



Orlando Wetlands South Woods Branch Trail Nature Guide

Orlando Wetlands

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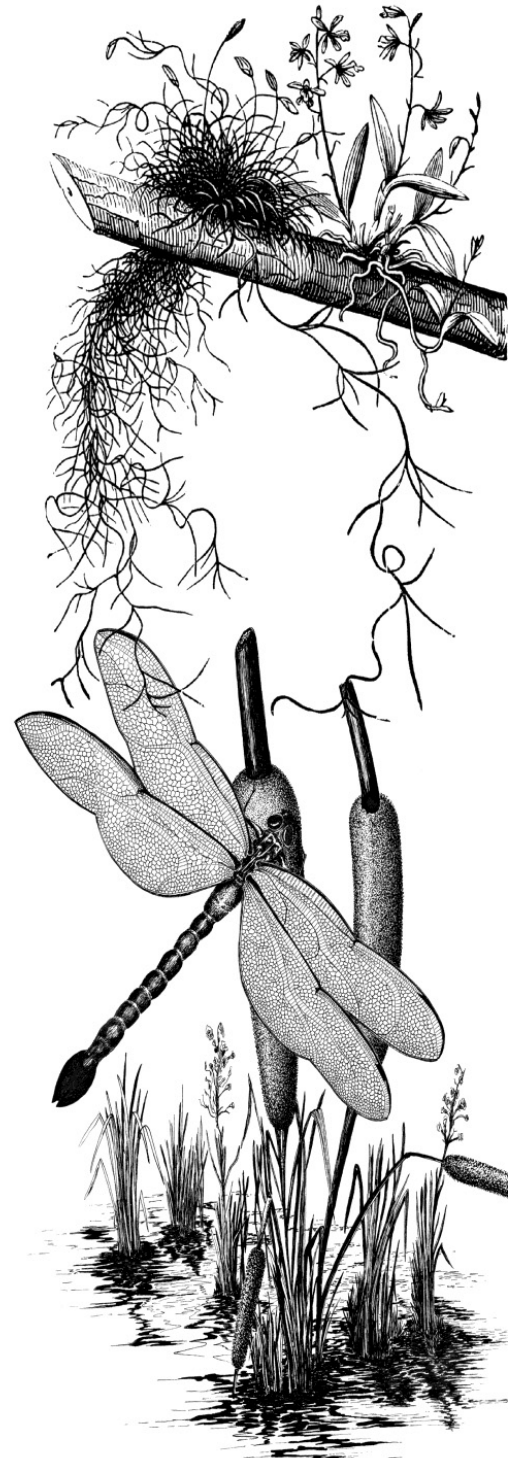
Location: Drive 40 minutes east of downtown Orlando on SR 50 to Christmas, FL. Go north (left) 2.3 miles on Ft. Christmas Road (CR 420) and 1.5 miles east (right) on Wheeler Road. Parking area will be on your left.

Hours: Sunrise to sunset, Tuesday through Sunday
(Closed Monday)



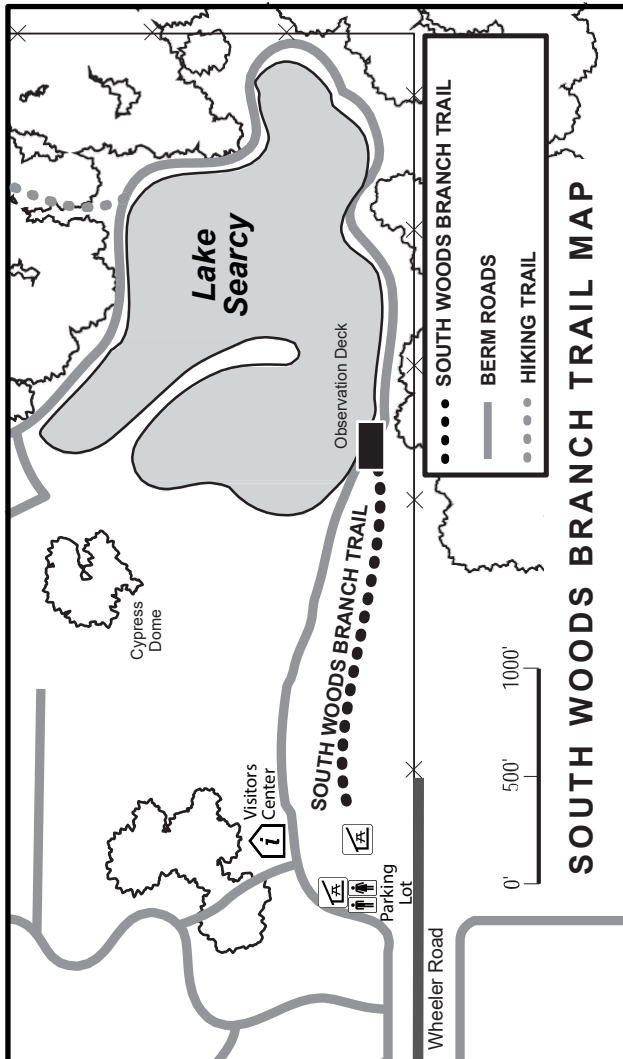
City Of Orlando
Public Works Department
Water Reclamation Division
5011 L.B. McLeod Road
Orlando, FL 32811

