

CONSERVATION



35

YEARS

OF CONSERVING

FAIRCHILD'S
CONSERVATION
TEAM, BY THE
NUMBERS

By Jennifer Possley
Photos by Fairchild staff



Thirty-five years ago, a wonderful thing happened for South Florida: a native plant conservation program was born. In honor of this milestone, we are looking back at the formation and many accomplishments of Fairchild's Conservation Team, as we have worked to safeguard the native biodiversity of our region.



The first Fairchild staffer dedicated to rare plants of our region, Carol Lippincott, examines a rare plant specimen with renowned botanist George Proctor in Puerto Rico in the late 1980s.

The history of Fairchild's local plant conservation efforts is one of partnerships and cooperation. Not surprisingly, it was a partnership that started it all. In 1984, the Center for Plant Conservation (CPC) was formed to save the diverse array of native plants within the United States. As a founding member of the CPC, Fairchild

pledged to safeguard the rarest native plant species of South Florida, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. These imperiled plant taxa—now 69 in total—are part of Fairchild's collections and also part of the CPC "National Collection" comprising our nation's most imperiled plant species.



Former Conservation Horticulturist and Connect to Protect Network staffer Devon Powell and Jennifer Possley were happy to be in a pine rockland on this buggy summer day.



The Conservation Team is still as active as ever! Here Jimmy Lange, Lydia Cuni and Dr. Sabine Wintergerst pause from installing a seed germination experiment with the federally endangered Keys wedge sandmat in the Lower Florida Keys.

In 1989, five years after joining the CPC, longtime Fairchild Tropical Garden Director John Popenoe hired the Garden's first staffer entirely dedicated to rare plant conservation. Carol Lippincott, curator of endangered species, was on staff for four years, with funding provided by the CPC, The Nature Conservancy, and MetroDade Parks and Recreation Department. These were unusual times and a lot happened during Dr. Lippincott's term! In 1990, Miami-Dade County residents voted to raise their property taxes to fund the purchase of environmentally endangered lands, and the County's EEL program was born. In 1991, the

County formed its Natural Areas Management (NAM) Division to manage the unique natural resources in its urban parks. In 1992, Hurricane Andrew severely damaged much of South Florida, including the endangered lands and urban parks. The County relied on Fairchild's expertise and connections to help NAM survey the damage and quickly mobilize recovery efforts. It was during these early days of the County's preserve system and post-Andrew restoration that Fairchild's Conservation Team became a critical player in conserving South Florida's rare plants.

150+

populations of rare South Florida plant species mapped and monitored regularly

200+

collections of 70 rare plant species' seed and spore safeguarded in long-term cold storage

100+

plant species studied for germination research

78

reintroductions of 21 rare native plant species

50

peer-reviewed scientific publications

60+

interns, graduate students and post-doctoral students mentored

90+

staff and volunteers working on the conservation team



Dr. Joyce Maschinski, seen here with longtime volunteers Mary Rose and Patty Phares, was Fairchild's Conservation Ecologist for 13 years. Now at the Center for Plant Conservation, Joyce still collaborates regularly with Fairchild's Conservation Team.



Fairchild's 2019 Conservation Team is stellar! Members include horticulturist Brian Harding, seed lab manager Dr. Sabine Wintergerst, and field biologists Lydia Cuni and Jimmy Lange.

Three and a half decades later, some things have changed (we have gone from typewriters to smartphones!) but Fairchild's Conservation Team remains a fixture in conserving South Florida's rare plants. Our work has expanded from Miami-Dade County preserves into various national parks, state parks, other counties, and even private properties. Our collaborative spirit and ability to reach across political and jurisdictional boundaries allows us to take a holistic approach toward conserving species and habitats rather than particular parcels of land.

Over the years, the ripple effects from our research, surveys, seed banking, horticulture, planning and outreach have made positive change for rare plants in South Florida and beyond. While our work is never done, the Team has accomplished quite a bit over the years. Take a look at some of the numbers and see!



Learn how you can support our conservation efforts at www.fairchildgarden.org/Florida-Conservation

6K+

native plants donated to school and home gardens through the Connect to Protect Network

10K+

plants provided to Miami-Dade County and other partners for local restoration projects

50+

separate grants received to support the program

20

statewide Rare Plant Task Force meetings co-hosted with our partners

1

award recognizing the team as U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Southeast Region recovery champions, for our work with the key tree cactus

20+

management plans written for Miami-Dade County preserves

69

rare plant species safeguarded, funded and publicized as part of our Center for Plant Conservation National Collection

Jennifer Possley is Fairchild's Conservation Program Manager. Carol Lippincott, Joyce Maschinski and Joy Klein provided valuable input in writing this article.