



Osprey Observer Fall 2020

EDUCATING . CONSERVING . RESTORING

Message from the President

by Jim Peterson

It has been a year like no other for most of us. I am happy to say that despite all of the stresses and challenges due to COVID-19, the Oakland Nature Preserve is financially stable and continuing with our mission to Preserve, Restore, and Educate. We are continuing with our mission because we have a great group of individuals and foundations who supported, volunteered, tirelessly worked, and donated to the Preserve this year. I want to thank the Town of Oakland for covering more of our staff salaries and benefits. All staff at the Preserve will now be town employees with the town covering our two management positions. The town also assists with other expenses and maintenance that we are very grateful for. We are so excited and thankful to the West Orange Healthcare District who awarded us a grant to re-deck our boardwalk. Our boardwalk contractor R.C. Stevens also donated some in-kind services for the construction that helped lower the overall cost of the project. We plan to hold a grand reopening ceremony in a few months once the construction is complete. I also want to thank two local foundations that donated to us this year. One of the foundations has supported Oakland Nature Preserve since it was founded, and we are so grateful for their continued support. A new foundation offered us an Education Match Grant this year and we have met the challenge, thanks to all of the individual donations we received. Thank you everyone who contributed!

I also have to thank our volunteers. Our board of directors are all volunteers. We have a diverse and talented group of directors who all positively work toward our mission. We also have many student and individual volunteers who earn school credits, perform Scout and special projects, and perform tasks on our weekly workdays. We are accepting volunteers now, so if you are interested please speak to our Director or Volunteer Coordinator.

I must thank our great staff at the Preserve. We do not know when we will return to our previous education events and class visits, but our super talented education staff have begun outreach education and on-line classes, and they worked extremely hard to safely offer small day adventure camps this summer, which were a huge success. We plan to continue our kayak Blue Hikes and have a Pumpkin Glow event in the works for this year. Hopefully we can hold some of our regular events next year, so please support us when you can.

Please help us spread the word that the Preserve is open to the public every day, free of charge. I recently met a local couple that did not know we had public access. I told them that the Preserve is public land owned by the Town of Oakland but managed by a volunteer board of directors. We are open daily for upland trail hikes and the boardwalk down to Lake Apopka. We have several mascot animals for education and a museum that is open when staff are available on site.

With cooler weather it is a great time to come out and visit the Preserve but please continue appropriate virus safety precautions. I recently read some articles about COVID-19 and how people have been indoors too much, including children. There are new studies showing how children can quickly become disconnected to nature and how getting them out and experiencing the outdoors helps with many emotional problems and their sense of wellbeing.

Please check our website for events and thank you for your continued support!

Upcoming Events

- 10/5 - Homeschool Series
- 10/6 - Art in Nature age 6-9
- 10/10 - Blue Hike Kayak Tour
- 10/24 - **Pumpkin Glow Jack-o'-Lantern Trail**
- 10/26 - Science Day grade 4-6
- 10/27 - Art in Nature age 9-12
- 11/9 - Homeschool Series
- 11/10 - FMNP Wildlife Monitoring online course begins
- 11/14 - Blue Hike Kayak Tour
- 11/23 - Science Day grade 4-6
- 12/12 – Blue Hike Kayak Tour



**Be sure to follow us on Facebook
for Preserve news and events!**



**Pumpkin Glow
Jack-o-lantern Trail**
October 24th 6pm-9pm

Join us for what could be West Orange county's only nighttime Jack-o-lantern hike. The Glow Trail will be lined with Jack-o-lanterns created by members of the community, creating an ethereal and beautiful night-time hike.

For more information and to register your Jack-o'-Lantern visit www.oaklandnaturepreserve.org/pumpkinglow

Donations benefit the Oakland Nature Preserve.



Match Challenge Met!



Oakland Nature Preserve is delighted to announce that we have met the Match Challenge that was extended to us in August, offering matching funds of \$5,000 if we were able to raise \$5,000.

This is extremely valuable to our environmental education programs, which serve people of all ages in the central Florida area. We are very proud of our educational accomplishments in recent years. With this opportunity, we can continue to develop and expand them to serve more individuals of all ages.

A big thank you to everyone who donated and helped to spread the word on this exciting project.

