

Conifer Quarterly

Vol. 22 No. 2

Spring 2005





Above: The endangered
Araucaria rulei



All photos this page by Daniel Luscombe

Right: The colorful, exfoliating
bark of a young kauri
(*Agathis australis*)

Below: Foliage of *Araucaria
angustifolia*

Read more about Daniel
Luscombe's trip to New
Zealand on pages 20-25.



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Cover photo: *Larix chinensis* with *Rhododendron purdomii*. Photo by Henrik Sjoman.
See page 32 for more about conifers from Taibai Mountain in China.

Pines and Palmettos

Non-conifer "cones" attract attention at two Southeastern destinations

Text and photos by Maud Henne

This past January, the American Conifer Society's Board of Directors met in Orlando, Florida, rather than in chilly St. Louis, Missouri. In order to have time and opportunity to find and visit botanical gardens, I drove to Orlando from my home in central Virginia, covering about 860 miles (1380 km) each way.

One of my discoveries was **Harry P. Leu Gardens** in Orlando, a 50-acre (0.2 km²) garden estate on Lake Rowena that features towering moss-hung live oaks, camellias and azaleas. Under the canopy of trees, I found what appeared to be cones on a broadleaf plant. Though many

Curcuma sp., shown here at Harry P. Leu Gardens, is an ornamental ginger whose developing inflorescences look much like cones.



of the garden's plants were labeled, this one was not. A cone but no conifer? I took pictures and later requested help from Tom Cox, an expert on Southern plants. He identified this plant as one of the ornamental gingers from the species *Curcuma*. The *Southern Living Garden Book* lists a *Curcuma* with a cone-shaped



inflorescence as *C. alismatifolia* with a common name of Siam tulip.

During my visit to Leu Gardens, I also spotted a large "cone" on a plant that looked like a palm tree. It was actually a cycad (*Cycas* sp.) commonly known as sago palm. The botanical literature points out that these primitive evergreen plants date back to the Jurassic and are more closely related to *Ginkgo* and *Pinus* than to palm trees.

Next, a tree with soft juniper-like foliage drew my attention. Junipers always interest me, and I am especially fond of *Juniperus virginiana* (**Eastern red-cedar**), which is native to my home state of Virginia and grows wild in pastures and on roadsides there, but does not thrive in Florida. The tree in Leu Gardens had soft, fine foliage, not the

The foliage and cone-like structure on this sago palm may resemble those of a conifer, but it is actually a cycad.



prickly leaves of the *J. virginiana*, and the crown was rounded and open (see photo on back cover). According to the label, this was *Juniperus silicicola* (**Southern red-cedar**).

*Under the canopy of trees,
I found what appeared
to be cones on a
broadleaf plant*

I also visited **Audubon Newhall Nature Preserve** on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, which is just north of historic Savannah, Georgia, on the Atlantic coast. This 50-acre (0.2 km²) preserve was created in 1965 and is mostly woodland and marshland surrounding a pond. It might be summarized by two words: pines and palmettos.

One of the eight designated trail areas is called Pine Flats, though the pines themselves tower over visitors. As

the excellent, illustrated eight-page *Trail Guide* explains, so many pines grow throughout the Preserve that their dropping needles create an eerie effect as they catch and hang in other trees and shrubs. They provide natural mulch and – as they slowly decompose – create a highly acidic soil that determines what types of plants may grow there.

