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# CAROLINA BAYS

## Overview

Carolina bays are small wetland depressions which are symmetrically oval in shape. When seen from the air, they are very distinct and the long axis of the oval is always oriented northwest to southeast. These wetlands occur only in the coastal plain regions of North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia and vary in size from one to thousands of acres. The origin of Carolina bays is a mystery. Some theories include: meteor showers, ocean currents, and sinkholes but each theory has at least one flaw to disprove it.

There are several different vegetative structures found in Carolina bays based on the depression depth, size, hydrology, and subsurface. Some bays are predominately open water areas with large scattered pondcypress trees, while others are very thick, shrubby areas called pocosins, growing on peat mats.

## Important Messages



Many Carolina bays have fallen victim to farming, highways, developments and golf courses. Now that they are recognized as unique areas, efforts have been undertaken to protect the remaining bays and the Francis Marion National Forest harbors two dozen of the 200 that exist in South Carolina.



Bays are very unique in their shape, vegetative content and origin. Some of the plants associated with Carolina bays practice carnivory, such as the pitcher plant.



The Forest Service has reintroduced fire, through prescribed burning, to some of the bays on the Francis Marion National Forest. Fire is an important part of the historic ecology of bays.

## Species Checklist

### Plants

bladderwort  
butterwort  
fetterbush  
loblolly bay  
pitcher plant  
pondcypress  
pond pine  
red bay  
sundew  
sweet bay

### Animals

black bear  
dragonflies  
green anole  
green tree frog  
wood stork



### Vocabulary

carnivorous plant  
coastal plain  
ecosystem  
fire-dependent  
hydrology  
peat  
pocosin  
prescribed burning  
sinkhole  
wetland



Trumpet pitcher plant (*Sarracenia flava*)

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