

BALBIS' AIRPLANT

Tillandsia balbisiana J.A. & J.H. Schultes

Synonyms: none

Family: Bromeliaceae (pineapple)

FNAI Ranks: G4G5/S3

Legal Status: US-none FL-Threatened

Wetland Status: US-none+ FL-none



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Field Description: Leaves broader, 6-35 mm wide when measured at mid-length; **leaf sheaths** conspicuously inflated, the plant pseudobulbous (narrowed to a 'waist' upwards, above the base thickened by the inflated leaf sheaths); **leaf blades** and scape bracts twisted, reflexed. Like other *Tillandsia*, the poorly developed roots of this epiphyte help secure to a variety of hosts.

Similar Species: None. Very distinctive with its reflexed and twisted scape bracts and leaves.

Related Rare Species: None. Very distinctive with its reflexed and twisted scape bracts and leaves.

Habitat: Hammocks and swamps, and on the periphery of marshes and sloughs; epiphytic.

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Tillandsia balbisiana

Best Survey Season: Spring-summer (fall).

Range-wide Distribution: Mexico, West Indies, Central and South America. In Florida, restricted to the central and south peninsula.

Conservation Status: The most serious threats to this species are the Mexican bromeliad weevil and conversion of its habitat to urban, suburban, or agricultural uses.

Protection and Management: The state of Florida lists this species and most other rosette-forming bromeliads as threatened or endangered. The Mexican bromeliad weevil (*Metamasius callizona*) has killed many plants since its accidental introduction in Broward County in 1989. These weevils were first reported in Hendry County in 1997. This insect burrows into, and destroys, the leafy rosettes of this epiphyte. Since most *Tillandsia* species are slow to mature, protecting the trees in primary habitats will encourage the development of healthy epiphyte populations. Research has been conducted for possible biological control agents, and a test release of a parasitic fly was performed in 2007.

References: Weakley et al. 2023, Wunderlin and Hansen 2011.