the starting point, then pick us up at the end.

Kayak/Canoe rental fees are listed below. If we get more than ten people, the price will go down about \$2/ person.

Single kayak- \$28.00

2 Person kayak - \$40.00

Canoe (two people per canoe) - \$38.00

For further info or to make reservations (must be received by July 6), contact Alexa Wilcox-Huegel, phone: (727) 422-4792 or E-mail: Alexa776@tampabay.rr.com

August Field Trip: Snorkeling the sea grasses at a north county beach, Saturday, Aug. 15, 9:00 am

Place: to be announced. Barb Hoffman is previewing sites to pick the best one. The site selected will be posted on the FNPS.org/Pinellas website by mid July, or you can call Alexa Wilcox-Huegel @ 422-4792 after mid-July for more information.

This will be a wading/snorkeling trip led by Barb Hoffman to see some of the natural seagrasses she will be teaching us about at the August meeting. We did a similar type of trip a number of years ago, and it was so enjoyable we have asked Barb to repeat it. It is a great opportunity to see and experience an aquatic plant community. Hope you can join us.

Plan to bring snorkel gear, sunscreen, bug spray, towels, beach chair/ beach gear of your choice, and drinking water. We will have a short meeting before entering the water. Bring clothes to change; we will plan to go to a casual restaurant for lunch afterwards.

Plant Profile: Rain Lilies

by Craig Huegel

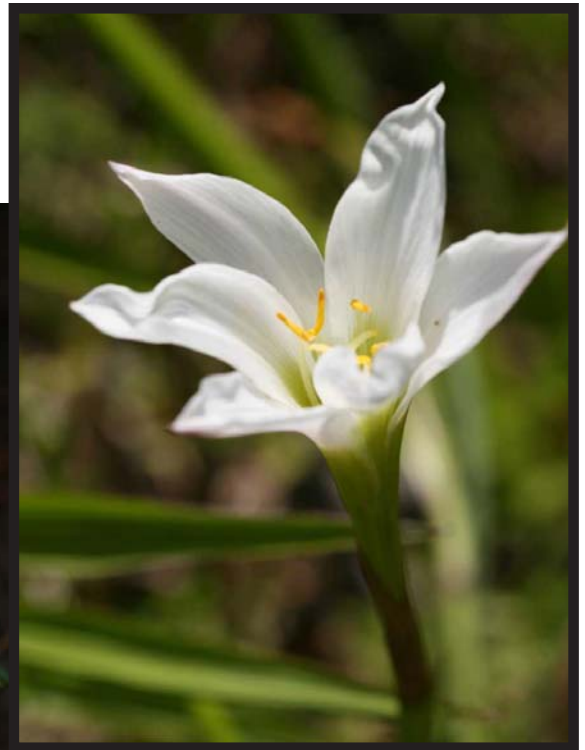
Florida has two (three depending on taxonomy) native species of rain lilies. Simpson's rain lily (*Z. simpsonii*) is the rarest and listed as a Threatened species by the state of Florida. It is very similar to our more common species, *Z. atamasco*, except the flower structure differs. In *Z. simpsonii*, the stigma (the female part of the flower that accepts the pollen) is the same length as the anthers (the male part of the flower that produces the pollen). It has very thin leaves and these are sometimes absent at the time of flowering. I have found this species growing in open pasturelands and in wet pinelands and it occurs sporadically in the central and south-central counties of Florida. It is endemic to the state.

The second species, *Z. atamasco*, is generally considered to be comprised of two distinct varieties (var. *atamasco* and var. *treatiae*), but some taxonomists consider them to be two distinct species and they are sometimes referenced that way in books. The Atamasco lily is more widely distributed and occurs in nearly every Florida county as well as areas north of the state within the Southeastern Coastal Plain to Maryland. The variety "treatiae" is relatively rare, however, listed as a state-listed Threatened species (or species variety) and present mostly in the northern half of Florida. They are distinguished only by the width of the leaves. In the "atamasco" variety, the leaves are generally 3-8mm wide (to ~1/3 inch); variety *treatiae* has narrower leaves – generally 2-4 mm wide (less than 1/4 inch) and a bit more cylindrical. The flowers are identical in size as Simpson's lily, but the stigma is noticeably longer than the anthers.