Revised 9/16/2023



*Cover illustrations courtesy of
Florida Center for Instructional Technology*

Welcome to the Orlando Wetlands South Woods Branch Trail



Credits

First Edition of this guide was *Nature Guide, Orlando Wilderness Park* (circa 1988). Text and Layout by Susan Schueger, Published by the City of Orlando Parks and Recreation Department. Illustrations for the First Edition by Mary Kutz and Jeff Parker.

Second Edition was *Orlando Wetlands Park: South Woods Branch*. Published in 1995 by City of Orlando, Public Works Department. Graphics updates by Pam Duffy and Bob Rope.

Third Edition. 2012. Pete Dunkelberg, Mary Keim, Mark Sees and Randy Snyder. Earlier draft review by Joie Kohl. Published by the City of Orlando, Public Works Department.

Fourth Edition. 2022. *Orlando Wetlands Park South Woods Branch Trail Nature Guide*. Published by the City of Orlando, Public Works Department, Water Reclamation Division.

For your comfort and safety, be prepared for primitive hiking. Bring water, sun protection, mosquito repellent and comfortable shoes.

Keep wildlife on the wild side. Don't harass or feed the animals. Leave wildflowers and plants for others to enjoy. No collecting of living plants or animals is allowed. No pets are allowed.

This is a self-guided trail. The numbers listed below correspond to the **numbered posts** along the trail. If you stop to observe and enjoy your surroundings, this half-mile walk may take you much more than the 15 to 20 minutes indicated on the trail's entrance sign.

Information Sources

ClipArt ETC of Educational Technology
Clearinghouse produced by the Florida Center for
Instructional Technology, University of South
Florida (etc.usf.edu/clipart) - a source for
illustrations for this booklet

eFloras. 2022. *Flora of North America*. Missouri
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- source of illustrations for this booklet

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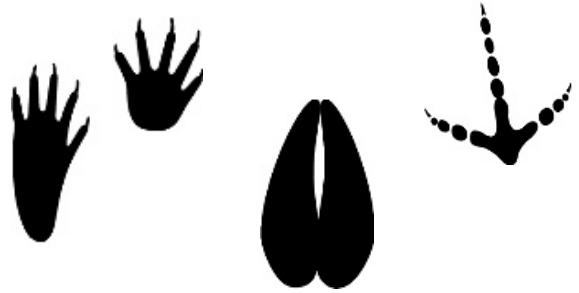
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Greensboro, NC USA. - source for illustrations for
this booklet

Wunderlin, R.P., B.F. Hansen, A.R. Franck, and F.B.
Essig. 2022. *Atlas of Florida Plants*
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Campbell (application development), USF Water
Institute.] Institute for Systematic Botany, University
of South Florida, Tampa. - the authority for plant
names used in this booklet

1. **Hammock** is the habitat type you are about
to enter. In Florida, the term is used primarily to
refer to evergreen hardwood forests. As you walk
along the trail, notice slight changes in elevation
and related transitions in plant species. Lower,
wetter areas of the forest are **Hydric Hammock**,
while slightly higher, drier areas of the forest are
Mesic Hammock.

