



Oakland Nature Preserve, Inc.

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Spring 2010

New Science Club for Junior Scientists



Rotary Classroom showing incubator (far left) and microscope stations.

Oakland Nature Preserve is offering a new after-school science club for young budding scientists! Students in grades K through 8 can meet with other like-minded students and learn about science and nature with Clayton Ferrara, ONP's Director of Education and Ms. Jessica Masser-Schurig of Oakland Avenue Charter School.

Students will make crafts and nets, collect plankton and insects, use binoculars to identify birds, plant plants, dig up fossils, make molds of animal tracks, assemble skeletons, and earn their Junior Scientist Certificate!

The enrollment fee for the pilot semester is \$15.00. Students may attend as many of the classes as they would like during the semester. Beginning April 8, 2010, classes will be offered every Thursday from 4:00 to 5:30pm, until the end of the first semester, July 29, 2010. Space is limited to 30 students per semester at this time. Please call 407.905.0054 for more details.

This is designed as a drop-off program; however, parents are welcome to stay for the class. We will not release students for pickup to adults other than those dropping them off without written consent.

Clayton Louis Ferrara, ONP Director of Education

Quail Restoration Project

Quail populations in Florida have shown a sharp decline in the last ten years. Some estimates are as high as 80%. We rarely see or hear them anymore in West Orange County.

Therefore, ONP is going to pursue a Bobwhite Quail Restoration Program.

The project will begin with planting food plots throughout the area on our property and the adjacent hobby farm. We will then bring in eggs to hatch or hatchlings from commercial operations, raise them to maturity, and release them. Then we step aside and hope they will remain on site and become a breeding population.

We know this is not easy and may not work, but we will be able to say we tried hard!

ONP Community Rummage Sale

ONP will hold a large community rummage sale to benefit the Preserve on Saturday, May 1, from 9:00am to 4:00pm, to be held in Oakland on the corner of Tubb Street and Oakland Avenue.

Supporters of the Preserve are asked to donate items to be sold and to deliver them to the Preserve during the week of April 25-30. If space allows, booth spaces will be made available at a nominal fee for homeowners to sell their own goods.

Please consider donating unwanted household items or volunteering to help with this big project.

Further information will be available as the project is organized. Watch the West Orange Times or visit our website at www.OaklandNaturePreserve.org.

Educating • Conserving • Restoring

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Letter from the President

If you have visited the preserve recently, you have seen how much use the Preserve is getting and how many activities are going on there. We are happy with the progress and excited about the programs being presented and developed. The Preserve will become increasingly valuable in the coming years.

Unfortunately, we have lost Tom Rodriguez, our Executive Director, because of decreased funding. One of the things that has caused this problem (in addition to decreased donations) is the fact that our fundraising for the past five years has focused on getting our building completed, so most of our income has been designated for the building fund, leaving us really short on operational funds. We were able to complete the building without a mortgage, but now face the chore of operations on a limited income.

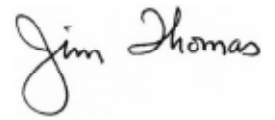
One of the most important programs we are developing is the formation of an Endowment Fund (see additional information in this newsletter) and a real campaign toward encouraging supporters to include ONP in their estate planning. This is the only long-term answer to operating the

Preserve, allowing all our volunteers and staff to focus on programs and maintenance and less on continual fundraising.

If anyone has ideas or experience in this field, please volunteer some time toward this goal.

The biggest need we have at this time, beside income, is for volunteers to help develop and operate this wonderful Preserve. In this issue we will list some of the jobs we need covered and a wish list for items we still need to make this Preserve more and more valuable. Please consider volunteering some time, even if it is only a few hours each month. I can guarantee it will be rewarding as you get involved.