Atamasco lily also occurs in the same habitats as Simpson's rain lily. They are especially noticeable along wet roadsides following a rain, but they appear in a variety of open habitats including pastures that are rather xeric at times. Rain lilies are toxic if consumed and should not be planted in areas where horses and cattle are grazed.



Z. atamasco* var. *treatiae



Z. simpsonii



***Z. atamasco* var. *atamasco*
pinkish form**

(Plant Profile: Rain Lilies, cont.)

There are several non-native rain lilies that sometimes are sold in garden centers and sometimes escape. I have included a few photos of the ones most commonly encountered here; *Z. rosea*, *Z. grandiflora*, and *Z. candida*. Take a close look at them as they are continually a cause of confusion for native plant gardeners and often mislabeled. In preparing to write this article, I scoured the internet for information to help ensure that I knew what I thought I knew about native and non-native rain lilies. Then I sent photos to Dr. Bruce Hansen at the University of South Florida. He corroborated my tentative taxonomy and allowed me to finish this article.

Z. rosea and *Z. candida* are quite small with flowers that are rather “flat” in appearance – much less funnel-formed than the native species. The greatest source of confusion seems to be in differentiating Atamasco lilies (variety *atamasco*) from the non-native *Z. grandiflora*. The leaves of both are similar in size and width and the size of the blooms is very similar too. Some of the confusion comes from the trait of some strains of Atamasco lily to be definitely tinged with pink. Most commonly, all forms of our native rain lilies are white even though the flower buds are often rosy in color. It also is common for them to turn pinkish as the blooms wither. But, native rain lilies often occur with a definite pink blush. *Z. grandiflora*, on the other hand, is definitely pink – solid pink, never white with a pink blush. It is not hard to tell the two species apart when they are side by side in pots at a nursery, but the pinkish forms of the native species sometimes cause confusion and end up getting labeled as non-natives. I guess the idea is that it is better to err on the side of caution. My thought is it is better to just plant them and wait for the Ph.D. taxonomist to prove you wrong.

Rain lilies are easily used in the landscape. They are exceptionally tolerant of periodic drought, but require good light to perform well. Do not plant them in a lot of shade. Half sun can work fine, but they prefer nearly full sun and good moisture during the rainy season. Then, sit back, wait for the rain, and enjoy them.

Some of the photos for this article and a wonderful source for information on a wide variety of rain lilies in the genus *Zephyranthes* can be found at: <http://www.pacificbulbsociety.org/pbswiki/index.php/Zephyranthes>; a site maintained by the Pacific Bulb Society. The photos of *Z. atamasco* var. *atamasco*, *Z. simpsonii*, and *Z. candida* were taken by Craig Huegel.



Z. grandiflora



Z. candida



Z. rosea

Birds and Native Landscapes

by Craig Huegel

With spring migration and the State Conference past us, it seemed a good time to reflect back on the importance of landscaping to wildlife—especially for migratory songbirds. There can be no question that wildlife requires habitat to persist in a location, but these past few months have reinforced my belief in the power of landscape - even to wildlife that are only passing through.

With my recent lay-off, I had the luxury this past season to truly watch wildlife in our standard-sized landscape of native plants in unincorporated Seminole – mid-County. Geographically, our lot is not unique. We are not on the Gulf of Mexico like Fort DeSoto Park and therefore whatever migrants reach our yard are not striking it first after hours of open-water travel. We are not adjacent to a larger natural area like folks adjacent to Brooker Creek or Weedon Island Preserves. The migratory birds that ultimately choose our yard to refuel and refresh as they fly north to their respective breeding areas are doing so not by chance, but by choice. It is all about habitat and I



Perched briefly on a branch of Snowberry (*Chiococca alba*), a male Black-throated Blue Warbler makes his way to a running water feature.

learned a bit more about what is important as I ventured out several times each day to explore my landscape with binoculars in hand.

Between April 7 and May 8, Alexa and I had nearly two dozen species of migrating warblers and many other beautiful songbirds stopping by for a day or two. The complete list is at the end of this article. They were here because of food, water, and cover. Their distribution was not random across our yard, but confined to a very small area of the landscape.