Trees along the trail include Southern Redcedar,
Simpson's Stopper, Live Oak and Cabbage Palm.
Shrubs include American Beautyberry and Sea
Myrtle. **Vines** include Virginia Creeper, Poison
Ivy and Muscadine Grape. **Epiphytes** (plants
living on plants) include Wild Pines, Golden
Polypody and Resurrection Fern. Depending on
the **season**, you may see **wildflowers** such as
Frostweed (with white flowers), Southern
Seaside Goldenrod (with yellow flowers) and
Lyreleaf Sage (with purple flowers).

Notice the large number of fire-intolerant trees in
the hammock. This suggests that the area has
not had a major fire for a long period of time.
Also notice the organic forest floor with abundant
leaf litter. This too suggests no recent fires.



(left to right) Raccoon, Deer and Turkey tracks

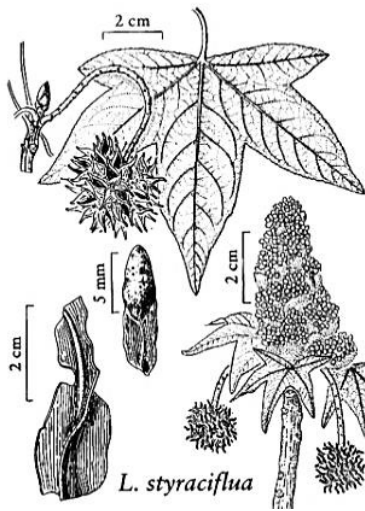
Look and listen for wildlife and tracks, scat, and
other wildlife evidence! Animals you may observe
in this hammock include Raccoon, Eastern Gray
Squirrel, White-tailed Deer, Wild Turkey, Carolina
Wren, Dusky Pigmy Rattlesnake, Green Treefrog
and Carolina Satyr (a small brown butterfly).



Green Treefrog, Randy Snyder

2a. American Sweetgum

(*Liquidambar styraciflua*, Sweetgum Family, Altingiaceae) is a deciduous tree with star-shaped leaves. Its dry spiny fruits contain seeds eaten by birds such as the American Goldfinch.



American Sweetgum, Courtesy eFloras.org

2b. Poison Ivy

(*Toxicodendron radicans*, Cashew Family, Anacardiaceae) is a vine with three leaflets per leaf. The resin in the leaves and stem can cause blistering of the skin and more severe reactions. Remember the old adage: **Leaflets three, let it be! Please use caution! Poison Ivy is an abundant vine in the hammock, growing up the trunks of many trees and across the ground.**



Poison Ivy Leaf, Pete Dunkelberg

29b. **Saw Greenbrier** (*Smilax bona-nox*, Smilax Family, Smilacaceae), is a woody vine. There are 12 native greenbrier (*Smilax*) species in Florida. Most of them are recognizable as greenbriers by the parallel veins in their leaves. This species has its small, dark purple fruit born in round clusters. Its leaves have prickles on the edge which distinguish it from some other greenbrier species.



Saw Greenbrier, Courtesy of USDA-NRCS PLANTS

30. You have arrived at the **end of the trail**. Take a few minutes to reflect on your journey through the hammock. How many types of trees do you recall seeing on today's visit? How many vines? How many epiphytes? How many other things have you noticed today along the trail? Appreciate the biodiversity!

The large, open body of water across the berm is Lake Searcy. This is a 100-acre borrow pit that supplied all of the fill dirt for the construction of the 18 miles of earthen berms that traverse the wetlands.

To return to the parking lot (1/2 mile), turn west (left) passing the observation deck. To circle Lake Searcy and extend your walk to at least three miles, turn east (right).

As you walk along the berm, notice the variety of wildflowers that grow along the berm.



Lake Searcy, Randy Snyder

We hope you enjoyed your self-guided tour of South Woods Branch Trail and that you will enjoy the rest of your visit to Orlando Wetlands!

27. Groundsel Tree or Sea Myrtle

(*Baccharis halimifolia*, Aster Family, Asteraceae), is an evergreen shrub with toothed leaves located west of the numbered post. The female plant's plume-like seeds resemble silvery paintbrushes. The male plant's flowers are full of yellow pollen that attracts a variety of insect pollinators.



