

# The Rhexia



**Paynes Prairie Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society**  
www.paynesprairie.fnpschapters.org

January 2018

## General Meeting

**Ashton Biodiversity Research & Preservation Institute, Inc.**

Chase Pirtle, Habitat Manager

**Tuesday, January 16, 2018**

Phillips Hall, Unitarian-Universalist Fellowship  
4225 NW 34th Street, Gainesville, FL 32605

Founded in 1996 to preserve critical uplands habitat for the future, Ashton Biodiversity Research & Preservation Institute, Inc. (ABRPI) is named after its founders, Ray and Pat Ashton. Although research is conducted on many types of wildlife native to the region, they specialize in tortoise care. ABRPI is one of the world's largest captive breeding facilities for the endangered radiated tortoise (*Astrochelys radiata*). ABRPI is also actively involved in conservation of the native gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*), native to the region. The January 16 program will tell of the history, current conservation efforts, critically endangered breeding program, and much more.

Our speaker, Chase Pirtle, has been obsessed with the natural world for as long as he can remember. He started his animal career at a young age volunteering at the Moonridge Animal Park in Big Bear, California. He has worked at a wolf sanctuary, completed a two-year animal science program in New Jersey, attended a forestry and wildlife ecology program in South Carolina, and graduated from the Santa Fe Teaching Zoo.

Currently, Chase is the animal care specialist and habitat manager at ABRPI and an authorized Gopher Tortoise Agent. He is also an instructor and private land manager for the Eastern Diamondback Conservation Foundation and has a FWC venomous license.

## January 20th field trip

**Ashton Biodiversity Research & Preservation Institute, Inc.**

The topic of Tuesday's general meeting program is the Ashton Biological Preserve featuring gopher tortoises and is presented by Habitat Manager Chase Pirtle. The following Saturday our field trip will be to the preserve itself where, for more than 20 years, it has provided refuge for animals relocated from areas slated for development. During cold weather, tortoises may keep to their burrows but we will see their upland habitat characteristics and learn their importance as keystone species, benefiting hundreds of coexistent plants and animals. Nothing is as pretty as a well-tended tortoise garden! Click [here](#) to learn more.

I first met Pat Ashton back in the early 80's when she was Director of Morningside Nature Center. An excellent botanist, she's well versed in Florida natural history and folklore.

We will be carpooling to the preserve from the Publix shopping area at the intersection of Hwy 26, Newberry Road, and Hwy 241 in the Jonesville area. Meet at 9:30 in the SW corner of the parking lot just behind (north) of the SunTrust bank. Please wear sturdy shoes, a hat, bring water and be prepared for inclement weather. You may want to bring snacks, cameras are suggested. More information will be provided at the general meeting. Contact field trip coordinator Karie Garren at [iluvfla@cox.net](mailto:iluvfla@cox.net) or (352) 316-3453.

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### Paynes Prairie Chapter Contact List

**President**

Mark Elliott markelliott1955@gmail.com

**Vice President**

Karen Garren iluvfla@cox.net

**Secretary**

Ellen Thoms ellen.thoms@douglasproducts.com

**Treasurer**

Goldie Schwartz afn49@mindspring.com 352-495-3983

**Chapter Representative**

Sandi Saurers sandi@bbos.com

**Director**

Connie Caldwell cnncldwll@gmail.com

**Director**

Karen Schneider karenks98@yahoo.com

**Director**

Jill McGuire mikejillmcguire@earthlink.net

**Director**

Michael Bubb Michael.Bubb@medicine.ufl.edu

**Director**

Dan White dtwhite.gville@gmail.com

**Field Trip Coordinator**

Karen Garren iluvfla@cox.net

**Newsletter Editor**

Karen Ahlers ahlers.karen@gmail.com

**Membership Chair**

Goldie Schwartz afn49@mindspring.com 352-562-3831

**Plant Rescue**

Jamie Barichivich m.terrapin@gmail.com 352-375-1972

**Plant ID**

Paul Cohen paulcohen2002@yahoo.com

**Chapter Website Maintenance**

Karen Schneider karenks98@yahoo.com

**Facebook Page Maintenance**

Lisa/Howard Jelks jelkslg@gmail.com

**Chapter Website** [www.paynesprairie.fnpschapters.org](http://www.paynesprairie.fnpschapters.org)

The *Rhexia* is published eight times a year by the Paynes Prairie Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society. Comments are welcomed. Readers are encouraged to submit articles and images for publication consideration to [ahlers.karen@gmail.com](mailto:ahlers.karen@gmail.com)

### New Paths at Carl's Garden

By Lisa Jelks

They say many hands make light work. Well, it doesn't hurt to have a Ditch Witch machine to help out. What began as a chilly morning quickly warmed up nicely as nine members met at Carl's Garden at the Kanapaha Veterans Park. After we cleared the pathways of the millions of *Biden* plants, Erick Smith maneuvered the mini-Bobcat to pick up and distribute concrete fines. We used rakes and shovels to even it all out, and employed two wheelbarrows to do the finish work. When all was said and done, Carl's Garden was looking pretty snazzy!

