

Native Orchid of the Month—October

Triphora trianthophora
(threebirds)

Three birds orchid (*Triphora trianthophora*) is an unusual orchid of deciduous forests ranging across much of central and eastern North America. The common name, three birds orchid, is attributed to the flower's resemblance to three birds in flight. The pink and white flowers are quite small, rarely reaching 1 inch in size and the stems vary greatly in length perhaps due to light and moisture conditions. In some instances stems barely



reach 2 inches in height, and on

other occasions grow up to 8 inches tall. What this species lacks in size it makes up for in mystery and beauty. The striking flower shape and color often stand out in sharp contrast to the deep and dappled shade of the deciduous forests it occupies.

Small, ovate, clasping leaves are scattered along a fragile purple stem and one white to pale pink, nodding flower rises from each axil of uppermost 1-6



(usually 3) leaves. The lip of the flower has three bright green crests.

As the common name implies, each flower resembles a small bird in flight. The plant may remain dormant for long periods, with the underground tuber giving rise to a new stem after several years; when the flowers bloom, they last only one day. The flowers bloom from July through October in mesic woods, ravines, stream valleys, and bottoms.