Groundsel Tree, Randy Snyder

28. Climbing Aster or Carolina Aster

(*Ampelaster carolinianus*, Aster Family, Asteraceae), on the west side of the bridge is a sprawling shrub that produces stems that can climb to 10 feet or more if supported by other plants. Its pink to purple fall flower heads with yellow centers attract many pollinators.



Climbing Aster, Mary Keim

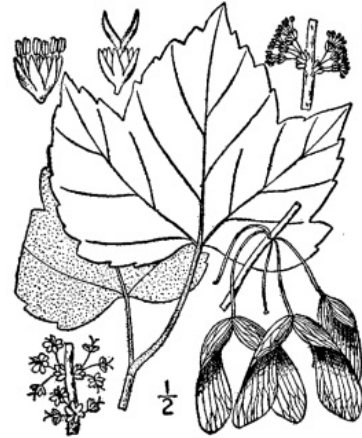
29a. **Dahoon Holly** (*Ilex cassine*, Holly Family, Aquifoliaceae), is an evergreen tree located about 10 feet east of the bridge. Its dark green leaves have edges (margins) that vary from smooth (entire) to serrated. In the fall, female plants bear small, red fruit eaten by songbirds.



Dahoon Holly, Mary Keim

3. Red Maple

(*Acer rubrum*, Soapberry Family, Sapindaceae) is a deciduous tree that displays brightly colored leaves in the fall and clusters of winged samaras (fruits) in the spring. Compare Red Maple's opposite leaf arrangement (2 leaves per node) to American Sweetgum's alternate leaf arrangement (1 leaf per node).



Red Maple, Courtesy of USDA-NRCS PLANTS

4. American Beautyberry

(*Callicarpa americana*, Mint Family, Lamiaceae) is a deciduous shrub with oppositely-arranged leaves. It blooms in spring and later develops clusters of magenta fruits. The genus name *Callicarpa* means beautiful fruit. Birds eat the fruit in fall and winter.



American Beautyberry, Mary Keim

5. **Simpson's Stopper or Twinberry** (*Myrcianthes fragrans*, Myrtle Family, Myrtaceae) is a small evergreen tree with oppositely-arranged leaves. Notice its distinctive smooth, red bark. It has fragrant, white flowers that attract pollinators and produces red fruit eaten by songbirds.



Simpson's Stopper, Mary Keim

6. **Carolina Ash or Pop Ash** (*Fraxinus caroliniana*, Olive Family, Oleaceae) is a deciduous tree with compound leaves (multiple leaflets per leaf), with opposite leaf arrangement. Its winged seeds feed mammals such as squirrels.



Carolina Ash, Randy Snyder

25. **Wax Myrtle or Southern Bayberry** (*Morella cerifera*, Wax Myrtle Family, Myricaceae), is a small aromatic tree found about 12 feet southwest of the post. The waxy fruit are an important winter food source for birds such as Tree Swallows and Yellow-rumped Warblers. They are also used in making bayberry candles.



Wax Myrtle, Courtesy of FCIT

26. **Christmas Lichen** (*Herpothallon rubrocinctum*, a lichenized fungus family, Arthoniaceae), is a red-ringed lichen growing on the trunk of the Live Oak. A **lichen** is a mutually beneficial relationship between a photosynthetic alga, or cyanobacterium, and one or more fungal species. The alga makes food that benefits the fungi, while the fungi provide protection that benefits the alga.



Christmas Lichen, Randy Snyder

23. **Toothed Midsorus Fern or Swamp Fern** (*Telmatoblechnum serrulatum*, Chain Fern Family, Blechnaceae) is the fern located on the north side of the trail. The name “midsorus” refers to the spore-bearing structures (sori) being along the central vein of each serrated leaflet. This fern is often found in poorly drained areas with organic soils.



Toothed Midsorus Fern, Mary Keim

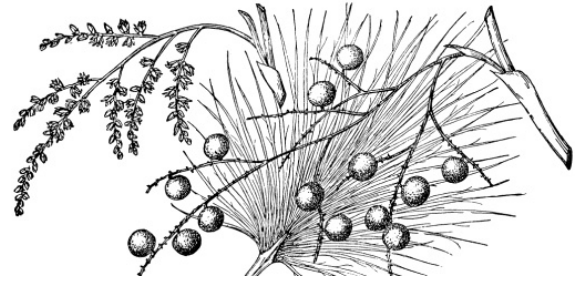
24. **Carolina Willow** (*Salix caroliniana*, Willow Family, Salicaceae), on the north side of the trail, is a deciduous, fast-growing wetland tree. Recognized by its narrow leaves with finely serrated margins, it is a host for the caterpillar of the Viceroy butterfly. Blooming early in the year when few other plants have flowers, it is an important resource for pollinators. Notice that the Carolina Willow is near the creek at the edge of the hammock. It is typical of transition zones. Such transition zones from one community type to another (such as from hydric hammock to marsh or from hydric hammock to mesic hammock) are called **ecotones**.