We rewarded our hard work with a nice lunch at Piesano's. No doubt we will be scheduling a spring workday to continue to make the Garden look its best, adding new plants and continuing to control the vines.

Thanks to all the volunteers who made it out: Erick Smith, Sandi Saurers, Jennifer Staiger, Jamie Barichivich, Claudia Larsen, Howard and Lisa Jelks, and Rob and Karen Garren.



**Photo Credits:** Our thanks to Wesley Hetrick for permission to use his photo, Sunrise at Paynes Prairie, on Page 1. See more of Wesley's images at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/wesleyhetrick> Also to Peter May for permission to use his *Rhexia* photo. See more of Peter's work at <http://www2.stetson.edu/~pmay/index.htm>



## San Felasco Hammock and Hogtown Creek Parks Vandalized

By Bob Simons

In the late 1970s or early 1980s, a pair of ecologists from Poland came to stay at my house. On the border of Poland and Belarus, they worked in the largest natural hardwood forest in Europe – the Bialowieza Forest – which is 548 square miles in size. Their mission here was to find and study a forest that was ecologically similar to this last remaining great hardwood forest of Europe, and, after searching world-wide, they settled on the hardwood forest in San Felasco Hammock. If they had come earlier, in the 1950s or 1960s, they might have settled on Gulf Hammock in Levy County or the Big Thicket in East Texas, but by 1980, both had been largely destroyed by timbering and conversion to managed forests of planted pine or other uses.



In 1980, San Felasco Hammock contained perhaps the best remaining example of a naturally functioning low elevation temperate hardwood forest. It was a natural, mature, diverse, healthy forest of oak, hickory, ash, elm, maple, basswood, sweetgum, southern magnolia, and other tree species, all tied together with a diversity of large vines dominated by several species of grape vines.

The abundance of vines was a very good thing for the fauna of the forest. The fruits of grape, Virginia creeper, pepper vine, supplejack, and poison ivy served as valuable food for various species of mammals and birds, the flowers of trumpet creeper and cross vine were important for hummingbirds, bees, and butterflies, and the tangle of vines and foliage in the tree tops provided valuable habitat for nesting and foraging.

Unfortunately, someone seems to have decided that this natural condition of the forest is undesirable. It has been recently discovered that huge numbers of the vines in San Felasco Hammock have been intentionally killed by cutting, perhaps in combination with applying herbicide to the cut surfaces, on at least several hundred acres.

My wife and I discovered this assault in April, 2017. When asked, the park manager said that they had discovered the vine cutting the previous summer, but have been unable to find out who did it or why. I have been working with Florida Park Service personnel to try to find how bad the damage is and who did it. So far, it is clear that the vine cutting is very extensive, occurring in most of the high quality hardwood forest areas of the park that have been checked for vine cutting. On at least a couple hundred acres, almost all the vines have been cut and are now dead. When I say almost all of the vines, Erika and I could not find a vine that had not been cut on the

area where we first noticed this damage. And, unfortunately, the damage may be much more extensive than this. There are over 3000 acres of upland hardwood forest in the park and hundreds more acres of lowland hardwood forest. Most of this has not been checked to see if vines have been cut, and at least some vines have been cut on all of the areas that have been checked so far. In addition, vines have been cut in Alfred A. Ring Park, and from there south in the other city park lands along Hogtown Creek.

Whoever is doing it and for whatever the reason, the vine cutting is a very bad thing. San Felasco Hammock will never again be as wild or as natural or as good habitat for wildlife as it was just a couple of years ago. If ecologists from Europe (or the University of Florida) want to find a low elevation temperate hardwood forest in natural condition to study, they may be disappointed. If a swallow-tailed kite raising a family here is searching for a lizard or a snake basking in the sun on top of the vine tangle in the treetops, its babies may go hungry. If a flock of migrating thrushes or vireos or warblers stops by San Felasco Hammock to feed on the fruits of Virginia creeper, pepper vine, or poison ivy in the treetops, or on the insects that live (*con't on Page 4*)



## It's november so show us pictures!

by Connie Caldwell with photos by Rob Garren

We gather in the driveway of David Juras' and Mark Elliott's home on a perfect November day. Mark is the gardener here. Dave has a couple of assigned areas for himself. We notice photographs clipped onto tree branches. "It's November," says Mark, and so he has provided us with beautiful photos of blooming plants that don't happen to be blooming for our visit.