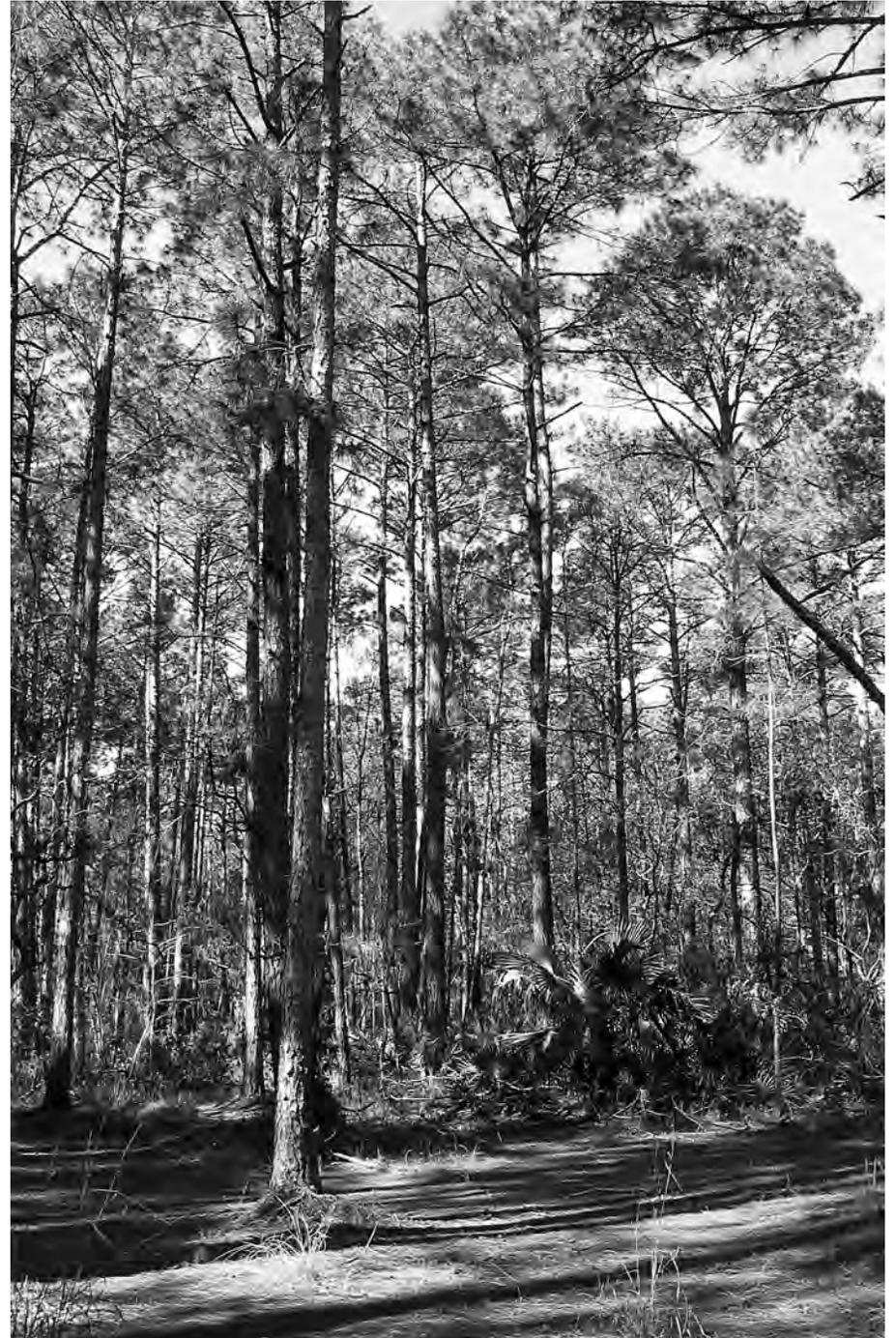
The *Trail Guide* lists four species of pines in the Preserve:

Longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*) is the giant of the drier ridges with an ultimate height of up to 120 feet (37 m). It is named for the long 10- to 15-inch (30- to 38-cm) needles which appear in bundles of three. The cones grow to 10 inches (25 cm) long, and I happened to find and photograph one (see page 14). I had known *P. palustris* before and had even planted and raised

one on my waterfront property in the Chesapeake Bay area. I like them best during their young “grassy” stage when their long needles are especially striking on such small trees. As they mature, their appearance becomes somewhat straggly and loose. *Audubon* magazine reports that longleaf pine forests once covered 80 million acres (320,000 km²) in the southeastern United States and that, due to commercial use and development, only three percent of these vast forests remain. The species’ native habitat stretches from Virginia to Florida and west to Mississippi.

