

SMALL'S MILKPEA

Galactia smallii H.J. Rogers ex Herndon

Synonyms: *Galactia prostrata* Small

Family: Fabaceae (pea)

FNAI Ranks: G1/S1

Legal Status: US-Endangered; FL-Endangered



Recognized by its procumbent (growing along the ground with out taking root) habit with stems twining toward the tip. Photo © Gil Nelson.

Field Description: Perennial **herb** with trailing **stems** up to 1.8 m long, twining at tips, appearing gray due to dense covering of short hairs. **Leaves** alternate, with three broadly oval leaflets, each less than 2.5 cm long; **leaflets** densely hairy (visible only with magnification, erect to ascending hairs adaxially. Typical pea **flowers** with a large upright banner petal, pale pink to purple, less than 1.3 cm long, in clusters of 1 - 5 at ends of the stems or on stalks rising from the angle of leaf and stem. **Fruit** a hairy pod, about 3.6 cm long.

Similar Species: Small's milkpea is distinguished from other milkpea (*Galactia*) species by the type and abundance of stem and leaf hairs, and by shape of the leaflets. Florida milkpea (*Galactia floridana*) leaflets are longer and wider and have visibly hairy upper surfaces; although Florida milkpea stems are hairy, they appear green rather than gray. Small's milkpea also has more pronounced reticulate venation on both sides of the leaf, has flowers more obviously exserted beyond the leaves, and does not root at the nodes as Florida milkpea does.

Related Rare Species: Pineland milkpea (*Galactia pinetorum*) is another imperiled species in the genus that is endemic to the state's pine rocklands in south Florida. Generally similar to Small's milkpea, pineland milkpea is distinguished by longer oblong or linear leaflets lacking hairs on upper surfaces and stems with retrorse hairs.

Habitat: Redland pine rocklands of southern Dade County, with South Florida slash pine (*Pinus densa*), saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*), willow bastic (*Sideroxylon salicifolium*), and poisonwood (*Metopium toxiferum*).

Best Survey Season: Spring-summer; few weeks following fire, primarily in the summer.

Range-wide Distribution: Endemic to Dade County, FL.

Conservation Status: Small's milkpea is a Miami-Dade County endemic species, with only about 8 populations remaining in a very restricted range and limited to pine rockland habitat. One of the biggest threats to this species is lack of fire disturbance. While regular fire is necessary to maintain the structural and compositional integrity of this species' pine rockland habitat, it is also very difficult to accomplish prescribed burns with the large amount of urban development and interface present surrounding the patches of fragmented habitat. An additional concern is for those populations occurring on private lands which are extremely vulnerable to development in the already highly developed Miami urban area. Invasive species and weedy native species are also a threat, as both St. Augustine grass (*Stenotaphrum secundatum*) and Mascarene templegrass (*Zoysia tenuifolia*) can take over areas where this species grows. Sea-level rise and associated habitat alterations from the soil salinization are likely to occur in the near future.

Protection and Management: Preserve remaining fragments of pine rockland, use prescribed burns to maintain pine rockland habitat, and carefully control invasive and weedy pest plant species.

References: Coile 2000, Franck 2017, Herndon 1981, IRC 1999, Isely 1990, Nesom 2015, O'Brien 1994, USFWS 1998, Wunderlin 1998, Wunderlin and Hansen 2000a. Weakley, A. S. and the Southeastern Flora Team 2024.



Relatively large pink flower displaying sizeable upright banner petal.
Photo © Keith Bradley.

