Cardinal Airplant in Florida Live Oak (Tillandsia Fasciculata?)

Cardinal Airplant; © Tom Truex, 2010.

We have several varieties of airplants in the live oak in our yard in Davie, Florida. The one pictured here is a bromeliad (click on images to enlarge). I believe it is the CARDINAL AIRPLANT (*Tillandsia Fasciculata*), aka GIANT AIRPLANT or STIFF-LEAVED WILD PINE[1. Wild Florida Photos, Nature Photograpy by Paul Rebmann (http://www.wildflphoto.com/species.php?k=p&id=81)] I did not climb a ladder to measure, but I estimate the plant pictured here is about 18 to 24 inches from top to bottom. Unfortunately, I can't tell you much about how these airplants settled in our live oak tree. We planted the oak about 15 years ago. I didn't put any airplants in the tree myself, so I'm assuming it is the work of birds, hurricane winds, or some of the other many small mammals or reptiles that creep around our yard. These airplants are apparently propagated by seeds. I'm not sure if they can be propagated by other means as well. I notice that they sometimes grow in clumps. When the weather is windy, some of the airplants blow out of the tree. I try my best to throw them back to the higher branches in the tree. My family considers it a great comical sport to watch my efforts

in throwing these plants up (they don't always stick where intended, requiring several throws on my part).

Closeup of Cardinal Airplant; © Tom Truex, 2010.

> *Giant airplant is a flowering bromeliad. It is a perennial[2.* ***Perennial:*** *Having a life cycle lasting more than two years. Source: http://Dictionary.Com], epiphytic[3.* ***epiphytic:*** *(noun Botany) A plant that grows above the ground, supported nonparasitically by another plant or object, and deriving its nutrients and water from rain, the air, dust, etc.; air plant; aerophyte. Source: http://Dictionary.Com] plant that is rarely found growing in cypress swamps and hammocks in Miami-Dade, Brevard, and Monroe Counties (Wunderlin, 2003). Tillandsia fasciculata is listed as a threatened plant in the Preservation of Native Flora of Florida Act. It blooms from summer to fall.*
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> *It's current distribution includes Florida, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and Georgia, though it is rare in the latter (Kartesz, 1999).*
>
> *SOURCE: Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants, University of Florida, IFAS,* ***http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/node/452***

The Cardinal Airplant is in danger because of loss of habitat and a bromeliad weevil (*Metamasius callizona*) that feeds on it.

FOOTNOTES: