

TREE CACTUS

Pilosocereus robinii (L.) Byles & Rowley

Synonyms: *Pilosocereus robinii* (L.) Byles & Rowley var. *deeringii* (Small) Kartesz & Gandhi;

Pilosocereus robinii (L.) Byles & Rowley var. *robinii*; *Cereus robinii* (Lem.) L. Benson;

Cephalocereus keyensis Britton & Rose

Family: Cactaceae (cactus)

FNAI Ranks: G1/S1

Legal Status: US-Endangered FL-Endangered

Wetland Status: US-none+ FL-UPL



Gil Nelson

Field Description: Tree-like **cactus** with cylindrical **stems** to 30 feet tall, 3 - 4 inches in diameter, branched or unbranched, with 9 - 15 ribs. **Spines** less than 1 inch long, in hairy clusters of 15 - 30. **Flowers** solitary, 2 - 2.5 inches long, outer petals green, inner petals white, opening in late afternoon from spine clusters near top of stems, smelling of garlic. **Fruit** leathery, round, flattened, blue-green ripening to red, with shiny black seeds in white pulp.

Similar Species: Bahama tree cactus (*Pilosocereus bahamensis*) is known from a single colony in the Monroe County Keys. Plants 9 - 12 feet tall, stems with 10 - 11

ribs, much branched, 3 - 4 inches thick, with spines in clusters of 15 - 20; flowers blueish-brown outside, inner petals white to pink. Also see fragrant prickly apple (*Harrisia fragrans*) in this guide.

Related Rare Species: Bahama tree cactus (*Pilosocereus bahamensis*) is known from a single colony in the Monroe County Keys. Plants 9 - 12 feet tall, stems with 10 - 11 ribs, much branched, 3 - 4 inches thick, with spines in clusters of 15 - 20; flowers blueish-brown outside, inner petals white to pink. Also see fragrant prickly apple (*Harrisia fragrans*) in this guide.

Habitat: Openings in tropical hardwood hammocks, cactus hammocks, and thorn scrub; over oolitic limestone.

Best Survey Season: All year.

Range-wide Distribution: Monroe County Keys, FL; Cuba.

Conservation Status: Most plants reported from early 1900s were destroyed by development. Only 8 populations, with about 600 plants, remain; only 2 of the populations are considered stable or not threatened by development.

Protection and Management: Prevent destruction of upland habitat in the Keys. Protect and monitor known populations. Control exotic species such as Brazilian pepper and Australian pine. Deter and prosecute plant poachers.

References: Adams and Lima 1994, Austin 1984a, Avery 1982, Britton and Rose 1937, Coile 2000, IRC 1999, Small 1917, USFWS 1998, Ward 1979, Wunderlin 1998, and Wunderlin and Hansen 2000a.