My thanks to all of you who have contributed time and dollars to Oakland Nature Preserve. We plan to continue our projects and develop new programs, and we need your continued support! Stay in touch and come out to visit frequently



Lake Apopka Restoration Update

Several projects are under way to restore Lake Apopka. The Marsh Flow-Way is performing well. The current flow rate is 130 cubic feet per second. The removal of nutrients and solids is excellent, following two separate years of maintenance work on the treatment cells. Since November, 2003, the Marsh Flow-Way has filtered nearly 2.6 times the volume of Lake Apopka and has removed more than 62 million pounds of suspended solids and 37,300 pounds of total phosphorus from lake water entering the Flow-Way.

The gizzard shad removal project shut down early in 2009 because catches declined. A total of 674,803 pounds were harvested from Lake Apopka in the summer and fall of 2009, which is less than in previous years. Gizzard shad removal is scheduled to resume in the fall of 2010. Experimental gill net catches of shad in February and March of 2010 were the lowest on record. Although the low temperatures this winter may have also negatively affected the fish, scientists working on this project feel that the low catch results demonstrate that gizzard shad populations in the lake have been effectively decreased. Since gizzard shad removal began in 1993, more than 17 million pounds have been removed from the lake.

Construction continues on the North Shore Restoration Area (NSRA) to prepare new phases of wetland restoration areas for re-flooding. Monitoring continues in Phase 1 (1,200 acres) and Phase 2 (1,400 acres) to ensure the safety of birds using these newly flooded wetlands. The number of birds that are returning to these areas is amazing. The Zellwood Christmas Bird Count (CBC), which includes parts of Lake and Orange counties, Lake Apopka, and the NSRA, counted over 160 species of birds on December 23, 2009. The Zellwood CBC holds the record for the highest consecutive inland bird count of any area in the nation.



Emerging eel grass beds. Photo: SJRWMD

A joint, three-year alligator study was completed this year. Scientists from the St. Johns River Water Management District (District), University of Florida, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission worked together to assess alligator health, hatch rates, and movement in Lake Apopka and the marsh properties.

Invasive island apple snails are still present in the Winter Garden area where they were first discovered in 2006. District staff continues to search for and destroy eggs from the invasive snails each week. The District has purchased special traps and a newly invented bait to specifically attract and catch these snails. As soon as lake water temperatures increase, the District plans to begin trapping and removing the invasive snails. Residents in the Winter Garden area are asked not to disturb the traps when found (they will be secured with white pvc

pipes and flagging material). Handling live snails can potentially expose humans to parasites, and the shells are very sharp.

Total phosphorus (TP) in the lake dropped to 0.06 milligrams per liter (mg/L) this winter before rising again after multiple storm events. The goal for TP in Lake Apopka is still 0.055 mg/L. The rainfall this winter has brought water levels in Lake Apopka and the Harris Chain of Lakes up to regulation schedule depths. Higher lake levels should result in improved water quality and healthier submersed plant beds in these lakes. District staff is mapping and studying eel grass beds in Lake Apopka and hope to continue to encourage the spread of native submersed plants such as eel grass in the lake, while keeping out the invasive plant, hydrilla.

Jim Peterson, St. Johns River Water Management District

Restoration Update

The grounds at the Preserve have never looked better. It would be nice if the Garden of Weedin' Volunteers could take all the credit, but the long, cold winter did a lot of the work.

Now is a good time to see which plants were not affected by the frost. The black-eyed susans, blanket flowers, pennyroyal, and blueberry plants in the Bioscape garden laughed at the cold. Most of the exotic plants melted, making our job so much easier right now, but they will be back with a vengeance as soon as it gets warmer.

Two of the sandhill habitat's prettiest spring bloomers, the chickasaw plum trees and the summer haw, have started flowering.

The good news is, there are a number of projects in the works. An Eagle Scout has proposed a restoration project by the parking lot. Watch for that to get started and cheer them on.

The Garden of Weedin' Volunteers, with the help of several local students, have cleared the dead exotics from the area near the front gate, returning it to a park-like appearance. Part of this area will become home to a quail project.

Recently the Garden of Weedin' Volunteers went to the Florida Native Plant Society, Tarflower Chapter, rescue site, and had a great time rescuing wire grass and other soon-to-be-flowering plants. We'll be planting the rescues on the hill in the parking lot. Please do not walk through the hill area, because the plants are trying to recuperate.

