Technical Report

Wetland Flora

No. 98-1 / May 1998

Gene Silberhorn

Meadow Beauty

***Rhexia mariana* L.**

Growth Habit and Diagnostic Characteristics

Rhexia mariana is an erect, perennial herb (1 to 3 feet tall) with opposite, serrated leaves and four petaled lavender, rose or pink flowers. The reproductive parts (8 stamens and 1 pistil) in the center of the flower are a distinctive bright yellow. The petals are sensitive to wind and rough handling and fall off readily. It is tempting to pick these plants for a bouquet, but they are better left to grace their natural habitat.

There is a great deal of variability in the species: the leaves are always opposite, but they may not be serrated and reduced by half in size as illustrated, which is more typical. The leaves, stems and seed capsules vary from dense to sparsely hairy. This species of meadow beauty is often found in dense colonies or clusters of stems coming up from slender underground rhizomes. The globular, urn-like seed capsule with the remaining four sepals is a diagnostic feature of the genus *Rhexia.*

Distribution

Rhexia mariana is found in wet conditions throughout much of the Eastern two thirds of the United States.

Habitat

Meadow beauty is frequently found in wet meadows, roadside ditches, coastal dune swales and on the margins of swamps. *Rhexia mariana* is frequently found in the nutrient poor, acidic, wet sand soils of maritime dune swales. In these habitats, *Rhexia* is often associated with sundew *(Drosera* spp.), rushes *(Juncus* spp.), yellow-eyed grass *(Xyris* spp.) and high-bush blueberry *(Vaccinium corymbosum,* Wetland Flora, No.97-5, July 1997).

Ecological Value/Benefits

The striking beauty of the blooms of this plant is its greatest value.

Wetland Indicator Status

According to the *Draft Revision of The National List of Plant Species that Occur in Wetlands, 1997, Rhexia mariana* is classified as an **obligate wetland plant** (OBL). OBLs are plants that almost always occur in wetlands (>99% probability).

Rhexia mariana L.

Wetlands Program
School of Marine Science
Virginia Institute of Marine Science
College of William and Mary
Gloucester Point, Virginia 23062
Dr. Carl Hershner, Program Director

This report was funded, in part, by the Department of Environmental Quality's Coastal Resources Management Program through Grant No. NA67OZ0360-01 of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management, under the Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended.

Illustration by Kent Forrest

Printed on recycled paper.