The circular driveway surrounds a large island of plantings. For 15 years, Mark has been creating a garden of amazing diversity in this area: pipestem (*Agarista populifolia*), parsley haw (*Crataegus marshallii*), winged elm (*Ulmus alata*), swamp chestnut oak (*Quercus michauxii*), swamp azalea (*Rhododendron viscosum*), pinxter azalea (*Rhododendron canescens*), Walter's viburnum (*Viburnum obovatum*), gallberry (*Ilex glabra*), American holly (*Ilex opaca*), snowbell (*Styrax americanus*), false indigo (*Amorpha fruticosa*), American beautyberry, both purple and white (*Callicarpa americana*), red buckeye (*Aesculus pavia*), titi (*Cyrilla racemiflora*), Virginia sweetspire (*Itea virginica*), coontie (*Zamia integrifolia*), hearts-a-bustin' (*Euonymus americanus*), atamasco lily (*Zephyranthes* sp.), blackeyed susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*), Indian pink (*Spigelia marilandica*), green dragon (*Arisaema dracontium*), as well as numerous non-natives. A side note about beautyberry: Mark tells us that when the white-berried seeds are planted, less than 10% of the plants could be expected to have white berries. Still want to try it?

Mark has learned from neighbors that this 5-acre property was pasture 35 years ago. It slopes in a northwesterly direction from front to back. The topsoil



Mark's yard in May

## Vine cutting

(continued from Page 3)

in this tangle, to fuel their journey south in autumn, they may also go hungry. Just this summer, birders looking for hooded warblers, which nest in San Felasco Hammock, were unable to find these birds north of Millhopper Road, where almost all of the vines have been cut, but did find them south of Millhopper Road where only a small percentage of the vines have been cut. Someone has done a very bad deed, and it is one that cannot be undone in the span of a human lifetime. The vines are not sprouting back, and the shade of the forest, combined with the browsing of deer, are effectively preventing any new vines or vine sprouts from getting started.

This needs to stop before even more damage is done. If anyone has information about this issue, please contact Bob Simons at 352-372-7646 or [bobgraybeardsimons@gmail.com](mailto:bobgraybeardsimons@gmail.com). If anyone sees vine cutting in progress, please call the Wildlife Alert Hotline at 888-404-3922 or the San Felasco Hammock State Park office at 386-462-7905.

over the clay is fairly shallow, so it retains a lot of moisture. Recently, when a 30" diameter pine tree was struck by lightning and had to be taken down, he counted more than 40 rings. The stump is quite impressive!

On one side of the driveway Mark points out Florida anise (*Illicium floridanum*), yellow anisetree (*Illicium parviflora*) and scentless mockorange (*Philadelphus inodorus*). On the other side and along the front of the house, sheltered from the road by a wooded area, are snow squarestem (*Melanthera nivea*), white false indigo (*Amorpha herbacea*), flame azalea (*Rhododendron austrinum*), southern arrowwood (*Viburnum dentatum*), dahoon holly (*Ilex cassine*), and poppy mallow (*Callirhoe papaver*). Plantings in the wooded area along the road include spruce pine (*Pinus glabra*), Virginia magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana*), and a needle palm (*Rhapidophyllum hystrix*) that Mark has transplanted twice, once to rescue it from a property that was to be developed, and once from his previous home.

Nearer to the front of the house are southern magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*), loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda*), American wisteria (*Wisteria frutescens*), wild olive (*Cartrema americanum*), maple leaf viburnum (*Viburnum acerifolium*), Simpson's stopper (*Myrcianthes fragrans*), swamp dogwood (*Cornus foemina*), silver maple (*Acer saccharinum*), mayhaw (*Crataegus aestivalis*), an unhappy tulip poplar (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), sparkleberry (*Vaccinium arboreum*), fringe tree (*Chionanthus virginicus*), sweet shrub (*Calycanthus*



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### October yard tour (con't from page 4)

*floridus*), flatwoods plum (*Prunus umbellata*), and a leafless beaked orchid (*Sacoila lanceolata*). Further on are white ash (*Fraxinus americana*), pop ash (*Fraxinus caroliniana*), and persimmon (*Dyospiros virginiana*). All the beds are surrounded by mown paths of mixed grasses.