Carolina Willow, Courtesy of FCIT

7. Cabbage Palm

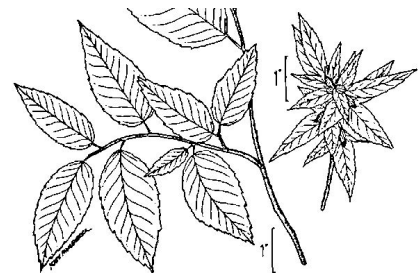
(*Sabal palmetto*, Palm Family, Arecaceae or Palmae) is Florida’s State Tree. It is sometimes harvested for its leaf bud, called “swamp cabbage” or “hearts of palm”, but doing so kills the plant. Palm leaves are used in some cultures for making roofs, baskets, and hats. Sabal palms are valuable to wildlife, such as Cedar Waxwings that eat the fruit and Carolina Wrens that eat insects feeding on the leaves.



Cabbage Palm, Courtesy of FCIT

8. American Hornbeam or Bluebeech

(*Carpinus caroliniana*, Birch Family, Betulaceae) is a small tree found in moist forests. Leaves have depressed veins on the upper surface. The fruit occurs in spike-like clusters. The ridges running up and down the trunk help distinguish this tree sometimes called “musclewood.”



American Hornbeam, Courtesy of USDA-NRCS PLANTS

9. American Elm

(*Ulmus americana*, Elm Family, Ulmaceae) is the large deciduous tree about 10 feet north of the trail. Its leaves have toothed margins. It can be distinguished from the American Hornbeam by its asymmetric leaf base. Wildlife eats its early spring-ripening seeds when many other foods are scarce.



American Elm, Courtesy of USDA-NRCS PLANTS

10. Live Oak

(*Quercus virginiana*, Beech Family, Fagaceae) is the large, wide-crowned, evergreen tree towering above you. Live Oaks are long-lived and known for withstanding hurricane-force winds such as those that passed through Central Florida in 2004. Its dark, leathery leaves have slightly rolled edges. Oak leaves are eaten by many species of caterpillars which, in turn, are eaten by a wide variety of songbirds. Its acorns are also very important for wildlife.



Live Oak, Courtesy of FCIT

21b. **American Royal Fern** (*Osmunda spectabilis*, Royal Fern Family, Osmundaceae), on the north side of the trail, has leaves that are bipinnate (leaflets arranged like a feather divided twice). Contrasted to the Cinnamon Fern, the Royal Fern's spores occur at the tips of some leaves.



Royal Fern, Courtesy of FCIT

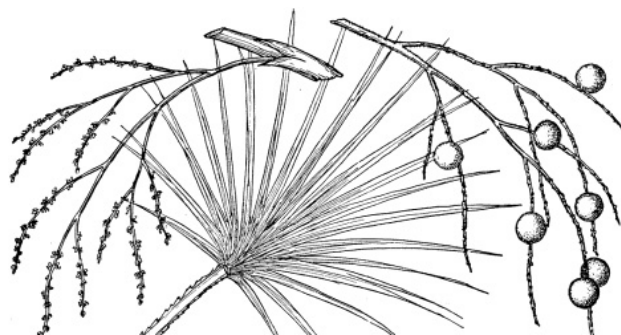
11. Virginia Creeper

(*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*, Grape Family, Vitaceae) is a common vine in the hammock that can be distinguished from Poison Ivy (see **2b**) by its having five leaflets in its leaves. Its small, grape-like fruit provide food for birds and other wildlife.



