

# The Orchid Thief

IDH2930 35A8

Time: Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> period (3-3:50 pm)

**Location:** McGuire Center for Lepidoptera and Biodiversity, Florida Museum of Natural History, Powell Hall, 3215 Hull Road; Room 217 arrive at front desk at 2:55. This class will be online or meet in person.

Fall 2021

**Short Title:** The Orchid Thief by Susan Orlean. 1998, revised edition, 2014. Nonfiction. 1998, revised edition, 2014. Nonfiction

**Long Title:** *The Orchid Thief: A true story of beauty and obsession* By Susan Orlean 1998, revised edition, 2014. Nonfiction

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**Office hours:** Thursdays 10 am–12pm McGuire Center for Lepidoptera and Biodiversity, Powell Hall, 3215 Hull Road, Room 216

## Course Description

The plant family Orchidaceae is geographically distributed on six continents and amazingly diverse, including about one fourth of the world's plant species. *The Orchid Thief* is focused on a somewhat eccentric man, John Laroche, who indeed has more than a normal love for growing orchids. He goes to orchid shows and is caught up in the excitement of seeing new species and hybrids on exhibit and/or for sale by vendors. He is also interested in the conservation of orchids and seeing them in their native habitat around Florida. Laroche was employed at one time by the Seminole Tribe of Florida to set up a plant nursery with an orchid propagation laboratory on tribal land. All orchid species in the wild are currently protected by the CITES treaty (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) and can only be observed, not collected, in their respective natural habitat. Laroche decides to collect wild plants, including the native Ghost Orchid, *Polyrrhiza lindenii*, which is protected on CITES 1 (most endangered list), from the Fakahatchee Strand State Park. He was convicted of removing plants from the Park.

This book provides a brief history of orchid growing in England where some of the major growers sent collectors out to remote and exotic locations on different continents to ship back plants. Unfortunately most of these plants died before they arrived. A number of these growers had an insatiable desire to describe new species and the competition was unbelievable. It was indeed "orchidilirium." Today orchids are big part of the major plant industry business in Florida with orchids sold in grocery and other big box stores. New species continue to be discovered today but

some of the original species are no longer extant in the wild. In addition, outreach education concerning growing orchids continues through local orchid societies and shows throughout the Florida. Orlean also covers the history of the development of southwestern Florida including the Tamiami Trail, introduction of invasive plants, logging of cypress, introduction of agricultural sugar, and setting up Fakahatchee Strand State Park and the Florida Land Conservation program.

**Course objectives and student expectations:** There are two aspects of this book. The book was written derived from an article published in the Miami Herald about an a local nursery employee, John Laroche, who had been arrested for stealing orchids from Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve in southwestern Florida near Naples, FL. Laroche's defense was a loophole in the law that he claimed allowed the Seminole Indians to remove endangered orchid species from the swamp. He accepted a plea deal which included a fine and six months' probation. The author, Susan Orlean, became intrigued with the situation and interviewed Laroche for an article in the *New Yorker* and subsequently published the book, *The Orchid Thief* in 1998. Orlean became fascinated with the native orchids and everything that Larouche was doing, including attending orchid society meetings and attending shows. She also was interested in the history of the development of southwestern Florida and the Tamiami Trail. Her knowledge also extended to the history of plant nurseries in south Florida, the important role that the Seminoles played in Florida from 1821 to date among other topics.

As background for above, students will learn about the natural history of Florida orchids with an emphasis on southwestern part of the state. They will have an opportunity to see actual herbarium specimens and the Euglossine bees and hawkmoths which are involved in the fertilization of the flowers. Insects are necessary for the pollination of orchids and other plants, and over the years, progress has been made for new techniques for propagation of orchids. They will learn that the formal history of growing orchids began in London England, and with the advances made with greenhouses and Edwardian glass houses in 1850's, cultivated orchids were in bloom throughout the year. Collecting native orchids in the tropics was a dangerous business, and quite competitive. This competition continues today among professional and amateur growers through the artificial crosses made and exhibited at shows. The nursery business in Central and South Florida economically is one of Florida's major growth industries. Finally, the conservation of orchids and bromeliads are responsible for the development of the Florida State Preserves and Conservation areas and Parks, which enabled conservation management native species that are present today.

**Required textbooks:** *The Orchid Thief: A true story of beauty and obsession* By Susan Orlean 1998, revised edition, 2014. Nonfiction.

## Course Schedule

### Orchid Thief Syllabus

8/24/2021 Visit to the Rainforest, Florida Museum Natural History, Cultural Plaza

8/31/2021 Chapter 1 The Millionaire's Hothouse: Setting the stage

9/7/2021 Chapter 2 Cloning of the Ghost orchid, *Polyrrhiza lindenii*

9/14/2021 Chapter 3 A Green Hell. Also read pp. 112–114. Guest Lecturer, Dr. Haleigh Ray, Stetson University. Research in the Fakahatchee Strand and the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge.

