



The Institute
for Regional
Conservation
(IRC)

A not for profit
501(c)3
organization

Friends of IRC News

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Key deer (*Odocoileus virginianus clavium*)
Photo: Kirsten Hines

Spring 2008

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Restoration Turned Clean-Up

We planned to pull weeds as part of our effort at the February 24 Restoration Barbeque, but plans quickly changed as we realized how much trash had accumulated at our George N. Avery Pineland. The neighbors apparently viewed the property as their personal dumping ground, not an uncommon notion, and tossed dirty diapers, broken signs, beer bottles, furniture, car parts and much more over the fence. Debris included environmental hazards such as car batteries and 5-gallon containers filled with motor oil.

Thanks to our hard-working crew, we took 7 truckloads of garbage to the dump and recycling center. One of our participants contacted a DERM inspector who graciously joined us on her weekend to evaluate the environmental atrocities we'd uncovered. Thanks to her report, we were able to follow-up with Miami-Dade County



Before (above) and after (below) cleaning



FOIRC Update

Many thanks to DOW AgroSciences for their 10-gallon donation of "Garlon 4 Ultra", essential to our restoration work!



BBQ attendees by gathered recyclables
Photos: Michael Cherkiss, Kirsten Hines

Police inspectors. The renters who were at fault had already skipped town, but the owner was tracked down. He apologized, removed the remaining debris and will hopefully prevent this from happening again after a \$400 fine.

Illegal dumping is a common problem in natural areas, but one that is seldom punished due to difficulties identifying perpetrators. Many thanks to everyone who contributed to this success! Next time we should be able to concentrate on the weeds.

YOU'RE INVITED TO A MOVIE EXTRAVAGANZA:

Wind Across the Everglades

We join forces with Tropical Audubon Society to bring you this 1958 classic movie, never released on DVD or video in the U.S. Starring Burl Ives, Chris Plummer and Gypsy Rose Lee, the film takes you back to a conservation battlefield where the Audubon Society takes on the Cottonmouth Gang to protect wading birds from plume hunters.

When: Thursday, May 8; 7:00pm

Where: Doc Thomas House
5530 Sunset Drive

Tickets: \$20 at the door



A Tribute to One of the Original “IRC Boys”

As many of you already know, IRC Senior Biologist Steven Woodmansee ended his term as an IRC employee at the end of January to expand his horizons. We continue to benefit from his gifts in his new capacity as a research associate, but his day-to-day absence has been felt.



Steve joined IRC in 1997 as its 3rd employee, just in time to run many miles worth of transects as part of IRC’s baseline vegetation surveys. The sheer exhaustion of trudging through some of South Florida’s toughest terrain for days on end taught him to sleep whenever the opportunity arose, including in cars, planes, helicopters and even airboats. Not

all rides were sleep-inducing though. During a 10 day marathon of intense flights, consisting of 8 hours of staring at the ground while sweating profusely, one flight was particularly invigorating. A loud explosion interrupted the monotony and smoke began to billow from the engine as oil spewed across the windshield. The plane threw a rod and while they made it to safety, rumor has it Steve knows the crash position well. Then there was the time that Steve brandished a big stick to chase a mother bear away from Jimi who barely escaped up a tree. Fortunately, the bear lost interest before Steve appeared. Wasp stings, threats of toadbug bites, ATVs stuck in mud, a spinning hydroplane down the highway and missing chunks of skin are just a few of the trials and tribulations Steve endured in the name of conservation.

Steve W.,
Thanks for all
the years of
incredible
service!

Photos: Patty Castillo-Trenn,
Jimi Sadle

The mental and physical contributions Steve

Steven Green: First Recipient of the Arrowsmith Award for Service



From thrashing through poisonwood for restoration to risking his life in Miami traffic for roadside plant surveys, and yes, even to taking out the trash, Steven Green has wholeheartedly embraced a range of tasks for IRC. In ap-

preciation of his efforts, Steve became the first recipient of IRC’s new award—The Arrowsmith Award for Service—which was accompanied by a \$1,000 bonus.

This award memorializes the incredible dedication and generosity of the late Steve Arrowsmith, IRC’s first major unsolicited donor, who died suddenly from the side effects of asthma in 1992. The Arrowsmith Award is granted to a staff member of IRC who shows commitment, a work ethic and a spirit of cooperation that goes above and beyond the call of duty.

made during his tenure at IRC are immeasurable. He played a vital role in completing the “Floristic Inventory of South Florida”, co-authored IRC’s 2002 book, contributed to website development, initiated county collaborations for botanical surveys and training, discovered new populations of many rare plants, promoted outreach and education, published papers, and so much more. IRC would not be what it is today without Steve’s contributions.