Virginia Creeper, Pete Dunkelberg

22. **Saw Palmetto** (*Serenoa repens*, Palm Family, Arecaceae) is located on the south side of the trail. It is named for the saw-like spines on its leaf stalks. The leaf is covered with wax that can give it a silvery appearance. Plants can range from shrub to small tree size. Many insects, 311 species in one study, use nectar and pollen from the small white flowers. Wildlife, including the Florida Black Bear, eat the olive-sized fruit. Fruit have been overharvested in some areas and sold as a treatment for prostate problems. Saw Palmetto is the symbol of the Florida Native Plant Society, dedicated to preservation, conservation, and restoration of Florida native plants and native plant communities.



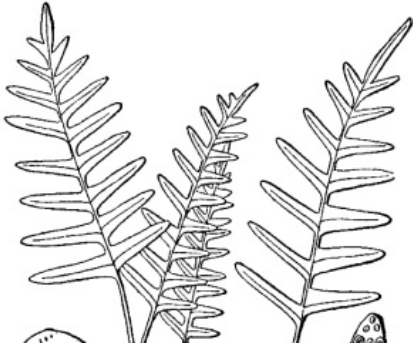
Saw Palmetto, Courtesy of FCIT

20b. Resurrection Fern

(*Pleopeltis michauxiana*, Polypody Family, Polypodiaceae) is an epiphyte on the Live Oak branch over the trail. When moisture levels are low, the fern's leaves curl up to conserve water. When moisture levels rise, the leaves uncurl or "resurrect," allowing them to gather more light for photosynthesis.



Resurrection Fern, Mary Keim



Resurrection Fern, Courtesy of USDA-NRCS PLANTS

21a. Cinnamon Fern

(*Osmundastrum cinnamomeum*, Royal Fern Family, Osmundaceae) located on both sides of the trail. It gets its name from the distinctive cinnamon colored, fertile fronds (leaves with spores).



Cinnamon Fern, Courtesy of eFloras.org

12. Holes made by Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius*, Woodpecker Family, Picidae)

"Wells" are holes pecked into the trunk of the Live Oak. Sapsuckers reside in Florida in winter and drill horizontal rows of holes in hardwood trees. They eat the inner bark of the tree, tree sap and invertebrates trapped in the sap that seeps from these wells. Other animals also feed at sapsucker wells.

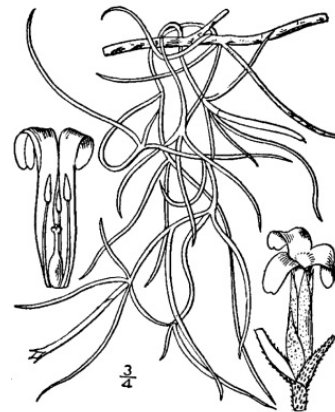


Yellow-bellied Sapsucker Wells, Randy Snyder

13. Air-plants

(*Tillandsia* species, Pineapple Family, Bromeliaceae) up in the Sweetgum tree and nearby Southern Redcedar tree, are epiphytes that live primarily in humid forests. Fourteen *Tillandsia* species are native to Florida with about half of these being found in the park. Larger-leaved species are commonly called Wild Pines.

Smaller-leaved species include Spanish Moss and Ball Moss. Although air-plants grown upon plants, they are not parasitic, that is, they get no nutrients directly from their hosts.



Airplants (*Tillandsia* spp.) *Tillandsia usneoides*,
Courtesy of USDA-NRCS

14a. Rusty Lyonia or Staggerbush

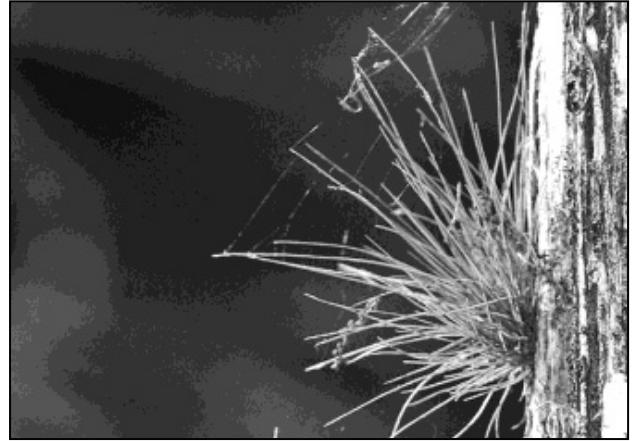
(*Lyonia ferruginea*, Heath Family, Ericaceae), located about 10 feet north of the trail, is a small evergreen tree. It is named for the rust-colored hairs on its leaves. Small, white, bell-shaped flowers bloom in the spring and later mature into dry capsules. Branches sometimes zigzag, leading to another common name, "crooked-wood." Other habitats for this plant are scrub and flatwoods. These habitats can change into hammocks over time if fire is excluded.