The inviting front porch overlooks several bird feeders and an extensive flower bed built up and surrounded by a rock wall where frog fruit (*Phyla nodiflora*) spills over the edge in places. In this bed Mark has planted St. John's wort (*Hypericum* sp.), giant iron weed (*Vernonia gigantea*), Stoke's aster (*Stokesia laevis*), tropical sage (*Salvia coccinea*), goldenrod (*Solidago* sp.), coral honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*), scarlet rosemallow (*Hibiscus coccineus*), saltmarshmallow (*Kosteletzkya virginica*), wild white indigo (*Baptisia alba*), wild blue indigo (*Baptisia australis*), Elliott's aster (*Symphotrichum elliotii*), purple cone flower (*Echinacea purpurea*), cutleaf cone flower (*Rudbeckia laciniata*), blackeyed susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*), frostweed (*Verbesina virginica*), Elliott's love grass (*Eragrostis elliotii*), muhly grass (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*), mist flower (*Conoclinium coelestinum*), canna lilies (*Canna flaccida*), bluecurls (*Trichostema* sp.), and milkweed (*Asclepias perennis*). This bed also contains numerous non-natives as well. Lots of bird and butterfly activity here!

Foundation plantings in front of the house include yaupon holly (*Ilex vomitoria*), star magnolia (*Magnolia stellata*), and American holly (*Ilex opaca*). A lovely rocky creekbed walled on both sides with mossy stones facilitates drainage and is planted with blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium atlanticum*), rattlesnake master (*Eryngium aquaticum*), blueflower eryngo (*Eryngium integrifolia*), spider lily (*Hymenocallis* sp.), cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*), catchfly (*Silene catesbaei*), Bartram's tillandsia (*Tillandsia bartramii*), and on a branch of the yaupon holly tree, a green fly orchid (*Epidendrum conopseum*).

We move along to the side yard, where Mark points out pinxter azalea (*Rhododendron canescens*), loblolly bay (*Gordonia lasianthus*), chestnut (*Castanea hybrid*), live oak

(*Quercus virginiana*), water oak (*Quercus nigra*), laurel oak (*Quercus laurifolia*), swamp chestnut oak (*Quercus michauxii*), bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*), pond cypress (*Taxodium ascendens*), rusty blackhaw (*Viburnum rufidulum*), and Ashe magnolia (*Magnolia macrophylla* var. *ashei*).

Mark leads us now to the only area of the property that is dry and sunny enough to support plants such as false rosemary (*Conradina* sp.), standing cypress (*Ipomopsis rubra*), calamint (*Calamintha* sp.), silk grass (*Pityopsis* sp.), wax myrtle xeric form (*Myrica pumila/cerifera*), rusty lyonia (*Lyonia ferruginea*), powder puff (*Mimosa strigillosa*), and blanket flower (*Gaillardia aestivalis*). The soil in this area is local sand brought in for the above ground septic system, and it drops sharply several feet in the back to a densely wooded area.

In the back yard, Mark points out the yellow jessamine (*Gelsemium sempervirens*) that winds its way along the rail that borders the deck, high above us. Southern wood ferns (*Thelypteris kunthii*) hug the base of the deck along the ground. Other plant- ings in the back yard include fringe tree (*Chionanthus virginicus*), hearts a-bustin' (*Euonymus americanus*), fetterbush (*Lyonia lucida*), winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*), oakleaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*), obedient plant (*Physostegium virginiana*), bandanna of the Everglades (*Canna flaccida*), southern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*), and stalked adder's tongue (*Ophiogossum petiolatum*). And that's the end of our tour.

Some of us stay to visit the greenhouses where we learn about Mark's penchant for collecting tropical plants, some of which have been with him since graduate school days!

The wooded area in back - the "back 40", where we didn't walk - has yaupon holly (*Ilex vomitoria*), American holly (*Ilex opaca*), a hawthorn (*Crataegus* sp.), Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*), trumpet vine (*Campsis radicans*), poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*), saw greenbrier (*Smilax bona-nox*), Carolina jessamine (*Gelsemium sempervirens*), wild grape (*Vitis* sp.), and red maple (*Acer rubrum*).

Mark has created a place of beauty and a haven for wildlife. Thank you, Mark, for sharing all of this with us.



