

## Ghost Orchid



This photograph shows an extremely rare ghost orchid in bloom in a Florida nature preserve. Orchids love the warm, humid climate of the Everglades, and many of the most unusual – and endangered - orchids are found here. Florida parks, including the Florida Panther Preserve, allow endangered species like the ghost orchid to have a chance for survival.

Early European travelers in Florida were so impressed by the abundance and beauty of the flowers that one of them called the area *Pascua Florida*, meaning “feast of flowers.” As you can see from Mark Dion’s use of photographs of John Kunkel Small’s

plant collections, orchids were much easier to find in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century than they are now. But Small wasn’t the only orchid collector. Collecting orchids was a very popular activity for many people during the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The main reasons for the disappearance of the ghost orchid are these kinds of collections, as well as habitat loss, including logging of bald cypress trees, which are needed for a healthy orchid habitat. In addition, the ghost orchid can only reproduce with the help of the giant sphinx moth, which is itself rare.

William Bartram also collected orchids as he travelled in Florida. He lived too early for photography, so we don’t have visible records of how many he saw. However, some of his collected orchids - no longer alive, of course – are in safe-keeping at the University of Florida. Bartram did not realize that the collections he was making of these unusual flowers might damage their chances for survival in the wild or even in gardens. Many orchids are very difficult to grow in gardens or for sale, and ghost orchids almost always die when taken from their special habitats. It is against the law to even try. Sometimes visitors can see them – but only on very special guided hikes, when hikers may be blindfolded, so the location of the blooming orchids is kept secret.

### Questions

1. What have you learned about the ghost orchid?
2. Do you think the ghost orchid needs to be “rescued”? Why or why not?
3. How would you represent what you have learned about the ghost orchid in an art work?