



**Common Name:** SILKY CAMELLIA

**Scientific Name:** *Stewartia malacodendron* Linnaeus

**Other Commonly Used Names:** none

**Previously Used Scientific Names:** none

**Family:** Theaceae (tea)

**Rarity Ranks:** G4/S3

**State Legal Status:** Rare

**Federal Legal Status:** none

**Federal Wetland Status:** none

**Description:** **Shrub** or small tree up to 19 feet (6 meters) tall, with a single, often leaning or arching, trunk. **Branches** and leaves held in one plane, creating a spray-like effect. **Young twigs** and leaves covered with silky hairs. Mature **leaves** 2 - 4 inches (5 - 11 cm) long, oval with pointed tips and finely toothed margins, alternate, deciduous, with fine hairs on the margins and along the veins on the lower surface. **Flowers** about 3 inches (7 - 8 cm) wide, on short stalks rising from the angle of leaf and stem, the stalks twisted so flowers are held in one plane along the upper sides of branches. **Petals** 5 in number, white, crinkled, silky-hairy on the outer (lower) surface. **Stamens** purple with blue tips (anthers). **Sepals** 5 in number, silky-hairy on the outer surfaces. **Fruit** a woody, rounded, slightly angled capsule about ½ inch (1.2 - 1.8 cm) long.

**Similar and Related Rare Species:** Mountain camellia (*Stewartia ovata*, Georgia Watch List) occurs in the mountains and Piedmont in moist hardwood forests and bluff forests. Its leaves are up to 6 inches (6 - 15 cm) long on winged stalks, its flowers have 5 - 7 petals and sepals, and the fruit is strongly angled. Franklinia (*Franklinia alatomaha*) or the “lost Gordonia,” also in the tea family, was discovered by William Bartram in the 1770s near the Altamaha River in southeast Georgia. It has not been seen in the wild since 1804.

**Habitat:** Rich ravine and slope forests; often with beech, oak, basswood, and spruce pine. Lower slopes of sandhills above bogs and creek swamps.

**Life History:** Little is known about the life history of silky camellia. Its showy, white flowers attract bees and butterflies. The 4- or 5-chambered fruits open along the angles, exposing 2 - 4 seeds per chamber; the seeds are dispersed by animals.

**Survey Recommendations:** Surveys are best conducted during flowering (April–June) and fruiting (June–October).

**Range:** Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Arkansas, Tennessee, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia.

**Threats:** Clearing and logging on slopes and in ravines, impoundment of streams, poaching.

**Georgia Conservation Status:** About 40 populations are known, 3 on state conservation lands, 10 on military bases.

**Conservation and Management Recommendations:** Avoid burning, logging, and mechanical clearing on slopes and in ravines. Avoid damming streams. Plants do not transplant well; protect plants from digging and prosecute poachers.

#### **Selected References:**

Chafin, L.G. 2007. Field guide to the rare plants of Georgia. State Botanical Garden of Georgia and University of Georgia Press, Athens.

Foote, L.E. and S.B. Jones, Jr. 1989. Native shrubs and woody vines of the southeast. Timber Press, Portland, Oregon.

Godfrey, R.K. 1988. Trees, shrubs, and woody vines of northern Florida and adjacent Georgia and Alabama. University of Georgia Press, Athens.

Lance, R. 2004. Woody plants of the southeastern United States: a winter guide. University of Georgia Press, Athens.

NatureServe. 2008. NatureServe Explorer. Arlington, Virginia.  
<http://www.natureserve.org/explorer>

Nelson, G. 1996. Shrubs and woody vines of Florida. Pineapple Press, Sarasota, Florida.

Patrick, T.S., J.R. Allison, and G.A. Krakow. 1995. Protected plants of Georgia. Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Natural Heritage Program, Social Circle.

Prince, L.M. 2002. Circumscription and biogeographic patterns in the eastern North America–east Asia genus *Stewartia* (Theaceae: Stewartieae): insight from the chloroplast and nuclear DNA sequence data. *Castanea* 67(3): 290-301.

Sanders, B. 2004. William Bartram's botanical discoveries in Georgia. *Tipularia* 19: 8-17.