9/21/2021 Chapter 4 Orchid Fever -- Schemes to find pollinators. Dr. Lucas Majure and Dr. Kent Perkins. We will have a virtual tour of the Herbarium in Dickinson Hall at 1659 Museum Rd. The focus will be on Florida's native orchids.

9/28/2021 Chapter 5 A Mortal Occupation Collecting orchids in the wild can be dangerous!

10/5/2021 Chapter 6 Gorgeous. Propagation of Orchids. Guest Lecture Dr. Michael Kane UF/IFAS See Kauth, P. J. et al. 2008. Presentation on hand pollination and in vitro symbiotic orchid seed germination DOI 10.1007/s11240-008-9365-1

10/12/2021 Chapter 7 The Good Life. Fakahatchee habitat and the Seminole and Miccosukee Indians.

10/19/2021 Chapter 8 Anyone Can Grow Orchids. History of orchid growers and plant nurseries in South Florida. New economic opportunities for growing orchids, especially *Vanilla* species.

### **TOPIC FOR THREE PAGE PAPER AND PRESENTATION DUE ON 10/19/21**

10/26/2021 Chapter 9 Plant Crimes -- Modern day competition among orchid growers including stolen plants.

11/3/2021 Chapter 10 Barbecued Doves. Legal issues concerning the introduction of non-native species into the U. S. especially Florida under the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and conservation management.

11/10/2021 Chapter 11 Osceola's Head. Legal issues for Laroche and the Seminoles.

11/17/1921 Chapters 12 Fortunes. Laroche and his new careers. Chapter 13 A Kind of Direction. Laroche and Orlean finally visit Fakahatchee together

11/24/21 Student presentations

**Student assignments and expectations** – Grades will be based on attendance, class participation and required reading on different topics for discussion each week. Students will be required to write a three- page paper on any of the above subject and make 10-15-minute PowerPoint presentation. Grades for the latter will also include the delivery.

You will learn about:

- the native orchids of Florida and insects how insects are involved in their pollination
- new techniques for the propagation of orchids and new economic opportunities for growing the Vanilla orchid
- The main character, John Laroche, went to trial for failing to obey the laws covering the collection of orchids, bromeliads and other endemic plants in a state conservation preserve. There are certain guidelines concerning such plants in the CITES regulations.
- The history of collecting of orchids throughout the world and the development of growing orchids in an Edwardian house and eventually in a greenhouse.
- The development of southwest Florida and problems encountered in clearing the area for the Tamiami Trail.
- The history and interaction of the Spanish and Seminoles and their legal status in the U.S. today

### Evaluation of Grades

Attendance	100	10%
Class participation	300	30%
Paper	300	30%
PowerPoint	300	30%
Total	1000	100%

### Grading Scale

Score	Percent	Grade	Grade Points
934-1000	93.4-100	A	4.00
900-933	90.0-93.3	A-	3.67
867-899	86.7-89.9	B+	3.33
834-866	83.4-86.6	B	3.00
800-833	80.0-83.3	B-	2.67
767-799	76.7-79.9	C+	2.33
734-766	73.4-76.6	C	2.00
700-733	70.0-73.3	C-	1.67
667-699	66.7-69.9	D+	1.33
634-666	63.4-66.6	D	1.00
600-633	60.0-63.3	D-	0.67

0-599	0-599	E	0.00
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### **Class attendance and Make-Up policy**

Class attendance is expected via ZOOM in part and also directly in the classroom. Each unexcused absence will result in a 10 point reduction in the final grade. Excused absences are consistent with university policies in the undergraduate catalog

(<https://catalog.ufl/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>) and require appropriate documentation. Students will be required to provide the topic for three-page paper on variety of topics discussed in the course. In addition, students will have to provide the completed three-page paper and make a PowerPoint and provide a pdf of the presentation to the instructor at the end of the class. Students should arrange with the instructor for makeup material, and the student will receive one week to prepare for any makeup assignment, if circumstances allow it.

### **Students Requiring Accommodations**

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, [www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/)) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

### **Course Evaluation**

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at

<https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>.

### **Class Demeanor**

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open.

### **Materials and Fees**

Other than the book listed above, there are no additional fees for this course. Students will be required to wear a mask during any in person meetings.

### **University Honesty Policy**

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code.” On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code (<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor in this class.

### **Counseling and Wellness Center**

Contact information for the Counseling and Wellness Center:

<http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>, 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.-

Dr. Jacqueline Y. Miller

I serve as a Curator within the Department of Natural History, Florida Museum of Natural History, with a specialty on the biology, systematics, biogeography and the faunal biodiversity of Lepidoptera in the West Indies, Central America, and South America. In addition, I currently chair two graduate students in the Department of Entomology and Nematology and currently serve as a member of one Masters and five Ph. D. committees (UF) and one in Puerto Rico. I have served on two foreign student Ph. D. committees. I also mentor, train and assist other graduate and undergraduate students at UF and other institutions. A Fellow and Honorary Life Member of the Entomological Society of America, I also serve as an Emeritus Judge of the American Orchid Society.