

## JAPANESE CLIMBING FERN— NO PROBLEMA? THINK AGAIN.

We stepped across the old wooden bridge onto Florida River Island, created by creek tributaries in the renown Apalachicola River floodplain of northern Florida, and were aghast, awestruck even (but not speechless, of course—being a group of pest plant managers). Here was a rich floodplain forest (easily over 20 tree species in the overstory) swaddled up to its neck in a dense light-green blanket of Japanese climbing fern (*Lygodium japonicum*). On the ground, the blanket covered well over 50% of the area in sight, encroaching on native herbs such as a patch of rare spiderlily, and smothering overstory recruits. The seedlings and saplings bowed with the weight of the viney fern; beneath that weight they were leafless, dying brown, or dead. Gee, no recruits, eventually no forest—and so dies this fern's reputation as a "wimp" compared to its sister scourge of south Florida, *Lygodium microphyllum* (Old World climbing fern). Needless to say, the Northwest Florida Water Management District plans to stem the rising flood of *japonicum* in this river basin famous for its endemism—at least in this spot, at least for a time.— K.C. Burks