If you have seen our yard, you know that we have designed our front yard to be a more open xeric pineland with a few scattered trees and a lot of wildflowers and native grasses. In our side yard, off our deck, we have a permanent pond with a pump that recycles the water from a small shallow pond, through a short stream and waterfall to a larger deeper pond below. Adjacent to this are a few dense shrubs and small trees as well as an open wetland planted with wildflowers. Behind the deck is a grove of live oaks that we share with two of our neighbors. We have planted a woody understory here and extended the forest planting with different trees along the length of our narrow backyard.

The migratory songbirds confined their movements almost exclusively to the forest canopy and the small moving water feature. While the cardinals, blue jays and fish crows used the bird baths in other parts of our yard, the smaller songbirds would literally line up and await their turn at the narrow part of the waterfall. Here, they would look furtively in all directions from the stems of the larger ferns or the branches of the St. John's-worts and, when comfortable that the coast was clear, splash and dip beneath the shallow moving water. Each bird, repeated dozens of times each day and heralding that this was no chance occasion.

Running, trickling water drew birds from across our little corner of forest. Birds foraging across the street in my neighbor's small oak grove would venture to our small stream, bath and drink, and return to feed. In doing so, they would bypass the other bird baths. It was not merely water that drew them, but shallow moving water.

Their foraging took place exclusively within our small forest. They rarely ventured out to catch bugs in our

pineland or the wildflower understory, though these areas have their own collection of insects. They did not spend time searching out the small fruit produced by our shrubs. Warblers and the other migratory birds that visited us are insectivores at this time of year. They specialize on small grubs and larvae and on the many small pollinating insects in the canopy of oaks (and mulberries, which we don't have). These conditions are met beautifully in the canopy of live oaks – not in pines or most other trees. Live oaks flower later than laurel oaks and they time it perfectly for the arrival of spring migrants. These birds are looking for tiny insects and larvae and live oaks produce this type of food during the early spring.

I am not a “classic” birdwatcher, though I have been watching birds for as long as I can remember. I know that I could get in my car and drive somewhere else to build my “list”, but I get far more satisfaction out of watching them in my landscape and knowing that the conditions I have created have made my neighborhood a richer place to live. Do not underestimate the power of landscape. By thoughtful planning, you can put the welcome mat out for a wealth of other creatures and make your part of the world a better place. The equation to solve is incorporating food, water, and cover – timed appropriately to meet the needs of the wildlife at the time of year they are here.

The photos for this article were taken by member/graphic artist/photographer, Christina Evans, in her home landscape in Pinellas County. Christina, and her husband Stan, have transformed their yard with native plants and

use it regularly for their amazing nature photography. To get a much broader view of Christina's work, go to her website and explore a while: <http://www.cgstudios.smugmug.com/>



A male Common Yellowthroat strikes a pose next to Swamp Fern (*Blechnum serrulatum*) and bud-ding Scarlet Sage (*Salvia coccinea*).

Our Bird List

Warblers (by time of sighting)

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| Blue-winged warbler | Tennessee warbler |
| Palm warbler (migratory) | Ovenbird |
| Pine warbler | Blackpoll |
| Black and white warbler | Common yellowthroat |
| Prothonotary warbler | American redstart |
| Cerulean warbler | Worm-eating warbler |
| Prairie warbler | Black-throated blue warbler |
| Hooded warbler | Cape May warbler |
| Northern parula warbler | Magnolia warbler |
| Orange-crowned warbler | Black-throated green warbler |

Other Migratory Songbirds

- Indigo bunting
- Painted bunting
- Ruby-throated hummingbird
(hawking small insects in oak canopy)
- Summer tanager
- Scarlet tanager
- Swainson's thrush
- Hermit thrush
- Blue grosbeak
- Rose-breasted grosbeak
- Yellow-billed cuckoo
- House wren

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Danie Cutler, Bruce Turley



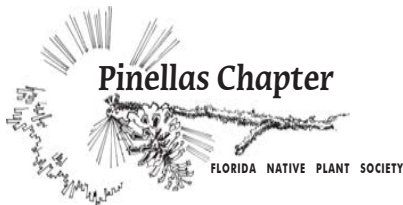
Z. candida
rain lilies

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--**Special Events/Festivals:** Cindy Peacock
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--**Plants:** Bruce Turley 595-2073

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