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Santa Fe Audubon Society - Florida

Santa Fe Audubon Society

Melrose, FL

MARCH 2021

NEWSLETTER

"OFF THE MAIN TRAIL"

Suggested places for creating your own field trip.

TURKEY CREEK PRESERVE

Main trailhead & parking area 6300 N.W. 93rd Ave, Alachua, FL



Turkey Creek Preserve is approximately 375 acres and is located within the City of Alachua. The property was acquired in December of 2009, with funds from the Wild Spaces Public Places Sales Tax and with reimbursement from Florida Communities Trust. The preserve protects numerous habitat types, including basin swamp, depression marsh, dome swamp, upland hardwood forest, blackwater streams, and sinkholes. It is also home to state-endangered woodland poppymallow, as well as state threatened gopher tortoises.



With five miles of trails, visitors have ample opportunities for recreational activities and wildlife viewing. All marked trails are open to hikers, with select trails allowing off-road bicycling and equestrian use. This preserve also has a half-mile Fitness Trail featuring seven exercise stations for patrons to add a workout to their visit.

source:

<https://alachuacounty.us/news/article/pages/Turkey-Creek-Preserve-Ribbon-Cutting.aspx>

THE NATIVE PLANT CONNECTION

SPANISH NEEDLE or COMMON BEGGAR'S TICK

(Bidens Alba)



To most gardeners in the United States, this plant is a pesty weed – invasive, ugly and something to be uprooted immediately. To butterflies and bees, it is the most attractive plant in the garden. In Florida, it is one of the top three nectar-producing plants and therefore beloved by bees and beekeepers alike! It lures multitudes of butterflies, including: Julias, Ruddy dagger-wings, Monarchs, American Painted Ladies, Common Buckeyes. It is the host plant for the Dainty Sulphur butterfly.

In other parts of the world where it grows, including Africa, South America, Jamaica, and Asia, it is beloved and used to make herbal tea. It has multiple other uses as well. The plant alleviates rashes, itching, and other skin issues. The leaves can be crushed to produce a sap used on cuts to aid in blood clotting. The leaves can be cooked like collards, while the raw flower petals make a beautiful salad topping. Please note that if you are going to experiment with eating it, please make sure it has not come from an area sprayed with pesticides or herbicides (which shouldn't be used anyway if you want to attract bees and butterflies).

Spanish Needle grows to a height of 2-3 feet in full sun but will grow in partially shaded sites as well. The flowers are aster like with several 1/2" white rays and yellow centers, blooming all year. You can easily grow it from seed since one plant can produce 3,000 to 6,000 seeds that are dispersed by wind and water but most often become attached to fur or clothing. However, if you have it in your garden or yard already, please leave it there and enjoy an inexpensive way to attract bees and butterflies or something for your salad!

BIRD OF THE MONTH

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*)
band code "GBHE"



Whether poised at a river bend or cruising the coastline with slow, deep wingbeats, the Great Blue Heron is a majestic sight. This stately heron with its subtle blue-gray plumage often stands motionless as it scans for prey or wades belly deep with long, deliberate steps. They may move slowly, but Great Blue Herons can strike like lightning to grab a fish or snap up a gopher. In flight, look for this widespread heron's tucked-in neck and long legs trailing out behind.

Scan shorelines, river banks, and the edges of marshes, estuaries, and ponds across much of the U.S. for this tall, slow-moving heron. Great Blue Herons also feed in meadows, farmland, and other open fields. Some colonies or "heronries" are found near developed areas; look for the herons' bulky stick nests high in trees. And once you recognize their slow wingbeats and massive silhouettes, you'll start to notice these birds in flight high in the sky as well.



COOL FACTS:

Despite their impressive size, Great Blue Herons weigh only 5 to 6 pounds thanks in part to their hollow bones—a feature all birds share.

For more information about Great Blue Herons visit:

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Great_Blue_Heron/id

Fun Fact: A group of herons has many collective nouns, including as a "battery", "hedge", "pose", "rookery" and "scattering" of herons.



Kestrel Corner

by Bill Chitty

The Kestrel Box Project had a very successful 2020 nesting season, with four different boxes producing a total of 16 fledged young American Kestrels. Unfortunately, three of those boxes have serious ongoing disturbances nearby, and it is doubtful we will see the same production this year. On the plus side, the one undisturbed box already has its pair of kestrels preparing to raise young. This box (#22) has produced young the last three years in a row.

The disturbances at two locations is the staging of equipment and supplies for replacing the massive towers carrying the FPL high tension power lines. The third box has a huge mound of crushed lime rock almost on top of it with dump trucks and loaders around almost constantly. Last year during the entire nesting season, one of our successful boxes was about 100 feet away from a temporary parking area for bulldozers and pickup trucks, and our kestrels raised four young. So maybe there is room to hope. The new pole placements this year have boxes within 3/4 of a mile of all the disturbed boxes, maybe that will help. Monitoring starts on April 5; it won't be long before we find out.

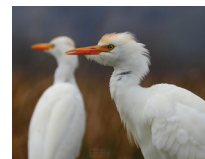
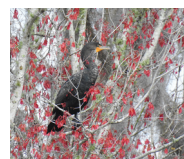


FLORIDA WILDLIFE EXTENSION Wildlife Happenings

Click on the link below to check out the "Wildlife Happenings" in our area.

https://wec.ifas.ufl.edu/extension/wildlife_info/happenings/

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