

The Green Swamp

The Green Swamp contains some of the country's finest examples of longleaf pine savannas. The open savannas have a diverse herb layer with many orchids and insectivorous plants. Much is also comprised of a dense evergreen shrub bog (pocosin) dominated by gallberry, titi, and sweetbay.

Many of the plants in the Green Swamp benefit from periodic burning; pond pine's cones burst and release seeds after being exposed to very high temperatures and wiregrass flowers vigorously after a fire. Longleaf pine seeds need bare ground to germinate and plenty of sunlight to grow, typical traits of plants that evolved in a landscape with frequent fires. The grasses and sedges of the Green Swamp have roots that are protected from the hottest fires, as do the orchids and insectivorous plants.

The Green Swamp contains at least 14 different species of insectivorous plants, including extensive populations of Venus flytrap, sundew, and four species of pitcher plant.

The preserve is home to many rare animals, including American alligator, fox squirrel, Henslow's sparrow, Bachman's sparrow, and Hessel's hairstreak butterfly.

One of the preserve's rarest residents is the federally listed endangered red-cockaded woodpecker. This woodpecker takes its name from the male's tiny red splotch behind its eye. The woodpecker prefers to nest in old-growth longleaf pines with red heart disease, since it can drill a nesting cavity in the softened core of the trees. The nesting trees are easily identified by the shiny, sticky coating of resin around the cavity that keeps eggs and young safe from predators such as ants, squirrels, and snakes. The woodpeckers complete the nest in one to five years. The birds return to the same nest year after year, as long as sap continues to flow around the opening. Since these birds are so picky about their living quarters, protecting their habitat is critical to ensuring their survival.

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