Pumpkin Glow Jack-o'-Lantern Trail



We are inviting ghouls and goblins to an enchanted evening hike. The Pumpkin Glow, the Preserve's new autumnal event, features a winding wooded trail of decorated and hand-carved jack-o'-lanterns

Participants are encouraged to dress in family-friendly costumes and bring a flashlight or lantern. Children will receive candy bags and will be able to meet some cool critters.

The Glow Trail will be lined with pumpkins created by members of the community, creating an ethereal and beautifully haunting sight. Those wishing to participate may carve a jack-o'-lantern for display with a battery powered light inside - no open flames will be allowed. All pumpkins submitted will be available for pick up the day after the event. Any pumpkins left behind will be shared with the Preserve's program animals for enrichment.

The night of the event, visitors will have the opportunity to vote for their favorite jack-o'-lanterns. All contest participants will receive a Pumpkin Glow Certificate and large ONP sticker. Awards for each carved jack-o'-lantern group will vary by age group.

Donations to attend the Pumpkin Glow will benefit the Preserve. The mission of Oakland Nature Preserve is to promote an understanding of the fragile balance between mankind and the environment by educating visitors about Lake Apopka basin's ecosystems and cultural history, and by restoring and conserving the lands within the Preserve.

Pumpkin Glow Jack-o'-Lantern Trail

October 24th

6-9 pm

Please visit www.oaklandnaturePreserve.org/pumpkinglow to register your Jack-o'-Lantern for the event.

Know Your Invasive Plants! by Jackie Rolly

Its Fall, well at least on the calendar, hopefully our cooler weather is around the corner. It has been a long, hot, rainy summer. Now is the time to take a hike around the restoration areas. The grasses are in bloom and even the wildflowers are making a show.

In order to get to this showcase, the summer was spent removing plenty of invasive exotics that would have detracted from its beauty. What was removed?



a. Guinea Grass, *Urochloa maxima* and Natal Grass, *Melinis repens*

Both were introduced as forage for the cattle industry and have spread beyond the pastures to become a major headache for restoration of natural areas. Since the grasses were introduced from countries where the landscape is fire maintained, fire spreads it. Since our restored areas are burned periodically, these grasses become a real problem and will quickly out-compete our native grasses. (Photo: Jackie Rolly)

b. Balsam apple or Balsam Pear, *Momordica charantia*: This vine is in the cucumber family and originated in tropical Africa. It covers shrubs and tall trees. It is a bane to restoration areas as it spreads through tree gaps after prescribed burns and invasive plant removal. The vines compete with native vegetation as groundcover and can form dense thickets. Also our birds eat the seeds and spread the plant very widely. Our volunteers have spent countless hours pulling the vines from trees and along the ground where it makes vast carpets overwhelming our young native plants and flowers.



c. Minty Cat Urine, *Praxelis clematidea*: Unfortunately this plant very closely resembles a lovely Florida native plant called Mist Flower (*Conoclinium coelestinum*). But if you crush the leaves, it definitely smells like a dirty kitty litter box. It was accidentally introduced into Orange County, but continues to spread and now is a problem in several counties. Its seeds are like dust and travel on the wind and on our shoes, tires, etc. It too can cover an open area in one summer. (photo: Trudy Baker)

d. Oyster Plant, *Tradescantia* sp: This is a relatively new invader, but from the photo taken along the Blue Trail at ONP, you can see its ability to spread, in one summer.

There are plenty of other nasty invasive exotics at ONP, but these are the ones that gave us such heartache this summer. All you had to do was look into the trash bins by the building entrance to see all the work we all did, both the front areas and the Red Trail. Message to all is to please help us control these and other invasive plants by removing them from your yards and not buying them. (Photo: Jackie Rolly)



Duke Energy Foundation Grant

We are delighted to announce we have received a very generous grant from the Duke Energy Foundation for upcoming restoration projects at the Preserve!

Stay tuned for more details and photos as we get to work! Thank you very much, Duke Energy !

The Duke Energy Foundation's Powerful Communities program makes strategic investments to build powerful communities where our natural resources thrive, students can excel, and a talented workforce drives economic prosperity for all. The Foundation annually funds more than \$30 million to communities throughout Duke Energy's seven-state service area.



Ways you can help your Preserve:

- Volunteer your time.
- Participate in programs.
- Adopt an ONP Ambassador animal.
- Donate money.
- Donate a vehicle through the CARS program.

