

REVIEW

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Florida Wildflowers in Their Natural Communities.—Walter K. Taylor. 1998. Gainesville, Florida, University Press of Florida. 370 p. ISBN0-8130-1616-9. \$24.95 paper.—Walter Kingsley Taylor's new book, *Florida Wildflowers in Their Natural Communities*, is both a continuation of, and a departure from, his earlier book, *The Guide to Florida Wildflowers* (Taylor Publishing Company, 1992). Like *The Guide*, *Florida Wildflowers* combines competent photographs of Florida's flora with succinct descriptions. Unlike *The Guide*, *Florida Wildflowers* groups plants by habitat rather than by flower color. The result of this shift in method, if not always successful, is a nonetheless useful and attractive guide to the floral treasures of Florida.

Florida Wildflowers is divided into two parts. Part I describes eight "Major Terrestrial Communities" of Florida, including ruderal (weedy) sites. These communities, as well as subtypes and variants, are generally well-defined by Dr. Taylor, but some difficulties arise from a relatively narrow definition of "terrestrial". For instance, under the Pine Flatwoods description, no mention exists of wet prairies or seasonal ponds, yet many important (and imperiled) flatwoods species, including some pictured by Dr. Taylor in this section, occur in these seasonally inundated habitats.

Part II places 460 species of flowering plants, each represented by a photograph, in one of the eight communities described in Part I. The number of species depicted per community is roughly proportional to the areal extent of the community, with Pine Flatwoods, Temperate Hardwood Forests and Coastal Uplands having the most species and Scrub and Rockland Pineland habitats having the fewest. While some disappointing omissions occur, the selection is largely representative of the different communities.

Part II is, perhaps, the Achilles' heel of Dr. Taylor's book, since any given species may occur in more than one of the communities that he describes. Thus, *Florida Wildflowers* works best for species with narrow habitat preferences. If, for example, you wished to identify a hog-plum (*Ximeria americana*) in the pine rocklands or hardwood hammocks of the Keys, where it is relatively common, you will have a hard time finding it in *Florida Wildflowers* unless it occurs to you to look in the scrub community where the species description occurs.

The 460 photographs, with their accompanying species accounts, are the heart of the book. Each photograph is accompanied by the species' scientific and common names and placed in its family. The species accounts have three subheadings: Description (diagnostic vegetative and floral traits), Flowering Time, and Habitat and Range. Generally, the photos permit "ballpark" identification of the species and the description, habitat, and range are adequate to cinch the identification. Experts on specific taxa will find points to dispute in the descriptive and habitat information provided by Dr. Taylor, but that is unavoidable.

Some aspects of the species accounts are unnecessarily frustrating. What is the point, for example, of enumerating all the counties in which each species is found (or some counties where it is not found!)? Regional distribution would be adequate for most species and could be provided more economically (as in the thumbnail maps used in C. R. Bell and B. J. Taylor's *Florida Wild Flowers and Roadside Plants*, Laurel Hill Press, 1982).

As in *The Guide*, Dr. Taylor adds a Comment subheading in *Florida Wildflowers* in some species accounts to inform us about the origin of the species name, traditional uses of the plant by indigenous peoples, or how to distinguish the species from similar plants in the same habitat. This last feature is particularly helpful for speciose and confusing genera such as *Liatris*, *Eupatorium*, and *Crotalaria*.

In comparison to *The Guide, Florida Wildflowers* fares better in some respects than in others. Overall, it presents more detailed habitat information, but it covers fewer species than *The Guide* (460 vs. 576) and fewer pages of the total (70% vs 90%) are devoted to showing plants, which is, after all, the point of a field guide. *The Guide* provides an admirable introduction to flower morphology, unfortunately truncated in *Florida Wildflowers*.

However Dr. Taylor's books are more usefully viewed as companions rather than as competitors. Together *The Guide* and *Florida Wildflowers* cover over 800 species of flowering plants. The two guides provide information on almost a quarter of the flowering plants of Florida. For the wildflower enthusiast, the avocational naturalist or the professional botanist on unfamiliar ground, Dr. Taylor's books are reliable tools.

The acid test of *Florida Wildflowers* is this: if you are interested in the natural communities of Florida, can you take this book into the field and find your way? I think the answer is a resounding, Yes! This book is an informative and attractive guide to the wildflowers of a state named for its floral exuberance. I am proud to have it on my bookshelf and in my field kit.—**Carl Weekley**, Archbold Biological Station, P.O. Box 2057, Lake Placid, Florida 33852.