



# Institute for Regional Conservation

## December 2023 Newsletter

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## Monthly Conservation Note

### We Must Say "Yes!"

One of the key attributes of the conservation movement is to emphatically say "No!" No to destruction, no to contamination, no to unneeded and misguided development, no to the

thoughtless fueling of climate change. Without “No!” we would have lost so much, had so little of Nature to work with, and we would have effectively abandoned any kind of beneficial relationship with Nature. “No!” has served us well.

Unfortunately, the need for the conservation community to say “No!” is still imperative, as evidenced by recent efforts to promote Miami Wilds, which would have further degraded what little remains of the globally imperiled pine rocklands of South Florida. The community of “No!” came together yet again and helped to successfully defeat this initiative when it came before the Miami-Dade County Commission earlier this month. So many individuals, nonprofits, advocacy groups, and even National Geographic and the US Fish and Wildlife Service joined forces to clearly show the Commission that this was a very bad idea.

But saying “No!” only gets us so far. We know that we must achieve transformative change in our relationship with Nature. We must put things on the track toward recovery and sustainability, a future often difficult to imagine with all the strife in the world today. But imagine it, we must. And I imagine this future world through the lens of restoration, of recovery, of a culture that says “Yes!”

My vision, shared by many others, is to use the recent success of “No!” to propel the success of “Yes!” In this case, we must quickly organize to create a shared vision for a grand ecological restoration project at the Richmond Pine Rocklands. We must build on what Nature shows us is possible, that it is not a parking lot north of Zoo Miami, but a pine rockland with some asphalt on top of it, yearning to break through. Please join us in 2024 to make this restoration a reality!

George Gann  
***Founder and Executive Director***



A pineland croton seedling, sole larval host for the endemic Bartram’s scrub-hairstreak butterfly, recruits in degrading asphalt pavement in the Richmond Pine Rocklands. Photo by Alex Seasholtz



Pine rockland plants break through the asphalt north of Zoo Miami. Photo by George Gann



Dennis Olle, President of the Miami Blue Chapter of NABA, Tropical Audubon Society President Joe Barros, and National Geographic writer Rachel Fobar, envisioning a restored pine rockland north of Zoo Miami. Photo by George Gann, also present for the discussion.



## Upcoming Events

With the help of community members and students at volunteer events in 2023, we accomplished much-needed ecological restoration in several natural areas, removing invasive exotic plants and planting appropriate natives. And we had fun at the same time! Anticipating further accomplishments in 2024, we invite you to join us. Keep an eye on our social media and newsletter for upcoming announcements. We can't wait to have you with us again!



**Thank you** to all who have supported IRC's programs with a \$20 or larger donation in the last month: Dean Balosie, Maria Rowley, Lourdes Rodriguez, & Tom Herfort.

Thank you to our **Monthly Sustainers** who donate \$25 or more each month: Barbara McAdam, Lindsay Boehner and Valerie Seasholtz.

While we get funding for some great projects, those funds rarely cover all of our costs, so we really do need your support to continue our important work.

Donations allow us to provide important conservation services such as improving our free online resources, increasing protection of rare plants and animals, restoring native ecosystems, and advocating for better public policy.

If you're interested in being a sponsor of Natives For Your Neighborhood, please reach out to **Katherine Hardial**.

IRC has an E-Trade account. Please contact us about giving gifts of stock.



Scorpion tail (*Heliotropium angiospermum*)

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## Meet Our Team "Spotlight" - Joel Otero



Joel Otero joined IRC in the summer of 2023 as a Field Technician/Ecological Restoration Team Member. He is a South Florida native and has had a love for nature from a very young age. Throughout his educational career he has worked on many research projects in various ecosystems, including the Pine Rocklands. He also took part in the Million Orchid Project established by Fairchild Gardens, which helped propagate thousands of native orchids in urban landscapes. Joel is deeply concerned about conserving and restoring natural habitats across South Florida and aspires to grow with IRC.