Below: *Juniperus silicicola*

Right: The Pine Flats at Audubon Newhall Nature Preserve



Loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda*) can reach up to 100 feet (30 m) in height and is also known as bull pine or rosemary pine. The latter name refers to the tree's fragrant, resinous foliage. "Loblolly" is the Indian word for mud puddle, referring to the lowlands where these pines grow. Five- to nine-inch (13- to 23-cm) needles grow in clusters of three, and the tree produces three- to five-inch prickly cones. Native habitat: southern New Jersey to Florida to eastern Texas and Oklahoma.

Pond pine (*Pinus serotina*) grows in the wetter parts of the Preserve, as suggested by its name. It reaches heights between 25 and 40 feet (8-12 m), has six- to eight-inch (15- to 20-cm) needles and two-inch (5-cm) acorn-shaped cones that sprout directly from the bark. Native habitat: North Carolina to Florida, mostly on moist sites and swampy areas.

Slash pine (*Pinus elliottii*), according to the *Trail Guide*, is often mistaken for loblolly or longleaf pine. It produces stiff needles up to one foot (30 cm) long in clusters of two and three on the same tree, and the shiny brown cones are 3.5 to 6 inches (9 to 15 cm) long. I was delighted to find branches on the ground and confirm the two- and three-needle arrangement for myself, as well as observe the bluish-purple inflorescences (see photo inside back cover). At one time, this species was used extensively for the production of turpentine, tar and pitch, but now it is mostly grown as shade tree and for pulp and lumber. Native habitat: Coastal Plains, South Carolina to Louisiana.



Top: Cone of *Pinus palustris*

Bottom: Cones of *Pinus serotina*

The *Trail Guide* explains that this ecosystem will eventually shift from pines to oaks – mostly live oaks (*Quercus virginiana*) – due to the lack of sun on the ground and the increasing soil acidity that hampers the development of pine seedlings. Other conifers within the Preserve include **bald cypress** (*Taxodium distichum*), which were leafless during my winter visit, and **Southern red-cedar** (*Juniperus silicicola*) which I described above at Leu Gardens.

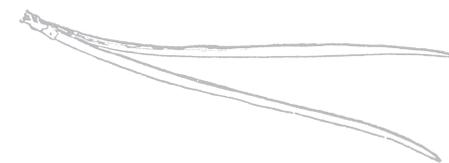
In my opinion, the Audubon Newhall Nature Preserve is the jewel of the 12-mile (20-km) long Hilton Head Island, where manicured residential and commercial developments leave little else for the nature lover.

Driving north on Interstate 95, I passed Fayetteville, North Carolina, but did not stop to visit Cape Fear Botanical Garden on this trip. I did notice along the roadsides a gradual change from pure stands of pines to a mostly hardwood ecosystem.

As much as I enjoyed and learned from my visits with the native pines, I was glad to get back home and look at my collection of exotic pines with their diverse growth habits and colors that are so valuable in a garden setting. ▲

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- Audubon Newhall Preserve Trail Guide*. Hilton Head Island Audubon Society, Hilton Head, SC.
 Bender, Steve (ed.). 2004. *The Southern Living Garden Book*. 2004. Oxmoor House, Inc.
 Krüssmann, G. 1985. *Manual of Cultivated Conifers*. Timber Press, Portland, Oregon.



About the author: Maud Henne has been a member of the Society since 1985 and maintains her late husband's conifer collection, now numbering about 300 plants, at her residence in Charlottesville, Virginia, near Thomas Jefferson's Monticello. She managed the ACS National Office from 1996 to 2000, served as secretary/treasurer of the Southeastern Region from 2002 to 2004, and became president of that Region in October 2004.

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