Rusty Lyonia, Courtesy of eFloras.org

19b. Southern Needleleaf

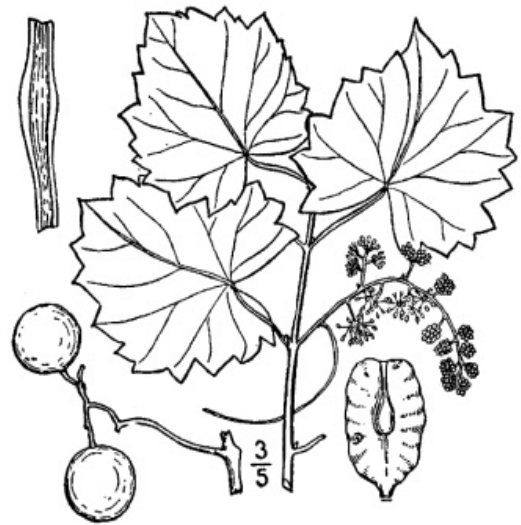
(*Tillandsia setacea*, Pineapple Family, Bromeliaceae), is an epiphyte that grows on many branches of this Southern Redcedar. Its leaves are narrow and its small flowers are purple.



Southern Needleleaf, Mary Keim

20a. Wild Muscadine

(*Vitis rotundifolia*, Grape Family, Vitaceae) is a woody vine. The stem of this individual vine is larger than most in the hammock. Look high in the trees to see its toothed leaves. Flowers bloom in the spring and edible fruit ripen by summer.



Wild Muscadine, Courtesy of USDA-NRCS PLANTS

14b. Yellow Jessamine

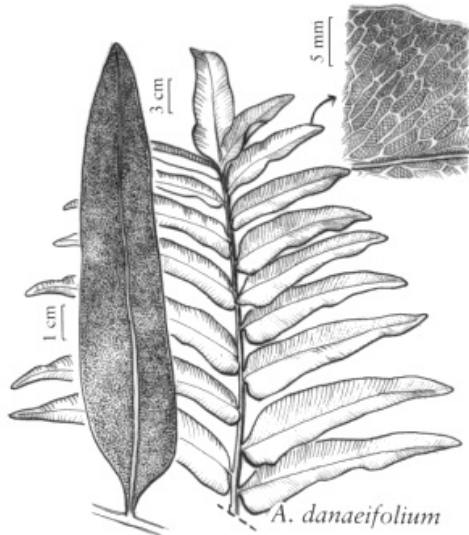
(*Gelsemium sempervirens*, Jessamine Family, Gelsemiaceae), growing on the Rusty Lyonia, is a perennial vine and is seen frequently along the trail. Its trumpet-shaped yellow flowers bloom in late winter to early spring.



Yellow Jessamine, Courtesy of USDA-NRCS PLANTS

18. Giant Leather Fern

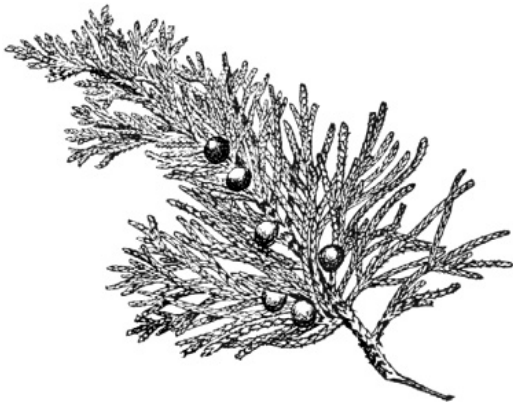
(*Acrostichum danaeifolium*, Brake Fern Family, Pteridaceae), is Florida's largest native fern. The pinnately-compound (feather-shaped) leaves are typically 4 to 6 feet tall, but can reach 12 feet. Fertile leaflets have rust-colored lower surfaces.



