



# Rare Plants of Louisiana

## *Pteroglossaspis ecristata* – wild coco, giant orchid Orchid Family (Orchidaceae)

**Rarity Ranks:** S2/G2G3

**Range:** AL, FL, GA, LA, MS, NC, SC; Cuba

### Recognition:

- 1) Tall orchid from 8 – 24” (or taller)
- 2) Flowers with three-lobed lip with the central lobe being maroon to brownish with green margins – sepals and petals yellow and infolded
- 3) Each flower subtended by a floral bract (leaf-like structure) that exceeds the flower
- 4) Leaves 2-4 at base of plant, 6-28” long with 3-5 prominent nerves; leaves pleated

**Flowering Time:** August – Sept.; **Fruit** – Sept. – Oct.

**Light Requirement:** Full sun to part shade

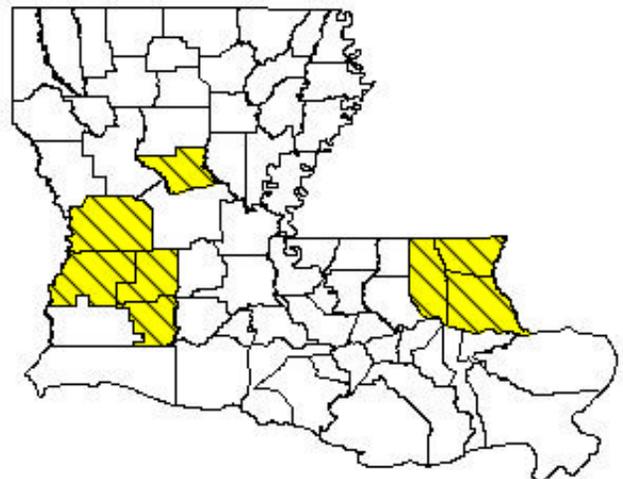
**Wetland Status:** Does not occur in wetlands



**Habitats:** Upland longleaf pine forests, mesic longleaf pine flatwoods, and coastal prairie. Wild coco is fire dependent. Associates include longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*), bracken fern (*Pteridium aquilinum*), little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), slender bluestem (*S. tenerum*), pine barren tridens (*Tridens ambiguus*), and many others.

### Threats:

- 1) Conversion of habitat to intensively-managed pine plantations (chemical and mechanical site prep and dense tree spacing)
- 2) Fire exclusion
- 3) Residential and commercial development
- 4) Exotic species such as cogon grass (*Imperata cylindrica*) may take advantage of soil disturbances to gain a foothold in wild coco habitat



### Beneficial management practices:

- 1) Thinning, targeting for removal off-site species such as loblolly and slash pines
- 2) Burning, especially during growing season (April-June) for maximum control of woody plants
- 3) Minimize soil disturbance (do not establish food plots, additional roads, etc.) so as not to free up growing space for exotics; clean logging equipment prior to entering site to harvest timber to avoid introducing exotics
- 4) Monitor for and treat cogon grass and other exotic plant infestations



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Wild coco in open habitat associated with abundant slender bluestem on Sandy Hollow Wildlife Management Area, Tangipahoa Parish, LA. Longleaf pine was cut out long ago but a diverse herbaceous layer remains because this site has been burned for years and has not been converted to loblolly pine plantation.



Fruits of wild coco, with tiny seeds seen blowing away appearing as dust particles.



Malcom Vidrine

Close-up image of wild coco flowers

## References:

Chafin, L. G. 2000. Field guide to the rare plants of Florida. Florida Natural Areas Inventory, Tallahassee, FL.

NatureServe. 2006. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 6.1. NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available <http://www.natureserve.org/explorer>. (Accessed: February 5, 2007 ).

Schotz, A. 2003. Status survey report on *Pteroglossaspis ecristata*, wild coco, in Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Alabama Natural Heritage Program. Unpublished report for United States Fish and Wildlife Service.