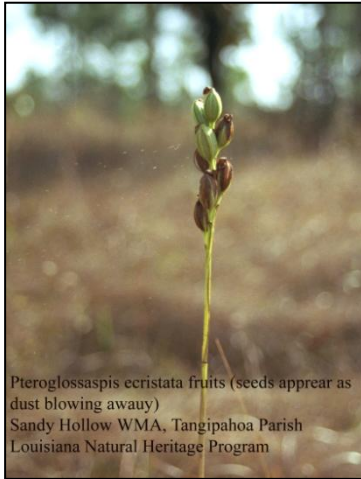


Native Orchid of the Month—October

Pteroglossaspis ecristata
(giant orchid)

Pteroglossaspis ecristata (giant orchid, also known as wild coco) grows three to five feet high in savannas, as well as in sandhills, pine flatwoods, and grasslands. It grows from Florida to Louisiana along the coastal plain. In Louisiana it grows both east of the Mississippi River in flatwoods, and west of the Mississippi River in coastal prairies. Both of these habitats



Pteroglossaspis ecristata fruits (seeds appear as dust blowing away)
Sandy Hollow WMA, Tangipahoa Parish
Louisiana Natural Heritage Program

are at risk from habitat destruction and fire suppression. Like many species of coastal plain savannas, it responds positively to fire.



Two to four, large, paper thin and heavily veined leaves arise from underground pseudobulbs. Inflorescences are erect, densely flowered toward top. Flowers are yellowish green with purplish brown markings and a three-lobed lip. They are twisted in toward the stalk, with a stiff floral bract, 2.5 inches long,

beneath each flower. Sepals and petals are yellow-green, folded forward over the lip.



It flowers July through October with fruits developing September through November. It is rare throughout its most of its range.

The giant orchid is a perennial herb that blooms only every few years, usually only after a fire. Often many flowers will bloom at once and remain open for about a week; they are probably pollinated by bees. Little else is known about the reproductive biology of this species; closely related species in the genus are known to be both self- and cross-fertile. The greatest natural threat to the loss of the species is the lack of fire needed to maintain a favorable habitat.

