

Allen David Broussard Catfish Creek State Preserve

by Nancy Bissett

A few years ago the owner of the property, a Venezuelan investor living in Miami, had ended the hunting lease with the family of a former county commissioner, Ernie Caldwell, and began bulldozing the scrub to create new pasture he needed for some of his extra cattle. Mr. Caldwell called The Nature Conservancy, which had already purchased a half section to the south, since this land was high on the state's Conservation and Recreational Lands (CARL) list (a list of lands to be purchased by the state when money becomes available). The Nature Conservancy immediately went to Miami to try to convince the owner of other options, explaining that this scrub land would make poor pasture, and a land swap was proposed. The owner phoned the fellow operating the bulldozer and asked him to stop! The Nature Conservancy, however, needed money quickly, since it could not afford long-term interest rates until it would be purchased by the CARL program, and it looked as if this proposal would fail.

About the same time, the Dr. William and Margaret Broussard family,



On Friday evening of the Florida Native Plant Society Conference, over 200 people hiked in the Allen David Broussard Catfish Creek Scrub, or Allen's Scrub, for short. The scrub jays were calling; the oaks and lyonias wore their brightest spring green and rusty foliage; and the sand sinks and ponds were filled with water. Everyone had a chance to unwind from a full day of lectures and to experience the scrub at leisure, but few knew the story of how this scrub was almost 'rubbed'.

who had lost their son, Allen, were looking for conservation land that could be a memorial to him. A special bill was passed by the state legislature to match funds for an Allen David Broussard memorial. The Broussard family and some local fundraising provided \$150,000 at the crucial time, allowing The Nature Conservancy to close the deal with the owner. The State never did contribute the matching funds under the special bill, but the remainder finally came through Preservation 2000. Without the Broussard memorial, the site would now be poor-quality pasture land.

Allen's Scrub lies on rolling hills at the eastern edge of the Lake Wales Ridge and on the east side of Lake Pierce. Pristine sandhill lakes dot the landscape between the ridges. The old name for this area was tub hills. The preserve now has about 1200 acres, but the projected design is for approximately 6000 acres. If the whole project is purchased with Preservation 2000 funds, it will contain a wide variety of ecosystems including the beautiful lake edge of Lake Pierce, basin swamps, bottomland hardwood forests, and a blackwater stream.

The rolling xeric oak scrub has 14 rare plant species that are found only in the peninsular Florida scrubs. Seven of these rare species are found only on the Lake Wales Ridge. These include the Florida gayfeather (*Liatris ohlingerae*), a large-headed blazing star. This site is the northeast end of its range, which extends only down through Highlands County. There were many pygmy fringe trees (*Chionanthus pygmaeus*) on the last two ridges of the hike. Britton's bear grass (*Nolina brittoniana*), the diminutive paper-like nail-wort (*Paronychia chartacea*), and hairy jointweed (*Polygonella basiramia*) also occur here. Sand lace (*Polygonella myriophylla*) lives on open, white sandy patches. Scrub plum (*Prunus geniculata*) is a favorite wildlife food that has sweet, ripe fruits in April.

Seven other rare plants in Allen's Scrub occur in other peninsular Florida scrubs as well:

- ◆ Curtiss' milkweed (*Asclepias curtissii*) is a creamy-white milkweed.
- ◆ Ashe's savory (*Calamintha ashei*) is a scrubby mint that also ranges up through the Ocala Forest.
- ◆ Scrub buckwheat — *Eriogonum longifolium* var. *gnaphalifolium* (some botanists prefer to call it *Eriogonum*



Allen Broussard, a young naturalist with a scrub preserve for a memorial, "and Barb, before I kissed her," his wife quoted him as saying. Taken in Arizona, summer of 1986.

floridanum as named by J. K. Small) — has a close counterpart in the midwest. Scrub buckwheat's habitat is intermediate between scrub and sandhills, and it is also found in turkey oak barrens.

◆ Scrub holly (*Ilex arenicola*) has many red berries and a leaf that follows the common perception of hollies — stiff and pointed — but it is bright green. Scrub holly is closely related to the East Palatka holly.

◆ Nodding pinweed (*Lechea cernua*) is an obscure herbaceous perennial with furry new leaves that are much different from the mature leaves.

◆ The silk bay (*Persea humilis*) has coppery-backed leaves which are very showy and smell like the cooking herb.