Weakley, A.S. 2008. Flora of the Carolinas, Virginia, Georgia, northern Florida, and surrounding areas. University of North Carolina Herbarium, Chapel Hill.  
<http://www.herbarium.unc.edu/flora.htm>

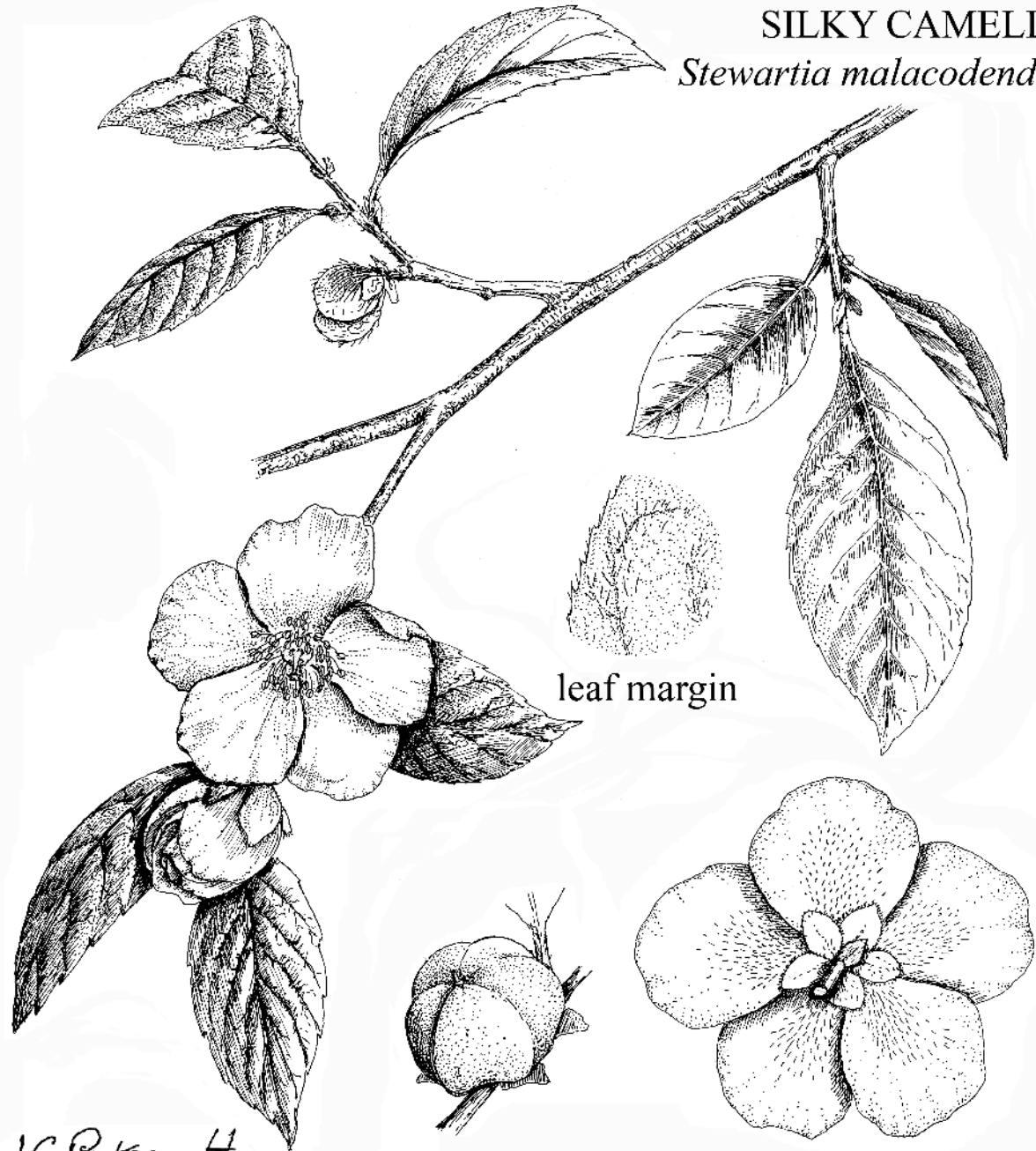
**Author of Species Account:** Linda G. Chafin

**Date Compiled or Updated:**

L. Chafin, Sept. 2008: original account

K. Owers, Feb. 2010: added pictures

SILKY CAMELLIA  
*Stewartia malacodendron*



J.C. Putnam H.

fruit

underside of flower with  
hairy petals and sepals





©Hugh and Carol Nourse



©Hugh and Carol Nourse