All of this couldn't happen without the incredible selfless help of the volunteers. There is so much more to be done, though, just trying to keep the newly cleared areas maintained so that the exotics can't take hold again, not to mention opening new areas along the upland hiking trails. We need more volunteers with mowers, weed-whackers, shovels, and true grit. Sign up at Volunteers@OaklandNaturePreserve.org.

Jackie Rolly, ONP Volunteer

Florida Master Naturalist Program

Oakland Nature Preserve participates in the Florida Master Naturalist Program (FMNP), an adult education program developed by the University of Florida. If you are interested in learning more about Florida's environment, or seeking educational contact hours, or wishing to increase your knowledge of Florida's natural systems so you can volunteer in educational programs, or as employees or ecotourism guides, then this program will serve you.

FMNP Modules are offered in three subject areas: Freshwater Wetlands, Coastal Systems, and Upland Habitats. Each module meets for forty hours, as scheduled by the instructors. Classroom instruction, videos, field trips, speakers, two volumes of information, and an individual project are all part of the program. The cost is \$225. Each person completing the module receives a pin, a patch, and a certificate.

The program is offered by participating organizations, such as Oakland Nature Preserve and Orange County Extension/Education Center, and modules are offered around the state. In Orange County, classes begin at the Orange County Extension/Education Center on South Conway Road. Jennifer Ramos, Florida Yards and Neighborhoods, is the instructor, and Peggy Lantz, ONP board member and volunteer,

is assistant instructor. One day of the six FMNP sessions is spent at ONP. So far, Ramos and Lantz are offering two modules a year, one on Wetlands and one on Uplands. We're considering a summertime module to accommodate teachers and school staff.

An Uplands Module is now in progress, meeting on Thursdays from 9am to 4pm for six weeks. Visit the website, www.masternaturalist.org for more information, to check on the schedule for the next class, or to register for the class.

Peggy Lantz, ONP Volunteer

ONP Education Building Open on Weekends

The Environmental Education Center at Oakland Nature Preserve will be open to the public on Saturdays and Sundays. Volunteers will be on hand to show the building and answer question about the building and the Preserve.

Volunteers are needed: If you are willing to talk to visitors at ONP, call Phyllis Hickman at 407.656.2392. A short training session will be offered and you will have a "cheat sheet" to remind you of the answers to visitor questions.

Phyllis Hickman, ONP Volunteer

Eagle Lady Visits ONP

Doris Mager, popularly known as the Eagle Lady visited ONP on Saturday, March 13th. She displayed her eagles, owls, and the ever-popular Cara, the Caracara, to a capacity audience in ONP's Rotary Classroom. After she explained the needs of these impressive birds in the wild, she gave several people the opportunity to "fly" her bird friends across the high-ceilinged classroom.

Jenny Nguyen, an honor student at Dr. Phillips High School, attended the presentation by Doris Mager with her Science Honor Society. Jenny said the "Bird Lady" was one of the sweetest ladies she'd ever met.

Jenny wrote, "The passion for birds she had was unconditional, which inspired me -- as a senior getting ready to attend college -- to think about my future career. In her presentation, my knowledge of birds grew [and] I became more aware about the dangers these birds encounter to stay alive. This has been one of the greatest and most influential events I [have ever] attended, and I can't wait to further my learning on this topic."



Story and Photo, Darla Miller, ONP Volunteer

Our Thanks to the Voss Family

The Voss Family of Oakland has provided tremendous support throughout the conception and development of ONP. They were among the original group of landowners of the property we bought, and they held it for us for a long time while we raised funds, when they could have sold it a number of times for more money than we paid.

Jeff Voss purchased the adjacent property on our east side, which had been proposed for dense development, and created an exciting “hobby farm” with several species of exotic animals - a real attraction for our visitors. When we whined that the Preserve did not have white-tailed deer for kids to see, Jeff fenced off a couple of acres adjacent to our parking lot and brought in three adult deer. They had a fawn last spring, and they really add to our site.

