

ICPS *SARRACENIA ALABAMENSIS* CONSERVATION IN ACTION!

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In May 2010, I had the privilege of visiting the rarest of *Sarracenia* at a site that is supported by the ICPS (see Figure 1). I was very excited about the chance to photograph and video this site to document our member's hard-earned dollars at work!

Using Splinter Hill Preserve (Alabama) as my base camp, I left very early the morning of May 21st to venture north through Alabama to this cherished site. I noticed how the terrain began to change. The lower lying pinelands and swamps turned into a harsher, rockier, and more hill-like environment. I also noticed the increase in that famous Alabama red clay; you know the kind you have to practically chisel off of your vehicle at day's end? Well, it was everywhere by the time I was 10 miles or so from my destination.

Keith Tassin of The Nature Conservancy was kind enough to guide me through the thickets of *Arundinaria*, a slender type of cane native to Alabama, and from which *S. alabamensis* derives its common name, "The Canebrake Pitcher Plant". Naturalist William Bartram once noted these massive stands of *Arundinaria* as he travelled through the region and described the cane as being "thick as a man's arm or three or four inches in diameter". Although the cane I witnessed was much smaller, I still enjoyed the gentle, rustling sounds the leaves made as welcomed breezes blew through them!

We finally came to rest on top of a gravelly clay hill. The soil here was fairly dry due to the higher elevation and blistering summer heat. However, the plants seemed to hang on, despite what seemed to me to be unusual conditions for *Sarracenia*. In fact, I was pleasantly surprised that they could grow so well in such a high clay type environment.



Figure 1: A fine healthy stand of *Sarracenia alabamensis* *in situ*.



Figure 2: *Sarracenia alabamensis* site before prescribed fire. Note encroaching grasses and woody shrubs.



Figure 3: *Sarracenia alabamensis* site after prescribed fire, which was made possible by donations from ICPS members. Note slower returning growth from woody shrubs and grasses, giving *S. alabamensis* a head start.

After exploring and shooting video, we ventured to a second area in this site. This area was different than the last, in regards to soil composition and surroundings. It is here that I saw the healthiest plants, which I attribute to the white, sandier soil that contained far less red clay, although it was also slightly gravelly. There was a constant water source in the form of a small natural spring that twisted and wound its way through the stands of plants. The seed set was incredible, with many large swollen capsules. What a great sight this was! Also, the size of the pitchers was easily twice the size as those at the first area. This particular area is on schedule to be burned in 2011, as the dense overgrowth is beginning to make itself known once again.

I must say that after visiting these fine plants in their natural habitat, I could clearly see the demand and extreme importance of land management actions such as prescribed fire. Without such measures, these outstanding colonies would quickly be choked out by fast growing, invasive overgrowth (see Figure 2).

Although burning the land clears the way for the *S. alabamensis*, it also clears the way for invasive woody competitors. However, the rhizomes of the pitcher plants can survive the extreme heat much better than those of its competition, thus giving the pitcher plants a much better head start (see Figure 2).

In Spring 2011, the ICPS is looking forward to reintroducing genetic material propagated from this site by Atlanta Botanical Gardens. Shortly after a burn, plants will be planted in the area that contains the natural flowing spring to ensure their needs are met perfectly with a more consistent water source. We will be soliciting for volunteers at this time to aid with their replanting. Please feel free to contact me if interested (brian@carnivorousplants.org) for details. Also, please help us preserve these plants for our future generations by visiting www.carnivorousplants.org and donating to the *Sarracenia alabamensis* Conservation Project.

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