Plant of the Season: southern fogfruit (*Phyla stoechadifolia*) Steven Green

Southern fogfruit (*Phyla stoechadifolia*) is a medium sized creeping herb in the verbenaceae family. It is distinguished from the more common turkey tangle fogfruit (*Phyla nodiflora*) by its woody lower stems, and its narrow lanceolate leaves. The distribution of southern fogfruit ranges from the West Indies to Mexico and South Florida.

In South Florida, southern fogfruit occurs infrequently in seasonal wetlands such as wet prairies, low elevation pine rocklands, and in roadside ditches. It is a state-listed endangered species. Several butterflies including the common buckeye, phaon crescent, and white peacock, use southern fogfruit as a larval host plant. Numerous other butterflies and insects

are attracted to the nectar of the



southern fogfruit (*Phyla stoechadifolia*)
Photo: Roger Hammer

semi-showy purple and white flower heads.

Southern fogfruit was once only thought to be native to Miami-Dade and Broward Counties. However, during recent plant surveys in Picayune Strand State Forest in Collier County, a population of southern fogfruit was located by IRC biologists Steven Green and Michael Barry. This population is over 50 miles from the closest population in the Big Cypress National Preserve.

For more information on southern fogfruit and its applications in your native plant landscape, visit our Natives for Your Neighborhood Website (www.regionalconservation.org/beta/nfyn.beta.asp).

A New Restoration Tactic

Kirsten Hines

Pest plant invasions are one of the largest threats to pine rockland fragments within urban Miami-Dade County. Dense infestations of Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolius*) and the like not only inhibit native species, but also prevent fire management which is necessary to maintain this habitat. Removing nuisance thickets is often more challenging than simply removing the plants themselves because of abundant seed banks that can haunt an area for



Barry Massin clearing unwanted plants

years to come. Our solution? Get rid of the seed infested soil!

Thanks to funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Ross Foundation and in-kind services from FOIRC member Barry Massin, we recently tested this new strategy on our pineland properties. Heavy machinery was used to remove unwanted plants and infected soil, steering around any remaining pine trees.

Will the strategy work? We won't know for some time, but we do know that pine rockland species are adapted to grow on the limestone substrate. Removing tainted soils shouldn't harm these species, but should deter unwanted competitors. Additionally, having these areas clear will enable us to burn, further benefiting native species which often depend upon fire to



Before (above) and after (below) treatment
Photos: Steven Green

trigger reproductive processes. This is also a great opportunity for us to introduce various candidate species!

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A New *Pithecellobium* for the Florida Keys

Keith Bradley

While walking across pine rockland on Big Pine Key for vegetation surveys last fall, Mike Barry and I found a colony of a couple hundred plants that were obviously of the *Pithecellobium* genus, but were unknown to us. *Pithecellobium* species are distinctive because of their fruits, which are sometimes called monkey's ear ring in the tropics. The fruits are long and slender coils which twist to open at maturity, revealing black seeds suspended by bright red spongy "arils" - a stunning, noticeable display (especially to hungry birds).

While clearly of this genus, these plants were different than the two species native to Florida - blackbead (*P. keyense*) and cat's claw (*P. unguis-cati*). These were small shrubs, reaching no more than 6 feet in height, with most plants at half that. The leaves were very similar in appearance and texture to blackbead, but they were much smaller. At the base of each leaf was

a pair of sharp spines, more typical of cat's claw which is a medium sized tree that does not grow in pine rockland habitat.

A specimen was collected and identified as Bahama cat's claw (*P. bahamense*) which has been found in the Bahamas and Cuba. Unbeknownst to us at the time, a local naturalist and photographer, Paula Cannon, had found the same patch of plants about a year before us. Paula's keen observations of the plants revealed that a gall midge (a kind of fly) has been parasitizing the fruits of these newly discovered shrubs, apparently to the extent that almost no seed bearing fruits can be produced.

Because of the close proximity of Big Pine Key to the Bahamas, the fact that Bahama cat's claw is not cultivated in Florida, and the relatively pristine habitat the colony was found in, we consider this spe-

cies to be native to the Florida Keys. It may have arrived thousands of years ago and remained unnoticed, or perhaps only decades ago when a bird flying from the Bahamas or Cuba dropped a seed. Regardless, special attention must be paid to this and many other rare species on Big Pine Key to ensure their persistence. Pine rockland habitat, and species dependent upon this system, in Big Pine Key are particularly vulnerable due to threats from rising sea level and fire suppression. The Key Deer Refuge is working to address the latter through fire management, but sea level rise depends upon each and every one of us living more conscientiously.



Bahama cat's claw (*Pithecellobium bahamense*)
Photo: Paula Cannon