



**Common Name:** SWAMP PINK

**Scientific Name:** *Helonias bullata* Linnaeus

**Other Commonly Used Names:** none

**Previously Used Scientific Names:** none

**Family:** Heloniadaceae (swamp pink), Melanthiaceae (bunchflower), or Liliaceae (lily)

**Rarity Ranks:** G3/S1

**State Legal Status:** Threatened

**Federal Legal Status:** Threatened

**Federal Wetland Status:** OBL

**Description:** Perennial **herb** often forming dense patches of large basal rosettes connected by underground stems. **Leaves** 3½ - 12 inches (9 - 30 cm) long and up to 1½ inches (4 cm) wide, glossy, evergreen, widest above the middle with pointed tips and tapering bases. **Stem** 1 - 2 feet (30 - 60 cm) tall while flowering, taller during fruiting, rising from the center of each rosette, stout, hollow. **Flowers** about ¾ inch (1 cm) wide, with 6 pink tepals (3 sepals + 3 petals) and six blue stamens, in a dense spike of 30 - 50 fragrant flowers at the top of the stem. **Fruit** ¾ inch long, 3-lobed, heart-shaped, papery, with many winged seeds.

**Similar Species:** In flower, swamp pink is unmistakable. Fly poison (*Amianthium muscitoxicum*), which produces basal rosettes in the same habitats as swamp-pink, has white flowers and stiff, dull green leaves less than 1 inch (2.8 cm) wide, with conspicuous veins.

**Related Rare Species:** None in Georgia.

**Habitat:** Shady seepage swamps and sphagnum bogs with continually saturated, though not flooded, soils; often occurs with red maple, purple pitcherplant, mountain laurel, rosebay rhododendron, and tag alder.

**Life History:** Swamp pink is a perennial herb that overwinters as a rosette of reddish-brown leaves. New leaves appear in the early spring, shortly before the flowering stalk elongates, and continue to enlarge during the spring and summer. Swamp pink reproduces primarily by the spread of rhizomes; less than 15% of plants in a swamp pink population flower in a given year. If a plant is going to flower the following spring, the flower cluster will appear as a large button in the center of the overwintering rosette. Swamp pink has a high level of seed set, with both self-pollination and cross-pollination producing abundant seeds. However, high seed set and germination rates are offset by the low numbers of flowering plants, low seedling survival, and slow growth rate. Seeds are dispersed by gravity, falling beneath the parent plant and contributing to the clumped distribution of plants, and by ants which are attracted to the fatty appendages (elaiosomes) on the seeds. Ants carry the seeds to their nests where their young eat the elaiosomes and then discard the seeds in nutrient-rich waste dumps.

**Survey Recommendations:** Surveys are best conducted during flowering (early April) and fruiting (late May–early June). Clumps of wide, flat leaves may be identified all year although in winter the leaves turn reddish-brown and may be hidden by litter.

**Range:** Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey, and New York.

**Threats:** Conversion of habitat to farmland and pasture. Pollution runoff and sedimentation into wetlands. Ditching and draining of wetlands. Poaching. Encroachment by shrubs and trees.

**Georgia Conservation Status:** One population on private land is extant but endangered. Efforts to establish plants at other sites are underway.

**Conservation and Management Recommendations:** Avoid ditching and draining of mountain wetlands. Prevent polluted runoff into sites. Protect plants from trampling and poaching. Hand-clear or use occasional fire to reduce woody competition.

**Selected References:**

Center for Plant Conservation. 2007. National Collection Plant Profile.  
<http://www.centerforplantconservation.org>

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

FNA. 2003. Flora of North America, Vol. 26, Magnoliophyta: Liliidae: Liliales and Orchidales. Oxford University Press, New York.

Godfrey, R.K. and J.W. Wooten. 1979. Aquatic and wetland plants of southeastern United States, Vol. 1, monocotyledons. University of Georgia Press, Athens.

Godt, M.J.W., J.L. Hamrick, and S. Bratton. 1995. Genetic diversity in a threatened wetland species, *Helonias bullata* (Liliaceae). Conservation Biology 9(3): 596-604.

NatureServe. 2007. NatureServe Explorer. Arlington, Virginia.  
<http://www.natureserve.org/explorer>

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.

Sutter, R.D. 1984. The status of *Helonias bullata* L. (Liliaceae) in the southern Appalachians. Castanea 49(1): 9-16.

USFWS. 1990. Swamp pink (*Helonias bullata*) species account. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C. <http://endangered.fws.gov>

USFWS. 1991. Swamp pink (*Helonias bullata*) recovery plan. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Newton Corner, Massachusetts.

Weakley, A.S. 2007. Flora of the Carolinas, Virginia, Georgia, 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:**

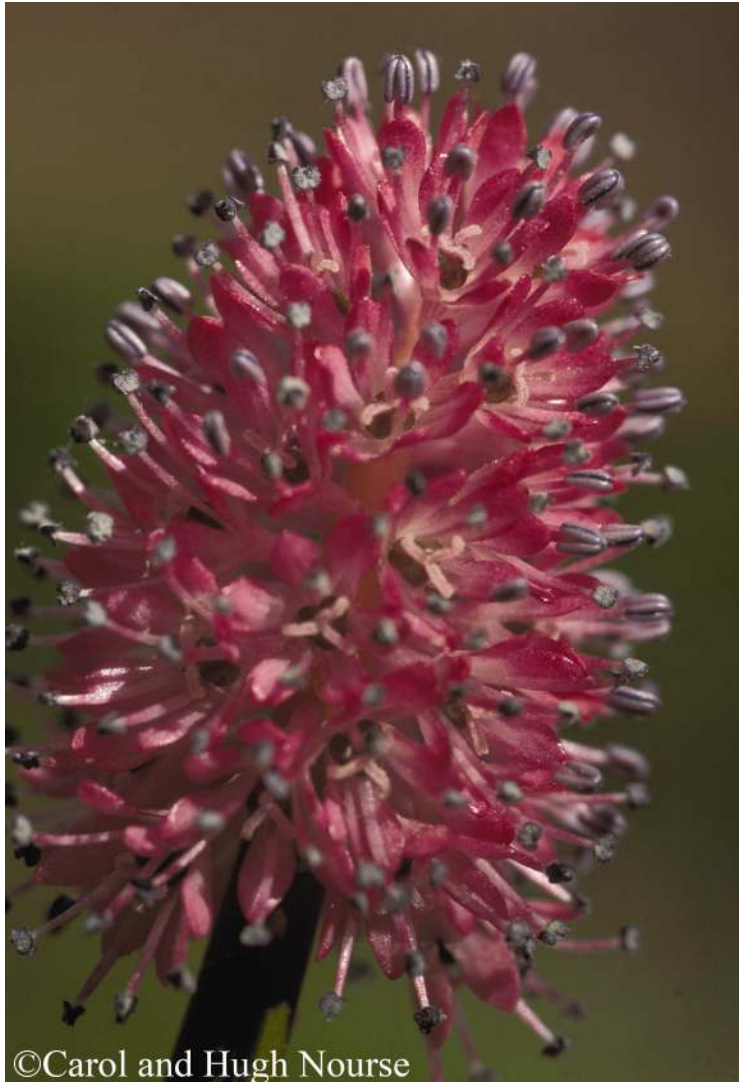
L. Chafin, Mar. 2007: original account

K. Owers, Feb. 2010: added pictures

SWAMP PINK  
*Helonias bullata*



J.C. Putnam H.



©Carol and Hugh Nourse