Polk County's Most Wanted—Crested Coralroot

In a joint effort to expand the knowledge and understanding of the flora of Polk County, the Pacolet Area Conservancy (PAC) and David Campbell need your help in locating this month's "Most Wanted—Plant," *Hexalectris spicata*, also known by the common names: Crested Coralroot, Spiked Crested Coralroot, or Brunetta.

The purpose of this project is to gain a better understanding of the flora in Polk County and documenting the species present in the county, making sure that the flora of Polk County is well represented in state records and herbaria. The only extensive study was conducted in the 1950's and 1960's by Oliver Freeman.

Hexalectris spicata is in the orchid family and is native to North Carolina. The North Carolina Natural Heritage Program lists the species as "significantly rare" and it is ranked as "imperiled," meaning that some factors make it very vulnerable to extirpation from the state. It has been found in the mountains, piedmont, and the coastal plain in North Carolina. A specimen was collected from Polk County in 1949 and there is also a record of the species occurring in Spartanburg County, South Carolina. Therefore, there is a good chance that the species is growing somewhere in Polk County.

Hexalectris spicata prefers to grow in dry forests and woodlands, especially over mafic or calcareous rocks, although it has also been known to occur in acidic conditions. It contains no chlorophyll, it is a saprophytic (an organism that grows on and derives nourishment from dead or decaying organic matter) perennial herb. It is essentially leafless and can be identified by the 6-32 in tall flesh colored flower stalk adorned with colorful flowers in a loose terminal raceme (an unbranched flower cluster, consisting of a single central stem, along which individual flowers grow on small stalks at intervals, blooming from the base toward the tip), blooming July-August. The flowers are comprised of 3 yellowish brown sepals with brownish purple striations spreading about 0.8 inches and reflexed at the tips. The "lip petal" is yellowish white with bright purple, fleshy ridges. Above the "lip petal" are two yellowish brown sepals with brownish purple striations lateral petals. The fruits are ellipsoid (longer than broad and tapering to approximately the same extent on both ends) capsules that are strongly 3-ribbed, hanging and about 1 inch long.

If landowners think that they have this species growing on their property, or know where it might be located, please contact PAC at 828-859-5060, or e-mail comments, questions, or photos to, landprotection@pacolet.org.