◆ Lewton's polygala (*Polygala lewtonii*) is a perennial herb, under a foot tall, that has lovely bright lavender flowers in early spring. The rest of the year it is difficult to locate. This plant is also found in turkey oak barrens up the ridge and in the Ocala Forest, but always on the east side of the ridge. Large populations have been monitored at Allen's Scrub.

Where the sandy ridges drop off, the seepage slopes are often covered with large stands of cutthroat grass (*Panicum abscissum*) at Allen's Scrub. Cutthroat grass once covered the whole eastern slope of the Lake Wales Ridge, but now is in remnant stands in slopes and flatwoods of this two-county area.

In early 1992 this land was passed from The Nature Conservancy to the State of Florida, and officially became the Allen David Broussard Catfish Creek State Preserve. It is being managed by the Parks Department, designated as a preserve with a low-use profile. Hiking trips can be arranged through the State Parks.

Allen David Broussard

"Wildlife biologist, ecologist, a birder with few peers, Allen had

remarkable insight into the workings of nature. Intelligent and innovative, he took a practical approach to problem solving.

"He was friendly and unassuming, careless of creature comforts, smiling and non-confrontational, beloved by family and associates.

"His loss is a great loss to all living things."

These words, written by Allen's father, will be engraved on the five-foot black granite base for Allen's bust that will be placed as a memorial in Allen's Scrub. They will tell how people who knew Allen thought of him. I wish I had met him, too, especially after reading his life story and stories others told of him.

As a boy he loved roaming the woods, being a counter for Audubon's Christmas bird counts, banding eaglets with the rangers in the Everglades, surfing, snowskiing. . . After high school, he was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Disease. Extensive treatments brought a cure, and a greater appreciation of life — all forms of life.

He graduated with honors from Colorado State in wildlife management. He knew he wanted to go on to do field research, which he had already been doing during summers and class breaks. First he studied sage grouse alone in northwest Colorado, then the Yuma clapper rail, a reclusive wader, on the lower Colorado River in Arizona. One day while in town with Barbara, another researcher, he collapsed, and Barbara rushed him to a small hospital. When his condition worsened, he was sent by air ambulance to Phoenix, then air-lifted to Stanford, California. He had had a heart attack at age 25, caused by damage from the cancer treatments. After a few weeks of care and then months of recuperation, he went back to Arizona to finish his research on the clapper rail. Then he went on to graduate work at the University of Illinois.

Allen and Barbara married in a beautiful state park in the Colorado Rockies and went to the Galapagos, a biologist's dream trip, for their honeymoon. Allen was a popular freshman teacher as a graduate assistant at Illinois while he continued his graduate studies. Despite warning symptoms of heart failure, he took a three-month research project in central Australia (a place he always wanted to see) where he had to ride a bicycle to his field area.

By the time he got home to the United States, he was in need of a heart transplant. When he awoke from the operation, his mother told him the worst was over. She said, "He deserved it. His was a life worth saving, a life of great promise. His talents were sorely needed in this world today." Despite his will to live and the best care available, infection took him on January 17, 1990, just four days after his 29th birthday.

Allen's colleagues thought highly of his talents as an ecologist. A fellow graduate student wrote, "All of Allen's fellow graduate students recognize that he was an exceptionally talented young scientist. He had a quick mind and was very creative — productively approaching problems from unique angles that would never have occurred to most of us. He was an especially valuable colleague because of his openness and because he had a particularly strong desire to share ideas. He enjoyed challenging his peers (and he did so often), and in turn he enjoyed being challenged. Exchanges with Allen were almost always laced with his particular brand of humor; often subtle, usually pointed, and always good-natured."

Allen worked with Rob Deblinger,

Ph.D., in Wyoming in the summer of 1982, sampling the plant habitat of pronghorn fawning sites. Over evening campfires Rob learned to admire Allen's great mind. He wrote, "It's only once in a long while that I meet someone who is so gifted. Allen had that rare talent to take lots of seemingly unrelated information and synthesize it into a workable hypothesis. Soon after came an ecological concept and finally a theory. I can't tell you how many "Broussard's Theories of Wildlife Biology" there are. I used to listen to him talk and talk, digesting and positioning facts, until it all made sense. Then he would say, 'And if that is so, what we used to think about in this way is really like this . . . ' and so on and so forth. What a great mind. There is no doubt that Allen would have made a *great* ecologist."

After hearing his story, I can now feel his spirit when I walk through Allen's Scrub and I will wonder what questions he would ask about this place and what theories he would form.

Nancy Bissett, co-owner of The Natives, has been active in FNPS since its founding.