Visit www.OaklandNaturePreserve.org/donate for more information

We Dig Our Volunteers! By Nicole O'Brien

While COVID-19 had us shut down for a brief time, we did restart our volunteer program over the summer. We have had many wonderful volunteers assist the past few months – from teenagers to those furloughed, to retirees and more! We are immensely thankful for their time over the long, hot summer. We have had many teens interested in volunteering with us, and we want to highlight our opportunities available to them.

Teens are welcome to join us for our regularly scheduled Community Work Days on Saturdays. During those volunteer events we remove invasive plants, move downed tree debris, mulch trails, trim the boardwalk, plant in our restoration areas, and so much more!



Our Leaders In Training assisted with our summer Adventure Days. Huge thank you to the 10 teens who helped our Educators this summer!

Eco-Interpreters hang out on the porch of our Education Center to greet visitors and interact with them using activities and biofacts.



More information on all of our volunteer opportunities can be found at
<https://oaklandnaturePreserve.wildapricot.org/Volunteer>

ANNOUNCEMENT

We have a real treat for everyone: Hundreds of great photos have been uploaded to our website – divided by topic and species identified where possible.

On our website, go to the VISIT tab, then scroll down to PHOTOS AROUND THE PRESERVE, or go to: www.oaklandnaturePreserve.org/photos

The photographs have been divided by topic:

- Birds at the Preserve (over 90 species photographed at the Preserve)
- Bird Photo Booth (up-close photos of visitors to our bird feeders)
- Critter Cam (hidden cameras catch night and daytime animal visitors on our trails)
- Reptiles and Amphibians (alligators, snakes, lizards, frogs, etc.)
- Plants at the Preserve (native beauty found year-round at the Preserve)
- Dragonflies and Butterflies (amazing close-up photos of these visitors)
- Scene at the Preserve (from vistas to minutia, treats for the eye at ONP)

Thank you to the talented volunteer photographers who participated in this project:

Steve Wilkinson, Steve Shaluta, Mark Heinen, Vivian Starnes, and Marlo Hill.

ONP staff led by Denise Byrne collected the Photo Booth and Critter Cam photos.

Project editor: Gloria Green



Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Regulus calendula

“Looking Up!”

Photo by Marlo Hill

What's In Bloom

by Denise Byrne

There is a lot in bloom right now in the uplands at the Preserve:

On your next visit keep an eye out for:

- **Beautyberry**, *Callicarpa americana*, is a native of Florida's hammocks and rich woodlands. The small lavender flowers, a favorite with bees, have been blooming since spring and are now giving way to shiny purple berries. These vivid purple berries are extremely popular with birds and also have insecticidal properties. The crushed leaves can be rubbed on the skin to repel mosquitoes! In addition, *Callicarpa* leaves contain terpenoids that repel fire ants. Visitors can see Beautyberry near our Pollinator Garden, around the Fish Cabin, and along the Red and Orange Trails.



Beautyberry, *Callicarpa americana*

- **Bee Balm**, *Monarda punctata*, also known as **Horsemint**, attracts a huge array of pollinating insects. Bee balm blooms are regularly covered in a diversity of native bees, wasps, and butterflies. They also attract hummingbirds, and birds eat the seeds in Winter. Visitors can see Bee Balm along our Yellow and Orange Trails and near the Pollinator Garden. If you had it in your yard, you could make delicious tea from the leaves.



Bee Balm, *Monarda punctata*

- **Firebush**, *Hamelia patens*, always seems to have butterflies around the flowers when it's in bloom. Hummingbirds, bees, and wasps frequent the flowers as well. As a bonus, fruit-eating birds such as Northern Mockingbirds, Catbirds and Blue-headed Vireos savor the small purple fruits. The leaves serve as larval food for the Pluto Sphinx and Nessus Sphinx moths. Visitors can see Firebush in the Honor Garden and in the Pollinator Garden.

- **Goldenrod**, *Solidago* sp., is an excellent nectar source for pollinating insects. Visitors can see Goldenrod around the Education Center, and in the Pollinator Garden.

- **Partridge Pea**, *Chamaecrista fasciculata*, is pollinated by bees and butterflies. Ants sometimes take advantage of this nectar too. The seeds of Partridge Pea are a source of Fall and Winter food for the Northern Bobwhite and other quail, Mallards, grassland birds, and field mice. Partridge pea often grows in thick clusters providing shelter for numerous species of small birds, amphibians, and reptiles. It also serves as a larval host to several butterfly species including Cloudless Sulphur, Gray Hairstreak, and Cernaus Blue butterflies. Visitors can see Partridge Pea on the Yellow and Blue Trails.



