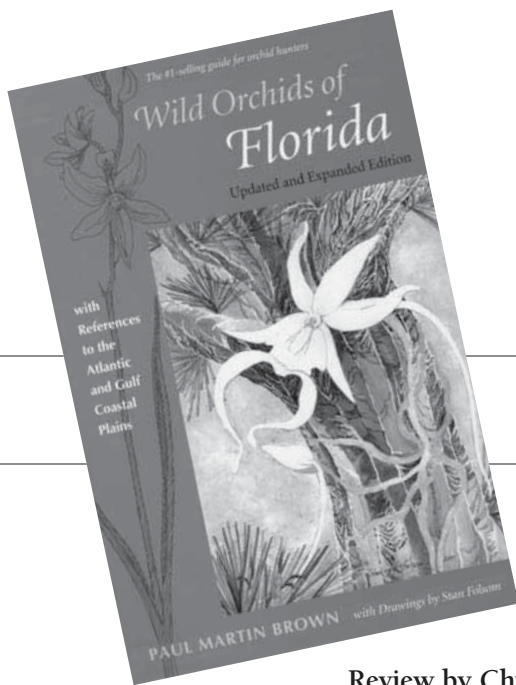


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# Palmetto





## Book Review: Wild Orchids of Florida

Updated and Expanded Edition

By Paul Martin Brown. 2006. University Press of Florida, Gainesville. Softcover (Flexibind). 409 pages. \$24.95.

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### Review by Chuck McCartney

Dr. Carlyle A. Luer's 1972 book *The Native Orchids of Florida* is the gold standard by which other volumes on our native orchid species must be judged. Unfortunately, it's out of print and new discoveries and a number of taxonomic changes have occurred in the intervening 34 years.

To fill the void, Paul Martin Brown published *Wild Orchids of Florida* in 2002. Now Brown has released an "Updated and Expanded Edition" of *Wild Orchids of Florida*. It doesn't match the quality of Luer's book, but it's the best guide native orchid enthusiasts have on the subject.

Luer's book was a large coffee table-size volume, unwieldy for use in the field, but featuring excellent photos including flower close-ups, plant details and habitat shots. Luer took most of the photographs himself over a period of 12 years tramping through the wilds of Florida.

Brown's books are intended as field guides. Their small format lets them fit handily into a backpack and the thick coated paper cover repels dirt and water, making them useful for outdoor orchid exploration. Unfortunately, both editions of *Wild Orchids of Florida* suffer from uneven photographic quality, with images ranging from poor to superb.

The revised edition discards some older images and includes 37 new color photographs including *Basiphyllaea corallicola*, the state's three smaller *Calopogon* species, *Corallorhiza wisteriana*, the recently rediscovered *Cranichis muscosa*, *Pelexia adnata* and *Ponthieva brittoniae*, *Cyrtopodium punctatum*, *Hexalectris spicata*, *Macradenia lutescens* (replacing photos from the first volume that looked more like *M. brassavolae*), the state's two *Malaxis* species, *Platanthera chapmanii*, *Pteroglossaspis ecristata*, *Spiranthes sylvatica*, and *Tropidia polystachya*.

The varying quality of the photographs is understandable since they represent the talents of an array of field photographers. Some photographs in the first book were miscredited or went uncredited, and such errors still exist in the revised version.

Brown also has problems giving proper credit to a couple of recent discoveries in South Florida:

– On Page 26, under the discussion of *Basiphyllaea corallicola*, Brown writes: "In 2004 Russ Clusman of Miami discovered a substantial population along a roadside in southern Miami." Although Clusman is now an intrepid Florida orchid explorer and increasingly fine field photographer, that new population of this rare orchid was actually discovered by Steve Woodmansee of the Institute for Regional Conservation and the Dade County Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society. In addition, the population is not in "southern Miami," but in the city of Palmetto Bay, miles to the south of the city of Miami.

– On Page 214, the credit for the rediscovery of *Ponthieva brittoniae* in the pineland of Everglades National Park is given to "ENP staff." The credit for the rediscovery of this species, not seen in Florida since 1987, belongs to Jimi Saddle of the Institute for Regional Conservation.

Brown loves the proliferation of names, so readers get discussions of purported natural hybrids, as well as a plethora of names for chance genetic mutations, even though these "forma" names are of questionable taxonomic value.

Taxonomically, Brown is a "splitter" of the first order. He has rarely seen a proposed new name he didn't like and if he can't find one, he'll create it – witness *Galeandra "bicarinata"* and *Govenia "floridana"*. Thus, in the revised edition, he supports the resurrection of the genus *Gymnadeniopsis* for the species known since Luer's book as *Platanthera nivea* but which seemed to be out of place in that genus. However, he also champions the transfer to *Gymnadeniopsis* of plants long known as *Platanthera clavellata* and *P. cristata*. He also transfers the southern *Platanthera blephariglottis* var. *conspicua* to species status as *P. conspicua*.

The new edition of *Wild Orchids of Florida* follows the format of the earlier version, with the orchids discussed alphabetically by genus and then by species where more than one species occurs in the state.

Each species discussion includes the botanical name Brown has chosen to use and its author, followed by a common name (the latter a tricky selection, considering that most of these uncommon orchids don't really have good "common names"). He then discusses the species' general distribution and its distribution in Florida and offers a brief description of the plant,

leaves, flowers, habitat and flowering period, followed where appropriate by comments on other aspects of the species, its taxonomy and the history of its occurrence in Florida.

Each species is illustrated with multiple color photographs as well as a line drawing of the plant in flower by Stan Folsom. Although adequate, these are not the most elegant of botanical drawings, and the book's editor has wisely chosen to use them relatively small. Some pleasant watercolor versions of these drawings have been grouped at several places in the new edition of the book.

One really useful feature of Brown's format which is shared with other recent regional floras is a distribution map for each species. Each map shows Florida's 67 counties, with a dot in each county where that species has been recorded. These distribution maps are an excellent quick-reference tool for users of this field guide. The revised version also corrects the erroneous distribution map first published for *Spiranthes torta*.

A glossary, bibliography, list of photo credits, and index, along with other miscellaneous addenda, end the book. ⚙