Giant Leather Fern, Courtesy of eFloras.org

19a. Southern Redcedar

(*Juniperus virginiana* var. *silicicola*, Cypress Family, Cupressaceae), is an evergreen tree with aromatic foliage and wood. It is actually a juniper rather than a cedar (*Cedrus*). Once heavily lumbered in Florida, the wood was used for pencils, fence posts, furniture, and construction. Songbirds, such as Cedar Waxwings, eat the small blue, berry-like cones found on female trees.



Southern Redcedar, Courtesy of FCIT

15a. Shoestring Fern

(*Vittaria lineata*, Shoestring Fern Family, Vittariaceae), is a linear-leaved epiphyte often found on Sabal Palms.



Yellow Jessamine, Courtesy of USDA-NCRS PLANTS

15b. Water Oak

(*Quercus nigra*, Oak Fern Family, Fagaceae), located about 15 feet south of the trail, is a deciduous tree with spatulate (ice-cream cone shaped) leaves. It is adapted to tolerate wet soil.



Yellow Jessamine, Courtesy of USDA-NCRS PLANTS

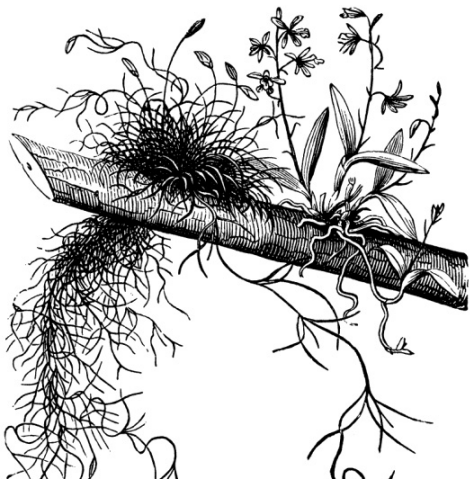
16. Cabbage Palm Dominated Hammocks

such as this one, usually occur in areas with poorly drained soils. Long periods of wet soil are not tolerated by some hardwood trees. Notice many of the trees around you are Cabbage Palms (see 7)!



Cabbage Palm Dominate Hammock, Randy Snyder

17a. **Epiphytes** are located on the Cabbage Palm trunk that crosses the trail. Epiphytes are plants that live literally upon ("epi-") plants ("phytes"). They are anchored to the surface of another plant but, unlike parasites, do not take nutrition from the plant. The relationship is commensalism, in which one species benefits while the other is not harmed nor helped by the relationship. The epiphyte benefits from being above ground where there may be more light and where they are more likely to avoid herbivores. The host plant remains unaffected. Epiphytes include mosses, ferns, bromeliads (such as the airplants highlighted at post #13) and orchids. Examine this palm trunk to get an idea of the variety of epiphytes found on this one tree!



Epiphytes, Courtesy of FCIT

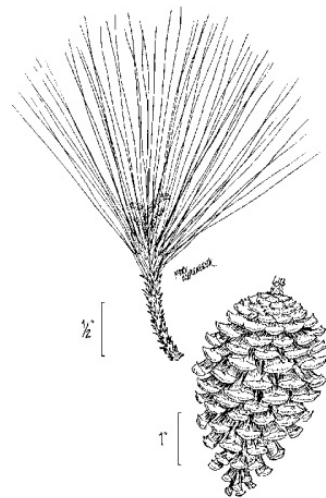
17b. Golden Polypody

(*Phlebodium aureum*, Polypody Family, Polypodiaceae), is a fern often found growing as an epiphyte on Sabal Palms (Cabbage Palms). On this palm, the fern is located just below the palm's leaves. Moisture and leaf debris trapped in the palm's leaf "boots" provide a good growth medium.



Golden Polypody, Pete Dunkelberg

17c. **Slash Pine** (*Pinus elliottii*, Pine Family, Pinaceae), found north of the trail, has 8 to 12 inch needles found in bundles of 2 or more. Pine seeds are very important food sources for wildlife such as songbirds and Eastern Gray Squirrels. The Slash Pine's presence suggests this area may have previously been a pine flatwoods that, without fire, has developed into a hardwood hammock. One community changing over time into another (such as a pine flatwoods changing into a mesic hammock) is called **ecological succession**.



Slash Pine, Courtesy of USDA-NCRS PLANTS