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## Meet Our Team "Spotlight" - Alex Andes Gascon

Alex Andes Gascon joined our Ecological Restoration Team in September 2023. Alex completed his Bachelors in Anthropology at Concordia University in Montreal and earned a Professional Masters in Applied Entomology at University of Maryland. He is a dedicated naturalist with a strong appreciation for insects and plants. Raised in Maryland, Alex is excited to contribute to restoration and conservation of the endemic biodiversity within South Florida's pine rocklands.



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## From the Field

### Interesting Finds with Steven Green, IRC Associate

Steven Green is an IRC Associate and biologist with Environmental Science Associates based in Orlando, Florida. He is sharing a two-part series about the northern portion of the Everglades. Part 1 in last month's newsletter covered the Everglades Headwaters.

#### Part 2: Flora

The flora of the greater Upper Kissimmee Basin was first thoroughly documented nearly 30 years ago by renowned botanists

A unique feature of these swamp systems is an assemblage of plants containing temperate species at the southern ends of their ranges, tropical species at the northern end of their ranges, and a handful of endemic species. Some examples of such temperate species include white fringetree (*Chionanthus virginicus*), Carolina basswood (*Tilia americana* var. *caroliniana*) and southern grapefern (*Botrychium biternatum*).

Tropical species seeking refuge from the occasional freezes are a rare component of

Edwin Bridges and Gary Reese who cataloged 664 native plant taxa in the Upper Kissimmee Basin. Having worked on smaller portions of Reedy Creek and Shingle Creek swamps within the Upper Kissimmee Basin, I have documented over 300 native plant taxa on various wetland mitigation and restoration projects.



Southern grapefern in Shingle Creek Swamp



White stopper growing on a midden in Reedy Creek Swamp

the flora. Some such species that I have documented that may be more familiar to the reader include white stopper (*Eugenia axillaris*), interestingly growing on a midden in the middle of Reedy Creek Swamp, and the imperiled toothed lattice-veined fern (*Thelypteris serrata*).



Celestial lily growing along the edge of a hammock adjacent to Reedy Creek Swamp

The flora also boasts a handful of rare threatened or endangered species, some of which are endemic to the Florida peninsula. Some species I have observed include yellow anisetree (*Illicium parviflorum*), Chapman's sedge (*Carex chapmanii*) and celestial lily (*Nemastylis floridana*).

All photos by Steven Green.



Chapman's sedge in Reedy Creek Swamp



Toothed lattice-veined fern in Shingle Creek Swamp



Yellow anisetree in Reedy Creek Swamp

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## Highlights of 2023

With your help, we've accomplished remarkable feats in 2023. Here are just a few highlights:

- **Setting the bar for Ecological Restoration** : Our current work at over 30 ecological restoration sites in South Florida is recognized as bringing the highest standards.
- **Invasive Species Removal**: Together, IRC crew and volunteers have removed thousands of non-native invasive plants.
- **Installation of Native Species**: Together, IRC crew and volunteers installed over 3,000 native plants.
- **Protecting Biodiversity**: Our [online databases](#) have had over 1 million visits! These visits were by people with a variety of needs, from natural area managers to graduate researchers seeking information from our floristic inventories, to homeowners looking for information about native plants for their garden.
- **Hands-on Community Engagement** : Over 260 of you volunteered during restoration events, including for Restoring the Gold Coast.
- **National Geographic Explorer Award**: was received by our founder George Gann. This prestigious award recognized the important work from our Pine Rockland Initiative –National Geographic states: "a true exemplar of restoring an imperiled ecosystem".

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## Follow us on Social Media

The best way to stay up to date on all things IRC is to follow us on social media! Every week we spotlight native plants for "Wildflower Wednesday" and give a glimpse into one of our many unique projects from our "From the Field Friday" posts. You can also follow our socials where we share about our event photos and lots of relevant



476 Posts 1,276 Followers 676 Following

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The Institute for Regional Conservation (IRC) is a Florida 501(c)3 dedicated to the protection, restoration and long term management of biodiversity.

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