Common Name: SWAMP LOUSEWORT

Scientific Name: Pedicularis lanceolata Michaux

Other Commonly Used Names: none

Previously Used Scientific Names: Pedicularis auriculata Small, Pedicularis pallida Nuttall, Pedicularis virginica Poiret

Family: Scrophulariaceae (snapdragon) or Orobanchaceae (broomrape)
Rarity Ranks: G5/S1

State Legal Status: Endangered

Federal Legal Status: none

Federal Wetland Status: FACW

Description: Perennial herb 16 - 32 inches (40 - 80 cm) tall. Stems red or green with purple stripes, slightly angled, the angles rounded and the flat surfaces with a line of hairs between the leaves. Leaves 2 - 4 inches (5 - 10 cm) long, tapering to a blunt tip; edges scalloped or lobed, each lobe with rounded teeth; leaves opposite, the pairs set at right angles to each other, with very short or no leaf stalks; leaf surfaces smooth or with a few short hairs. Flower cluster (40 - 100 cm) tall, narrow, with many leafy bracts; flowers appear to be arranged in a pinwheel pattern when viewed from above. Flowers less than 1 inch (2.3 cm) long, white or pale yellow; tubular with 2 lips, the upper lip hood-like, the lower lip with 3 erect lobes that nearly close the end of the tube.

Similar Species: Canada lousewort (Pedicularis canadensis) is 6 - 12 inches tall, and has alternate, deeply lobed leaves, the lower ones with leaf stalks. The upper stem is very hairy. Flowers appear April–May and are yellow, often with a purple or red upper lip. Plants typically form colonies of many plants.

Related Rare Species: None in Georgia.

Habitat: Bogs, seeps, springheads, wet woods over mafic bedrock.

Life History: Swamp lousewort is a perennial herb that reproduces sexually. Its flowers – with their yellow color, lack of fragrance and nectar, abundance of pollen, and closed lips (requiring a relatively large and strong insect pollinator) – are adapted to attract bees. The pinwheel arrangement of the flowers on the stem is thought to facilitate the foraging movements of bees. Swamp lousewort will not set fruit and produce seeds without cross-pollination. Swamp lousewort (like other members of the broomrape family) is a hemiparasite. Although it photo-synthesizes and produces carbohydrates, it is partially dependent on other plants for water and nutrients, especially iron and phosphorus. As a seedling, it attaches to its host by haustoria, small root-like organs that penetrate the roots of other plants and extract water, minerals, hormones, and sugars. Without the attachment, seedlings fail to thrive.

Survey Recommendations: Surveys are best conducted during flowering (August–October) and fruiting (September–October).

Range: Georgia, north to Maine, west to Nebraska and Manitoba.

Threats: Clearing of streamside and logging in wetland forests, conversion of habitat to pasture; use of herbicides in utility rights-of-way, invasion by exotic pest plants.
Georgia Conservation Status: Three populations are known, 2 on state-owned lands, one in the Chattahoochee National Forest.


Selected References:


Author of Species Account: Linda G. Chafin

Date Compiled or Updated:
L. Chafin, July 2008: original account
K. Owers, Feb. 2010: added pictures