

**2011 April Plant of the Month:**



Swamp Pink, *Helonias bullata*  
Photography by Michael Hogan

*Swamp Pink, Helonias bullata L.*

April showers can bring May flowers, but it also heralds in the start of Early Spring. One of New Jersey's showiest wild flowers make's its appearance early in this month. Swamp Pink, *Helonias bullata*, is a true wetland plant found in headwater seeps, springs and stream banks on our Coastal Plain. It also has a remaining population in the Northwest part of the State. Swamp pink has long been known to the professional horticulturalists and wild flower enthusiast. Flower growers and collectors have grown and wild collected this plant since the industry began to flourish early in the Twentieth Century. Historically, Swamp Pink was found from Staten Island to Georgia. The Staten Island population was lost mid-Twentieth Century during housing expansion for New York's growing population. Many of the remaining populations south of Delmarva Peninsula are associated with the Appalachian Mountains.

New Jersey is its northern limit. Most of the population is south of Trenton on the Coastal Plain. It occupies a few discrete habitats dependent on a stable water level. This plant is a clump former and is not capable of using creeping stolons or rhizomes to escape rising or fall water elevations. This habit creates a dependence on spring seeps, headwater fens, 1' and 2' order stream banks, and lake/bog edges. Camden, Gloucester, Salem Cumberland

and Cape May Counties support the bulk of today's known sites. The remaining populations are found at or near the confluence with the physical boundary created by the intersection of the Inner and Outer Coastal Plains where conditions discouraged permanent clearing or extensive agriculture. The geologic boundary coincides with the origin of the Delaware River and Bay basin draining streams. All stream between the Rancocas Creek and the Dennis Creek support this threatened plant. The plant is also found in the Pine Barrens within the Mullica, Great Egg Harbor River and the smaller streams that are the headwaters to Barnegat Bay, where it occupies cedar swamps and red maple hardwood wetland forests.

The plant is rare. It has Federal Threatened Species status designated in 1988 by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Its threatened status is buoyed upon New Jersey's more than 100 known populations. Compared to less than 25 outside our state, we are the heart of the species, preventing the federal endangered status. Today, the New Jersey Natural Heritage Program's List of Endangered Plant Species and Plants of Special Concern identifies the Global Rank as 3 (G3), the State Rank as 3 (S3), as a federally listed species (LT), as endangered by New Jersey statutes (E) and as a listed species by both Pinelands and Highlands Commissions.