Jeff has also agreed to sponsor this newsletter, which helps our cash flow, and he has contributed to a number of other projects. Jeff’s parents, Jake and Jane Voss, have also donated a number of antique tools and items. These are valuable additions to our museum.

The family has now agreed to hold a large rummage sale on their property in Oakland and donate antique items for us to sell.

Our project at ONP is much more successful than we could have dreamed about because of the generosity of the Voss family, and we extend our sincere appreciation.

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**Thank you to Jeff Voss, longtime supporter of
Oakland Nature Preserve,
sponsor of this issue of the ONP newsletter.**
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Volunteers Needed

Oakland Nature Preserve provides our local communities a window on Lake Apopka, educational opportunities, and a peaceful place to enjoy the natural beauty of Central Florida.

ONP relies upon volunteers for much of the day to day operation of the Preserve. Can you help with one of the opportunities listed below? Please call 407.905.0054 (and if you get the answering machine, you know the phone answering job is still available) or email Volunteers@OaklandNaturePreserve.org to sign up. It’s a wonderful way to give back to your community!

- One of the most immediate needs is for a festival director for the Oakland Heritage Festival, which will be on Saturday, October 30. It is already well organized with a great group of workers, but we need someone to coordinate it and keep all the parts well oiled. This is our biggest fundraiser and is a lot of fun!
- Publicity Coordinator to get notices to the newspapers.
- Greeters to keep the building open for visitors on Saturdays and Sundays.
- Librarian to organize our growing natural history library.
- People to man booths at various festivals in the area.
- Helpers for a huge rummage sale on Saturday, May 1, in Oakland.
- Garden of Weedin’ volunteers to do restoration work – weeding, planting, etc.
- Assistants for educational programs.
- Grant writers.
- Someone to archive history items in the museum.
- General office workers to answer telephones, etc.



ONP Is Gopher Tortoise Haven

Gopher tortoises are relics of prehistoric times. They are reptiles that have survived for millenniums, protected by their underground burrows and their hard shells. They can pull their head into the shell and tuck in their feet. Pretty much, they are safe from predators except when small.

Oakland Nature Preserve is a recipient site for this threatened species. Twelve tortoises have been relocated to ONP so far. The Preserve is rich in the sandy uplands and plants that gophers need. Tortoises like dry sandy soil to dig their burrows in. Their burrows may be six feet deep and thirty feet long. The burrows are temperature-controlled by their location underground, and gophers spend a great deal of their time in them, especially when it’s too cold or too hot outside.

Gophers eat all kinds of vegetation – grasses, herbs, flowers, cactus pads, and fruits. The gopher tortoise is a protected species. Even its burrow is protected, because it not only is home for the gophers, but for over three hundred other species, called commensals, that use the burrow for protection from heat, cold, fire, storms, and predators. Most of the burrow borrowers use the burrow as needed, such as rabbits, mice, snakes (especially the threatened indigo snake), toads, and others species running from danger or sheltering from the weather. But some live much of their lives there, such as the gopher spider and the threatened Florida gopher frog, though of course the frog lays its eggs in nearby isolated ponds.

The Preserve is pleased to be able to offer suitable habitat for relocated gopher tortoises. Take a hike on the upland trails where you can pass by several of their burrows, easily seen by the mound of gray or yellow sand at the entrance. You might even spot a gopher out of its burrow.

Story, Peggy, Lantz; Photo, Nancy Deam, ONP Volunteers

Oakland Nature Preserve Endowment Fund

Oakland Nature Preserve has established the mechanism where its supporters and friends can help fund the operating cost of the Preserve in perpetuity. By establishing the Oakland Nature Preserve Endowment Fund, the Preserve now provides an opportunity to make gifts and bequests where only the interest from investments can be spent. It is hoped that at some future time, the Endowment Fund will provide a major part of the funds needed to operate the Preserve.

For more information about this program, please contact Don Hickman at 407.656.2392.

Visit our website at
www.OaklandNaturePreserve.org
Up-to-date information on activities at the preserve
Printable color version of the newsletter.