

TREE CACTUS

Pilosocereus robinii (L.) Byles & Rowley

Synonyms: *Cereus robinii* (Lem.) L. Benson;

Pilosocereus robinii (L.) Byles & Rowley var.

deeringii (Small) Kartesz & Gandhi;

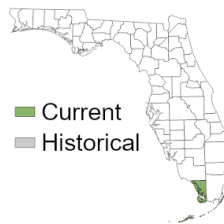
Cephalocereus keyensis Britton & Rose;

Pilosocereus robinii (L.) Byles & Rowley var.
robinii

Family: Cactaceae (cactus)

FNAI Ranks: G1/S1

Legal Status: US-Endangered; FL-Endangered



Gil Nelson

Field Description: Tree-like **cactus** with cylindrical **stems** to 9 m tall, 7.5 - 10 cm in diameter, branched or unbranched, with 9 - 15 ribs. **Spines** less than 2.5 cm long, in hairy clusters of 15 - 30. **Flowers** solitary, 5.1 - 6.4 cm long, outer petals green, inner petals white, opening in late afternoon from spine clusters near top of stems, smelling of garlic. **Fruit** leathery, round, flattened, blue-green ripening to red, with shiny black seeds in white pulp.

Similar Species: There are two species of *Pilosocereus* in Florida. Antillean tree cactus (*Pilosocereus millspaughii*) and Key tree cactus (*Pilosocerus robinii*). The flowering areoles of Antillean tree cactus have tomentose hairs that are visibly conspicuous and exserted, dense, and generally straight and parallel, while Key tree cactus' tomentose hairs are visibly inconspicuous and densely matted, intertwined, bent, curled, and irregular. Additionally, the spines of the Antillean tree cactus are up to 7 cm long, while the Key tree cactus spines are only up to 3 cm long.

Related Rare Species: There are two species of *Pilosocereus* in Florida. Antillean tree cactus (*Pilosocereus millspaughii*) and Key tree cactus (*Pilosocerus robinii*). The flowering areoles of Antillean tree cactus have tomentose hairs that are visibly conspicuous and exserted, dense, and generally straight and parallel, while Key tree cactus' tomentose hairs are visibly inconspicuous and densely matted, intertwined, bent, curled, and irregular. Additionally, the spines of the Antillean tree cactus are up to 7 cm long, while the Key tree cactus spines are only up to 3 cm long.

Habitat: Openings in tropical hardwood hammocks, cactus hammocks, and thorn scrub; over oolitic limestone.

Best Survey Season: All year.

Range-wide Distribution: Monroe County Keys, FL; Cuba.

Conservation Status: Most plants reported from early 1900s were destroyed by development. Only 8 populations, with about 600 plants, remain; only 2 of the populations are considered stable or not threatened by development.

Protection and Management: Prevent destruction of upland habitat in the Keys. Protect and monitor known populations. Control exotic species such as Brazilian pepper and Australian pine. Deter and prosecute plant poachers.

References: Adams and Lima 1994, Austin 1984a, Avery 1982, Britton and Rose 1937, Coile 2000, IRC 1999, Small 1917, USFWS 1998, Ward 1979, Wunderlin 1998, and Wunderlin and Hansen 2000a. Weakley 2022.

