

Polk County's Most Wanted Field Report: Walter's Crownbeard

By David Campbell

This is the first of our 'Reports from the Field' follow-up articles concerning the ongoing quest to find 'Polk County's Most Wanted' rare plants and animals. I recently penned a piece for this series on Walter's Crownbeard (*Verbesina walteri*). My article indicated the rarity and unusual distribution of this beautiful flowering plant. Walter's Crownbeard is known from only a handful of sites statewide, and prefers areas with rich moist soils, such as bottomland forests adjacent to streams. As always, the article requested that Polk County residents report any sighting of the species for follow-up by conservancy staff. Accordingly, the Pacolet Area Conservancy (PAC) and I were very pleased to receive a call from Mr. and Mrs. Bradley of Tryon, who indicated that they thought the plant was growing on their property. Someone must go out to investigate!

After a pleasant phone conversation with Mr. and Mrs. Bradley, arrangements were made for a visit to their home to confirm the presence of Walter's Crownbeard on their property. I had spent a long day in the field at other spots in Polk County that day, and the Bradley's were the final destination on my list of places I had to visit. Driving to their home, I hoped they wouldn't be too alarmed by my disheveled appearance (covered with mud and dirt from field work!). Pulling up to the Bradley's driveway, my spirits were immediately lifted by the site of a fabulous Pitcher Plant bog in their front garden - truthfully, one of the finest I have ever seen. Was this a good omen? Mr. and Mrs. Bradley were very warm in their greetings, and indicated that one of their sons was a Botanist too (exciting news for me, as there are not many of us out there...).

We went for a stroll down a small road on the Bradley property, toward a creek that flows at the back of their home. The topography of the area had a sloping hill easing off into a bottomland...however; the hill was covered in English Ivy so I was somewhat hesitant to get my hopes up - very few plants can survive in a thick patch of English Ivy. Undeterred, Mr. Bradley calmly walked around a corner at the bottom of his property and proceeded to walk up to one of the largest patches of Walter's Crownbeard I have ever seen - growing quite happily up and through the thickly growing English Ivy! I hope my jaw dropping wasn't too obvious to the Bradley's. To see one of our rarest wildflowers growing contentedly up through a patch of one of our most invasive plants is a sight I won't soon forget. It reminded me; once again, that one should never make too many assumptions when it comes to Mother Nature.

After taking several photographs, and collecting a specimen for the UNCC Herbarium, I bid an appreciative farewell to Mr. and Mrs. Bradley - thanking them profusely for their assistance. It was gratifying for me to know that the 'Polk County's Most Wanted' articles had produced real results.

What will our next great find be???