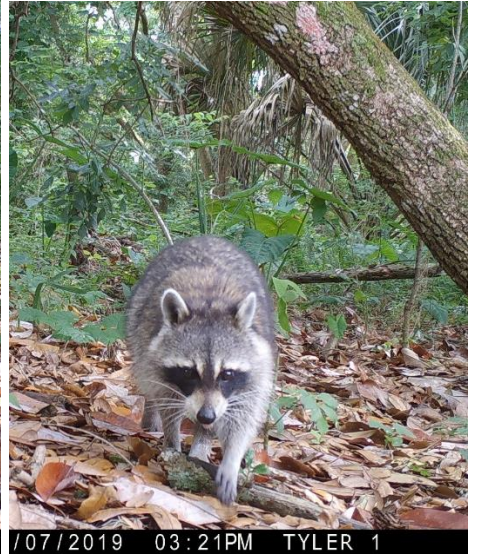
Partridge Pea, *Chamaecrista fasciculata*

- **Groundnut**, *Apios americana*, is the larval food of the Silver-spotted Skipper, and is currently blooming along the boardwalk.

- **Dogtongue Buckwheat**, *Eriogonum tomentosum*, has flowers that attract a variety of pollinators, and is currently in bloom behind the Fish Cabin.

Critter Cam Update

The Critter Cameras are staying very active photographing resident bobcats, coyotes, raccoons, armadillos, opossums, and rabbits in the uplands. The bird feeder camera regularly photographs adult and juvenile songbirds, along with other small birds. Check out ONP's website or Facebook pages for the most recent photos.



A tribute to Mr. Pickles



ONP is deeply saddened to announce that our beloved Opossum, Mr. Pickles, passed away in late July. A vet examination revealed advanced age-related complications, so we made the difficult decision to euthanize him rather than jeopardize his quality of life.

Compared to other mammals, including most other marsupials, opossums have unusually short lifespans for their size and metabolic rate. Virginia opossums like Pickles typically only live up to two years in the wild and in captivity. Admitted as a fully-grown adult (7-8 months old) in September 2017, we know that Mr. Pickles was at least three and a half years old at the time of his death, almost twice the average lifespan for his species.

Pickles came to ONP after being found injured on a road. Suspected head trauma and vision loss ultimately made him non-releasable, so he joined ONP's outreach team. During his education career at the Wildlife Center, Pickles was featured in more than 50 educational programs that reached more than 3,500 children and adults.

Pickles was well-known as an outgoing, happy, opossum, filled with curiosity. He loved walks around the Preserve's trails on his leash and understood the value of a good nap. He spent his days in his outdoor enclosure, where he lived until his last day, enjoying sunshine, fresh air, bird songs, and passing visitors, curled up with his beloved Koala bear that our Director Jennifer gave him when he arrived to ONP.

Mr. Pickles may be gone, but he will never be forgotten by those who met him.





Blue Hike Paddle Tours

We are delighted to announce the re-launch of our Blue Hike Paddle Tours for the Fall and Winter seasons. This was made possible by generous support from Duke Energy. ONP's Blue Hikes show paddlers the natural beauty, history, plants, and animals of Lake Apopka, along with an interpretative telling of the restoration progress of the lake. The hikes have since diversified to include several other locations, highlighting features and importance of many other Central Florida waterways.

*For more information and registration visit
www.OaklandNaturePreserve.org/blue-hike*

Animal Ambassador Update by Nicole O'Brien

We would like to welcome our newest Ambassador snake, Minerva!

Minerva is a 7-year-old Eastern Indigo Snake that was hatched as part of a breeding program at the Orianne Center For Indigo Conservation. Due to some physical abnormalities present when she hatched, she was not a candidate for release and was donated to ONP. Eastern Indigo Snakes are non-venomous, hold the record as the longest native snake species in the U.S, and unfortunately are listed threatened in Florida and Georgia due to habitat loss and fragmentation. Unusual food items, in comparison to that of other snakes, include small tortoises and all venomous snake species native to the Southeastern US. Come meet Minerva in our Museum to learn more about Eastern Indigos. We are excited to have Minerva as part of our family!

