

TRE MENDOUS trees

Collier and Lee counties are home to 17 national champions

By RALF KIRCHER
Staff Writer

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Still attached to a mature tree, the sprouting seed fell silently — as there likely was no one there in the woods to hear it — into the salty splash below.

From that unremarkable start among mosquitoes, dragonflies and golden orb spiders, grew a new tree alongside a new nation. Both were destined to become superpowers.

The black mangrove tree stands today, still accompanied by the insects whose ancestors remained oblivious of its growth. It stands taller and thicker than its mangrove brethren surrounding it inland from the northern shore of Mound Key in Estero Bay.

In fact, it is taller and thicker than any other black mangrove tree in the country whose growth it silently witnessed.

This black mangrove and 16 other trees of various species in Collier and Lee counties hold the title of National Champion, and each has a place on American Forests' National Register of Big Trees.

The register, begun in 1940, lists what foresters used to call the "bulls of the woods" — the biggest 687 specimens of 823 native and naturalized species across the United States.

Published every other year, the 1998-1999 list has 130 new champions, representing 125 different species. In addition, 140 trees dethroned existing champions, due either to their demise or the discovery of a larger specimen.

Florida alone has 151 entries on the list — more than any other state. California falls a distant second with 86.

"Because of Florida's tropical climate, you have the ability to grow a wider variety of species," said American Forests executive director Deborah Gangloff, whose 124-year-old organization is the oldest nonprofit conservation group in

AREA CHAMPIONS

COLLIER COUNTY

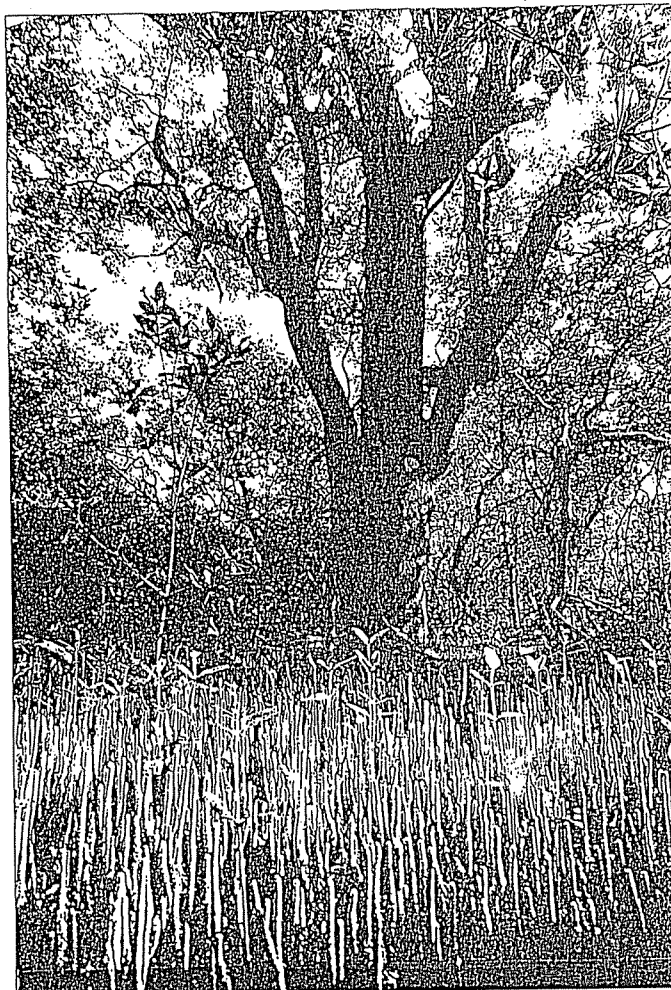
- Dahoon* — Immokalee
- Royal palm — Copeland
- Florida tremas — Collier County

LEE COUNTY

- Black mangrove — Mound Key
- Jamaica caper — Lee County
- Southeastern coralbean — Sanibel Island
- Dahoon* — Fort Myers
- Dahoon* — San Carlos Park
- Florida fishpoison tree — Lee County
- Geiger tree — Lee County
- Gumbo limbo — Captiva Island
- Red mangrove — Sanibel Island
- Florida mayten (2) — Sanibel Island
- Prickly ash — Lee County
- Rapanea — Sanibel Island
- White stopper — Sanibel Island

* Denotes co-champions

Source: National Register of Big Trees



With a 101-inch circumference, this black mangrove tree on Estero Bay's Mound Key is the largest in the United States. It recently received official recognition of its champion status when it was listed on the 1998-1999 National Register of Big Trees. *Cameron Gillie/Staff*

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Richard Workman, an environmental consultant in Lee County's Buckingham and author of "Growing Native," has long been taking advantage of the fruits of the climate, nominating several trees over the years, three of which retain their throne as champions.

