

Botanical Report for George Russell

March 13, 2017. We arrived at Pelican II around 5:30 and after unpacking the car, Torie and I set out for the prairie. We parked behind George Russell's Jeep who was in the woods to the east thinning timber. We walked down to the lower glades east of the main prairie road. My goal was to see if *Gratiola flava* and *Schoenolirion wrightii* were blooming. Both are uncommon. I was aware they occurred here because on our initial visit to this site in early April 2016 we had observed them.

We walked past the first glade and were heading to the lower glade when my daughter Torie exclaimed, "look dad, there is an orchid..." It was not an orchid, but her keen eye and sharp power of perception realized that this was something different. I was excited and I told her so which seemed to make the effort worthwhile in her mind. Although it was not an orchid, it was something closely related...a very rare lily—and equally worthy of study. Known as Wright's Sunnybells, *Schoenolirion wrightii* is found in Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas and Alabama, but is considered rare in all four states. It is a species of prairies and glades and its presence here makes this site even more worth the protection it has been afforded. We found perhaps 10-15 plants in the waning light of mid- March—mostly all on the lowest glade.

Now it was really getting dark but we explored the lower glade looking for *Gratiola flava*. This tiny plant, which can bloom when no more than one inch tall, is found only in Texas and two counties in Louisiana, where it is rare. It is really probably uncommon in Texas but has not official status. Its presence on these little Catahoula glades on the bluffs over the Trinity River is confirmation that efforts to conserve these outcroppings are worthy and should continue.

Eight days earlier I had explored the same site and had observed three or four plants—one of which was about three or four inches tall. I noted that they were growing in the extreme northwestern corner of the lowest glade. Torie and I had the most difficult time relocating them. The tall plant was gone but after some hard looking in the waning light we found three or four dozen very tiny plants about one inch tall—or less.



March 14, 2017

I went with George to pick up Geyata. While George and Geyata talked I went to the prairie and the barrens to look for plants. In the afternoon I took Geyata to show her

Scheonolirion wrightii a plant she had never seen. We spent about 2 hours together on the barrens, in what turns out to be her first return to the Big Thicket area in many years. She delighted in seeing the tiny sundews, not yet flowering, and the diminutive school bus yellow flowers of *Gratiola flava* and the ... and the... and the... “Oh look at this...!”

“I could have stayed out there all day.” She later confessed.

March 15, 2017

My family and I went with Geyata to the Big Thicket. I came back in the afternoon and went to the prairie. I found a plant I had never seen called *Mecardonia procumbens* (below) growing in a wet rut in the trail to the lower glades. It is not especially rare it was a new one for me.



March 16, 2017

It was cloudy and overcast this morning. I went to the prairie and marked six *Spiranthes brevilabris* orchids with stems about three inches tall. I also went to the barrens and crawled around on my hands and knees for about an hour looking for the diminutive *Geocarpon minimum*. This little member of the carrot family is less than once inch tall and was once thought to be confined to Missouri and Arkansas. It has since been found in Texas and Louisiana. At a site east of Palestine in the Neches River bottom it occurs in a plant community very similar to these lower barrens—but right on the river in the floodplain. I think it could be found on these barrens—however, since these sites are above the floodplain and the lake destroyed everything in the floodplain it is anyone’s guess if this little plant is actually here. Searches for it should continue.

In the afternoon I went to the new 500 acre addition and walked along the rocky stream bed east of the trailer that flows north to Palmetto Creek. The best find was a small

colony of a beautiful plant called Louse Wort, or Wood Betony, known in Latin as *Pedicularis canadensis*. One of the very few eastern representatives of a western genus with about 40 North American species, this species is found in east Texas in rich sandy soils often along creeks or on bluffs. This area was recently burned but scattered here are there along the creek were a few violets. As I was leaving George drove up. I returned with him to show him the Wood Betony along the creek.



March 17, 2017

The name of the rain lily sanctuary could be emended to include the Blue Celestial Lily *Nemastylis geminiflora* which I found in flower this morning shortly before drivin our trash to the dumpster. This strikingly beautiful lily is one of the so-called prairie indicator species and occurs here with several other prairie and glade species. This species begins to bloom around 11 am and closes around 3 pm. Just as we were preparing to leave at 11 am I took a break from helping the girls who vacuuming and cleaning Pelican II and took a few photographs in the rain lily sanctuary. The plants had just opened and were at the peak of freshness.

