



# Castellow Hammock

“I think that I shall never see a poem lovely as a tree.”

- Joyce Kilmer

## Tropical Hardwood Hammock

Tropical hardwood hammocks are unique and imperiled plant communities. The forest fragments that remain of these ecosystems occur on the limestone Miami rock ridge that runs along the Atlantic Coast of South Florida and is no higher than 24 feet in elevation in Miami-Dade County. The word hammock was taken from *hamac*, meaning “sleeping place” in the language of the Taino Indians, an extinct Arawakan people of the Bahamas and Greater Antilles. In the historic landscape, hammocks were small islands of broad-leaved forests containing a tall temperate evergreen, and semi-evergreen tropical tree species and small flowering trees, shrubs, ferns, bromeliads, and orchids. The closed canopy creates a humid forest interior with a low light level. It has been estimated that there were originally more than 500 hammocks. Today, more than half of these hammocks have been lost to land clearing and development. Nearly all remaining hammocks are in public ownership.



In 1962, a 50 acre parcel known as Castellow Hammock was purchased by Miami-Dade County for a park site. The most valuable asset of this site was the 45 acres of tropical hardwood hammock. This core hammock parcel was only a small part of the larger hammock complex of which most was still owned by various private landowners. The park opened an environmental education center in 1974. In the past 10 years, the Miami Dade County’s Environmentally Endangered Lands (EEL) Program has expanded the protected area by acquiring strategic hammock pieces expanding the park to 110 acres, which has more than doubled the original size of the protected natural area. Castellow Hammock is a popular park for birders, butterfly enthusiasts, and botanists-and also serve as a place for city dwellers to get closer to nature and rejuvenate the human spirit. Painted buntings frequent the bird feeders from fall into spring each year and hummingbirds are common in our hummingbird and butterfly garden in front of the nature center.



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