"This turns out to be a very good program for getting people out and enjoying the flora of Southwest Florida," Workman said. "We've got a lot of national

See TREES, Page 7B

Erythrina herbacea
Coral bean
Sanibel Island



Piscidia piscipula
Jamaica dogwood
Lee County



Piscidia piscipula

Bursera simaruba

Bursera simaruba
Gumbo limbo
Captiva Island



Cordia sebestena
Gieger tree
Lee County



Trees

Continued from 1B

champions."

To attain a place on the register, trees can be nominated by any individual or group. Each tree is given a point total, figured by adding the trunk's circumference in inches to its height in feet to one-quarter its average crown spread in feet.

California's "General Sherman," a giant sequoia, tops all other point totals at 1,300. By way of contrast, the littlest "big tree" is a 56-point Wright silttassel in Arizona. Mound Key's black mangrove, with its 101-inch circumference, 43-foot height and 57-foot crown, totals 158 points.

Arden Arrington, a tour boat operator who takes groups to Mound Key, co-nominated the black mangrove. The tree was first recognized for its immensity in 1994 when archaeologists studying the island's Calusa Indian past were surveying the site.

TO NOMINATE A TREE

The following information must be submitted to the National Register of Big Trees, American Forests, P.O. Box 2000, Washington D.C. 20013.

1. Correct name of the species or variety. Only U.S. native and naturalized species are eligible.
2. Circumference of the tree in inches at 4 1/2 feet above the ground. If there is a fork at this point, measure the smallest circumference below the fork. If it branches below 4 1/2 feet, measure the largest single stem above that level.
3. Vertical height of the tree to the nearest foot.
4. Average diameter of the crown to the nearest foot. Measure the widest spread of the crown and the narrowest, then add them together and divide by two.
5. Location.
6. Date measured and by whom.
7. Name and address of owner.
8. Clear photograph with date taken.
9. Description of the tree's physical condition.
10. Name and address of nominator.

Source: National Register of Big Trees

Arrington and Workman were interested in nominating the tree and set out to measure it. When they submitted the nomination, they discovered they had

mismeasured and returned to Mound Key to remeasure. Only they couldn't find the tree. Couldn't see the tree for the forest.

With the help of Koreshan State Historic Site manager Larry Fooks, Arrington rediscovered the tree a year or so later and submitted a successful nomination.

Last week, nature photographer Clyde Butcher lugged his 8-by-10 view camera to the tree to photograph it.

"This is the first champion tree I've ever seen that's in nature," Butcher said. "Most of them in Florida are in parks with a fence around them. This is really an exceptional site."

Butcher crouched under his darkcloth, looking through the ground glass of his view camera at the dim image, which reflected upside down through the lens.

Below, the pneumatophore roots protruded from the mushy soil, the roots a physical reflection of the spread of the tree's crown above. Overhead, the black-barked limbs reached crookedly skyward, still holding sprouting seeds that may one day fall to the ground to grow into another champion.

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Collier, Lee home to 17 national champion trees

05/24/98

By RALF KIRCHER, Staff Writer

(Editor's note: A champions list and how to nominate a tree can be found in this story)

About the time George Washington couldn't tell a lie about the cherry tree, a sprig of green sprouted from a black mangrove seed on a tiny key in Southwest Florida.

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(story continues after champions list)

THE CHAMPIONS:

COLLIER COUNTY CHAMPIONS

Dahoon* - Immokalee

Royal palm - Copeland

Florida trema - Collier County

LEE COUNTY CHAMPIONS

Black mangrove - Mound Key

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Jamaica caper - Lee County

Southeastern coralbean - Sanibel Island

Dahoon* - Fort Myers

Dahoon* - San Carlos Park

Florida fishpoison tree - Lee County

Geiger tree - Lee County

Gumbo limbo - Captiva Island

Red mangrove - Sanibel Island

Florida mayten (2) - Sanibel Island

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Feedback



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