Wetland Plant Identification Workshop

May 25–29, 2026
Highlands Biological Station

Instructor
Joey Shaw, Ph.D.
Professor of Biological Sciences, The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga
Office: 423-425-4265 | Cell: 423-443-9568
joey-shaw@utc.edu

Course Description

This workshop is designed for participants seeking to strengthen their ability to observe, collect, identify, and assess wetland vascular plants. Accurate identification of wetland species is essential for determining ecological condition, conducting wetland delineations, and understanding habitat integrity.

Students will build identification skills through field-based collecting, lab-based keying, online herbarium resources, and species assessments using tools such as coefficients of conservatism. Because the workshop focuses on wetlands within an hour of HBS, the emphasis will be on skill-building rather than surveying the full diversity of southeastern wetland types.

Participants may tailor their work to plant groups of interest—from woody species to graminoids—and will receive support with interpreting keys, terminology, and plant structures. Students will assemble reference collections, with dedicated time at the end of the course for preparing specimens.

The primary identification key will be the draft Second Edition of the Guide to the Vascular Plants of Tennessee, provided by the instructor.

Prerequisites & Prior Training

No prior experience with wetland plants is required. A foundational understanding of botanical terminology is helpful but not necessary—participants of varying backgrounds are welcome.

Some field days may run up to 12 hours, and participants should be prepared for extended outdoor activity.

Instructional Materials

- Draft Second Edition of the *Guide to the Vascular Plants of Tennessee* (provided)
- Optional supplemental keys such as Flora of the Southeastern United States (available online)

Field Trips & Required Equipment

Daily field trips will focus on plant collection from a variety of nearby wetlands. Collected specimens will be returned to the lab for keying and preparation.

Participants should bring:

- Hand lens
- Raingear & small backpack
- Bug spray & sunscreen
- Knee-high rubber boots
- Notebook & field guides
- Snacks, lunch, and plenty of water
- Optional: headlamp or small flashlight for seepage communities

The course does not require waders.

HBS will supply dissecting scopes and tools, though students may bring personal forceps or dissecting needles.

Evaluation (for students taking the course for academic credit)

Component	Points
Quizzes (field or classroom)	50 pts
Final Exam (plant terminology)	50 pts
Plant Collection (30 species × 5 pts)	150 pts
Total	250 pts

Daily Schedule & Expectations

Class begins each day at 9:00 a.m., with participants expected to work until 5:00 p.m. Most days include a field trip of varying length—some short local walks, others up to a two-hour drive.

Participants should arrive each morning prepared to remain in the field all day unless otherwise directed.

If severe weather occurs, class will shift to lab-based work on campus. Evening lab time may occur informally as needed.

Students with Disabilities

Participants with disabilities or conditions that may affect course performance should notify the instructor and HBS staff (828-526-2602) prior to the course start date to discuss accommodations.

Tentative Schedule

(Dates below reflect example sequencing from the instructor; activities will follow a similar progression during the May 25–29 session.)

Monday

- Meet in lab at 10:00 a.m.
- Introductions, backgrounds, and goals

- Overview of wetland types and weekly plan
- Short local field trip

Tuesday – Major Field Day

- Long-distance field trip to lower elevations (weather dependent)
- Collect extensive plant material for lab work

Wednesday

- Short local field trip
- Significant lab time for keying specimens

Thursday

- Moderate field trip
- Lab time to continue specimen identification

Friday

- Short local field trip
- Afternoon: finalize all specimens and prepare collections

Saturday (for-credit students only)

- 8:00–10:00 a.m.: Final exam and submission of plant collections
- Course concludes by 12:00 p.m.