

# CUTTHROAT GRASS

by Lewis L. Yarlett

(Mr. Yarlett says, "I have submitted cutthroat grass to Don A. Wood, Endangered Species Coordinator for the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, as a species to be placed on an endangered or potentially endangered list." Here is his discussion of cutthroat — a seepage slope grass. — Ed.

## Description

Cutthroat grass (*Panicum abcissum* Swallen) is a robust, strongly rhizomatous perennial grass with culms 50-70 cm tall, densely tufted, compressed; lower sheaths broad

## SEEPAGE SLOPES from page 10

destroyed a few Florida bogs over the years, but the current interest in large-scale mining of peat for fuel must be regarded as a much more serious threat.

Bog Plant Communities are very similar to those of other acid peat environments. Herb Bog, Shrub Bog, and Temperate Bayhead can be expected to differ from Seepage Herb Bog, Seepage Shrub Bog, and Baygall only in minor details of species composition. FNAI recognizes the Everglades Bayhead exemplified by the "teardrop islands" of Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge as a distinct community. These islands have a mixture of tropical and temperate flora dominated by swamp redbay, sweetbay, dahoon holly, and cocoplum (*Chrysobalanus icaco*). In Marshy Bogs, Herb Bog species are mixed with marsh species such as pickerel weed (*Pontederia lanceolata*), sagittaria (*Sagittaria lancifolia*), and water pennywort (*Hydrocotyle umbellata*).

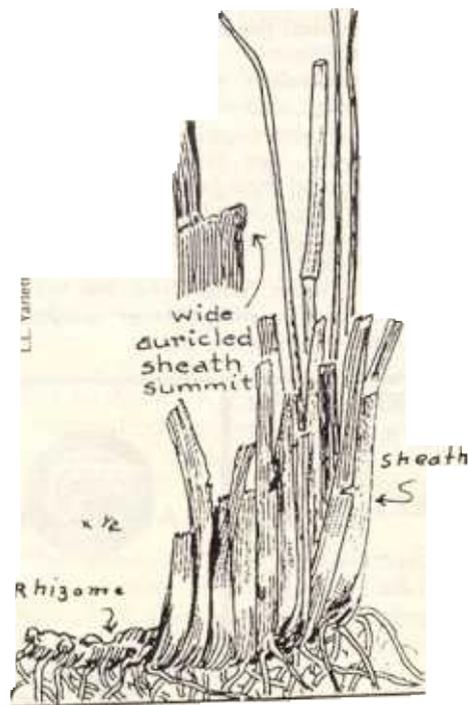
Rare species which might be encountered in Bogs include \*water sundew (*Drosera intermedia*), \*grass-of-Parnassus, \*white-top pitcher-plant, \*red-flowered pitcherplant, \*yellow fringeless orchid, \*Curtiss' lythrum, and \*hartwrightia. All of these grow on open, sunny sites.

\*Suzanne Cooper, FNAI Botanist, supplied information on rare species. Those flagged with an asterisk are on the FNAI Special Plant list. Information on populations of these plants should be sent to Suzanne at the Florida Natural Areas Inventory, 254 East Sixth Avenue, Tallahassee, Florida 32303 (904/224-8207).

Next issue: Rocklands.



and strongly keeled, crowded, 3-4 mm wide from keel to margin, truncate or extended at the summit into short, broad, obtuse auricles. Blades 15-25 cm long, 1-2 mm wide, folded, scabrous; ligule a very short membrane, scarcely 0.3 mm long. Panicles terminal and axillary, 7-15 mm long. Spikelets 2.8-3 mm long, obliquely set on the pedicels. Glumes, the first one-half to two-thirds as long as the spikelet, acute, 3-nerved, scabrous on the keel, the



Basal Characteristics of  
Cutthroat grass

second and sterile lemma equal, 5-nerved. Caryopsis 2-2.3 mm long, 0.6-0.7 mm wide, acute, pale, smooth, and shining.

## Range

This species of *Panicum* is found only in portions of Highlands, Polk, and extreme western portions of Osceola counties. A small acreage occurs in Highlands Hammock State Park, Sebring, Florida, where it is protected and can be observed.

## Habitat

Cutthroat is very site-specific. It grows only on moisture-receiving "seepy slopes" on the eastern and western slopes of the Florida ridge. It may also occur on small isolated slopes which receive moisture from a scrub site at a higher elevation. Most frequently in pure stands with a slash pine overstory. Two grass species may occur with cutthroat, creeping bluestem (*Schizachyrium stoloniferum* [Nash] Hitch.) and chalky bluestem (*Andropogon capillipes* Nash).

## Basis of Status Classification

The sites to which cutthroat is adapted are also ideally suited for intensive agricultural use, primarily improved pasture. During the 1950s and 1960s large acreages of the species were destroyed by intensive land preparation. Large-scale developments are also responsible for the decrease in the habitat. So far as is known this is the only location of cutthroat in the United States. It was first collected by C.V. Piper in 1917 near the now abandoned community of Florida. This was the site of a sawmill and turpentine still and not far from the present community of Indian Lake Estates. Cutthroat was not included in the 1935 edition of **Hitchcock's Manual of the Grasses of the United States**. Silveus reported it as *Panicum abcissum* in his **Grasses — Panicum Paspalum of the United States**, in 1942. In 1950 it was included in Agnes Chase's revision of Hitchcock's manual.

## Recommendations

Although cutthroat is protected within the state-owned Highlands Hammock State Park, a survey is needed to determine specific pure stands, the ownership, and possible preservation of these areas.