Elliott's aster (*Symphotrichum georgianum*)  
Photo by Rob Garren



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## **Coastal Dunes Tour March 9-12, 2018** *to benefit Florida Native Plant Society*

There are only a few places on our planet Earth with Coastal Dune Lakes and Florida is one. If you have yet to discover them, join us March 9 – 12, 2018 when we journey to the panhandle to see them for ourselves. Known as the Emerald Coast, Walton County Florida has 15 coastal dune lakes, functioning as nature intended, interlaced along the coast just feet from the Gulf of Mexico, yet they remain fresh water for most of the time.

During periods of high rain, storms or hurricanes, they become brackish, sometimes breaching their outfalls and pouring into the Gulf with their tannic waters staining the turquoise ocean. But the lakes eventually flush out the salt and return to freshwater.

Inspired by the documentary, *COASTAL DUNE LAKES – JEWELS OF FLORIDA'S EMERALD COAST*, by Elam Stoltzfus, this tour traverses iconic Hwy 30A, crossing Fuller, Morris, Campbell, Stallworth, Allen, Oyster, Draper, Big Redfish, Little Redfish, Alligator, Western, Eastern, Deer, Camp Creek and Powell Lake, so you will see for yourself why these ecosystems are so precious.

We travel by luxury motor coach with professional driver departing from Plant City at 7 AM on Friday March 9<sup>th</sup> and stop first in Apalachicola to visit the home, gardens and cemetery of eminent Botanist, Dr. Alvan Wentworth Chapman who spent most of his adult life exploring the flora of this area and died in this historic coastal community. Some of the plants named after him include Chapman's rhododendron, custard apple, wild Florida azalea, large-flowered skullcap, spreading yellow foxglove, Georgia holly and many others. Two of his neighbors, John Gorrie, the early inventor of mechanical refrigeration and Thomas Orman, local cotton merchant, were friends, as was Asa Gray, another noted botanist of this era.

Our accommodations for this 4-day/3-night tour are in cabins and bungalows at Topsail Hill Preserve State Park. Friday night is our pizza get-together in

the Clubhouse. Saturday morning we join the rangers for breakfast and explore Topsail Hill's dunes trail and recently burned sections along with two park naturalists, then head to Grayton Beach State Park for a tour of their natural areas. Both parks support populations of the endangered Choctawhatchee beach mouse. We will learn how they are monitored and what the outlook is for their future.



Morris Lake Trail, Topsail Hill Preserve State Park

Sunday we head to Blackwater River State Forest for a canoe/kayak trip or hike along the river so we can understand where all the coastal white sand comes from and search for the wild Azalea in bloom. In the afternoon, we tour Seaside Village, the first New Urbanism walkable community built in Walton County with all native front yards, varied architecture, and no-mow lawns.

We finish the evening with dinner and shopping in Seaside Village at their numerous restaurants and trendy food trucks.

Monday morning is open to explore the trails of Topsail Hill, then board our coach to head back to central Florida, arriving in time for dinner.

Make 2018 the year of discover, starting with our tour of the Coastal Dunes of Florida, March 9 – 12<sup>th</sup>. For more information, call Devon at 813-478-1183, email [indigotravelcompany@gmail.com](mailto:indigotravelcompany@gmail.com) or visit our website at [www.indigotravelcompany.com](http://www.indigotravelcompany.com).

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Florida Native Plant Society  
Paynes Prairie Chapter  
Post Office Box 1004  
Archer, FL 32618



The Mission of the Florida Native Plant Society is to promote the preservation, conservation, and restoration of the native plants and native plant communities of Florida.

The Society fulfills this mission through:

- Support for conservation land acquisition;
- Land management that enhances habitat suitability for native plants;
- Education;
- Public policies that protect our native flora, especially rare species;
- Research on native plant species; and,
- Encouragement of local landscaping practices and policies that preserve Florida's native plant heritage.

## **Paynes Prairie Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society**

*Please join us for these upcoming events!  
(See more details on pages 1 and 2)*

### **January 16th General Meeting Ashton Biodiversity Research & Preservation Institute, Inc.**

Chase Pirtle, Habitat Manager

**Tuesday, January 16, 2018**

Phillips Hall, Unitarian-Universalist Fellowship  
4225 NW 34th Street, Gainesville, FL 32605

*(See Page 1 for details)*

### **January 20th field trip Ashton Biodiversity Research & Preservation Institute, Inc.**

*(See Page 1 for details)*