

Our speaker this month was Wally Wilder of Zellwood, FL who presented a slide show program on the Wild Orchids of Florida. Wally is a self-educated horticulturalist that has seen a number of orchids in Florida's woodlands, ranging from common varieties to those species that are more rare. Florida is home to over 100 varieties of orchids, which occur in a diversity of habitats throughout the state. *Encyclia tampensis*, or the Florida butterfly orchid, is an epiphytic orchid that is quite abundant throughout central and southern Florida. The peak flowering period is between June and July, although this species is known to bloom sporadically throughout the year. The flowers of this species are highly variable in both size and color. The typical presentation is flowers with sepals and petals that are a yellow-green suffused with varying amounts of brown or purple. The white lip of this orchid is kissed with purple or magenta veining, and in the alba form no veining occurs at all, just a pure white lip. The butterfly orchid is locally abundant along Florida's waterways and within hammocks. The photos Wally showed us were taken in Myakka River State Park near Sarasota, FL. Another good place to view this orchid is in the trees along the banks of the Hillsborough River.

The green-fly orchid (*Epidendrum magnoliae*) is a very common epiphytic orchid occurring throughout central and northern Florida in mesic hardwood forests, especially those in close proximity to bodies of water. The green-fly orchid tends to grow on live oak trees often in close association with resurrection fern. This orchid can form dense clumps with pendulous yellowish-green flowers. Flowering occurs predominantly from August-March, but just like with *Encyclia tampensis* flowering can occur throughout the year. A good place to view this orchid up close is along the Holly Hammock hiking trail at Ross Prairie, near Hwy 200 southwest of Ocala, FL.

The leafless beak orchid (*Sacoila lanceolata*) is a beautiful terrestrial orchid with striking coral colored flowers. There also exists a green variety (forma *albidaviridis*), however, it is not as commonly seen as the red coloration. The leafless beak orchid is typically found in bloom from April-July and frequents road shoulders, open pastures, old fields, and dry woods. Even though there are no documented sightings of this species in Hernando County, it can be found to our north in Citrus along CR 491 (Citrus Way) and CR 480 (W Stage Coach Trl). Take it from me, even driving by at 60mph you will still notice this species as its red flowers definitely stand out against the surrounding green foliage. The hoary beaked orchid (*S. squamulosa*) looks superficially like the leafless beak, however, upon closer inspection has hoary white dots on the flowers. This species is known only to exist in damp pineland forests with limestone outcroppings in Marion County. This orchid can be searched for in forests of the Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenway south of Ocala.

Four species of grass pinks, *Calopogon* spp., occur in the state of Florida. These are terrestrial orchids that like sunny, wet meadows, pine flatwoods, and roadsides with sandy, acidic soils. These orchids open their nonresupinate flowers in succession starting at the base of the floral inflorescence with each flower only open for a few brief days. Flowering occurs from spring to early summer with (*Vanilla barbellata*) are just some of the orchids that can be found among swamps throughout the southern portion of the state.

April being a peek month for many species. Like the name suggests the flowers of the grass-pinks vary from deep to pale shades of pink with all four of the species having an alba variety. The many-flowered grass-pink (*C. multiflorus*) is probably the rarest grass-pink in Florida due to the fact that it is a fire dependent species, and will not flower until a few weeks after a spring burn. Some of the larger populations of the many-flowered grass-pink are located in the Goethe State Forest in Levy County and at the Disney Wilderness Preserve near Kissimmee.

There are at least eight species of fringed orchids, *Platanthera* spp., that occur in Florida. They are terrestrial orchids that prefer open, wet meadows, pine flatwoods, roadsides, and areas of seepage slopes. Most of the species have brilliant orange flowers with a fringed lip that are in bloom from summer to early fall. The Chapman's fringed orchid (*P. chapmanii*), with its vibrant orange-yellow flowers is critically endangered in the state and consists primarily of small local populations, such as ones that can be found along Hwy 90 in Bakers County. The orange fringed orchid (*P. ciliaris*), which can stand up to a meter high, can readily be found blooming in August among moist, mossy ditches located on the west side of CR 337 in the Goethe State Forest. Two of the species of fringed orchids, the southern white fringe orchid (*P. conspicua*) and the snowy orchid (*P. nivea*), have enticing, crisp snow white flowers and are more commonly located from central Florida northward. Not all of Florida's orchids are obvious and showy. There are several species of orchids that are mycotrophic, which means these plants derive most of their nutrients from a symbiotic association with fungi. The crested coralroot (*Hexalectris spicata*) is an example of this type of orchid that exists as subterranean tubers forming small rhizomes within dry, open, hardwood forests (preferably live oak) in central and north Florida. The crested coralroot is a summer flowering species which sends up a leafless stem during April-August that has several flowers with petals and sepals of a deep yellowish-brown and purple striations across the petals and the lip. A true albino form of the plant (forma *wilderi*) was discovered in Hernando County, and has been seen by only a few individuals including Wally and his brother. Some good places to explore for this orchid would be in forests near Crystal River and the Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenway.

As many of us already know south Florida is home to a large number of Florida's orchid species, with the Everglades, Big Cypress Swamp, and the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve being some of their favorite haunts. Several species including: the cigar orchid (*Cyrtopodium punctatum*), night-fragrant epidendrum (*Epidendrum nocturnum*), cone-bearing epidendrum (*E. strobiliferum*), Florida oncidium (*Oncidium floridanum*), clamshell orchid (*Prosthechea cochleata*), spotted mule-eared orchid (*Trichocentrum undulatum*), and the leafless vanilla Of course, no discussion of Florida's orchids would be complete without mention of the ghost orchid (*Dendrophylax lindenii*).

The ghost orchid is a leafless, epiphytic orchid that produces a rambling mass of grayish-green roots that attaches the plant to its host (cypress, pond apple, and pop ash trees being preferred). The flower of this orchid is unmistakable with its star shaped white petals and sepals tinged with green, and the “frog-like” shape of the lip with its long nectar spur. The ghost orchid can be found blooming from April-August on trees throughout south Florida’s hardwood hammocks, sloughs, and cypress domes. If you are the adventurous type, guided hikes that take you deep into the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve and led by park biologist Mike Owen are available to view the elusive ghost orchid. For those that prefer to keep their feet dry, Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary in Naples is home to the “super” ghost orchid, which can be viewed from the safety of their boardwalk. At their website, <http://corkscrew.audobon.org/visit/corkscrew-ghost-orchids>, they provide visitors status updates on how many flowers are currently in bloom.

For those interested in learning more about Florida’s orchids there are a number of good resources available. A book that I have found invaluable is *The Native Orchids of Florida* by Carlyle A. Luer (1972). Even though this book is over 40 years old, it is filled with large, beautiful color photos of the orchids and descriptive information, most of which is still accurate even today. Other good resources include *the Wild Orchids of Florida* by Paul Martin Brown (2005) and Prem Subrahmanyam’s website and blog at flnativeorchids.com. If you are interested in heading out to view Florida’s orchids in their native habitats, Wally said that now (April) is a good time to head up to the Goethe State Forest and May is a good time for the Cary State Forest, particularly near the intersection of US 301 and CR 119.