



Wekiva Wilderness Trust—Newsletter

July, 2022

Important Information and Updates

Insurance

For several years the WWT has been a member of the Florida State Parks Foundation and one of the huge benefits of membership was that we were covered by the Foundation's statewide insurance policy. For several reasons, the Foundation has decided that it can no longer provide this cover and so, as of August 1, we must find our own insurance cover.

We are actively seeking Directors and Officers insurance cover which protects our officers and board members from being sued both as representatives of WWT and as private individuals. This is not an expensive policy, and we expect to have something in place by the end of July.

The other policy that came with Foundation membership was General Liability coverage and we are exploring several options in this respect. The best – and cheapest – solution would be for everyone volunteering in the park to make sure that they are enrolled in the Florida State Park's online volunteer portal. If everyone visits this portal, creates a profile and logs monthly hours, they are automatically covered by the state's insurance policy when working in the park and are eligible for workers comp and other benefits. If we all did this, there would not be a need to take out separate and expensive general liability coverage. If you have not already visited the volunteer portal, I urge you to do so. It is in your best interest and that of the WWT. Go to <https://volunteers.floridastateparks.org>.

Serenity Garden

We are still trying to find a construction or landscape company that can come in and grade the Serenity Garden site. We approached several companies following the groundbreaking ceremony in March, but none were interested. Either the job was too small for them, or they have so much work, they couldn't commit to doing it for many months. If you know of any local landscaping firm or construction company that might be able to work with us, please let Don Philpott know. In the meantime, we are working with our surveying firm to get the site marked out and, hopefully, come up with a plan B.

Ethel

There is better news about the Ethel Historical Trail at Rock Springs Run State Reserve. We had a very good meeting with Senator Dennis Baxley, who represents Florida's 12th District which includes Rock Springs and the former township of Ethel. As well as being a very influential senior Senator, he is also an avid history buff and has promised to support the project in every way he can. Next steps include mapping out the proposed self-guided walking trail and then creating a trifold brochure and map for people to use when on the Ethel trail. We are also working on the design of all-weather interpretive panels that will tell the history of Ethel, the Delk Plantation and the people who lived there. There will also be location markers on the sites of many of Ethel's buildings such as the school, store, railway station and cemetery.

We hope that when the trail is open and publicized, it will bring many more visitors to Rock Springs and especially school groups so that children can learn about the fascinating history of Ethel.

Animal Rescue

The park, staff and volunteers often get calls about what to do with injured animals and birds that have been found. One great resource is the Back to Nature Wildlife Refuge in Orlando, whose mission is to rescue, raise, rehabilitate, and release injured or orphaned Florida native species and to provide education about respecting and preserving the environment through their non-releasable permanent residents known as "educational ambassadors".

Back to Nature is a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization and a leading wildlife refuge and rehabilitation center. Incorporated in June 1989, and founded by Carmen M. Shaw, Back to Nature Wildlife Refuge (BTN) is the largest non-profit 501(c) (3) public wildlife rehabilitation facility in the Central Florida Region, serving 2,500-3,000 of Central Florida's Wildlife per year. It relies on the generous support of the public to help it fulfill its mission. BTN employs four dedicated full-time staff and one part time staff to rescue, raise, rehabilitate, and release injured and orphaned Florida native wildlife.

In 2007, BTN was granted 20 acres of Orange County conservation land, managed by the Environmental Protection Division, in the Lake Nona area, and visitors are welcomed.

If you need to contact them, call 407-568-5138 or email info@btnwildlife.org.

Nature News

A Season of Dragons

Whether you're at the spring, on the river, or hiking an uplands trail, Wekiwa Springs State Park is a great place to see dragonflies this time of year. A pair of binoculars that can focus fairly close will help to get a better look at these colorful, fast-flying creatures. They can reach speeds of 20 mph, but they can also hover in place; they are easiest to observe when perched, although some species rarely do.

Dragonflies lay their eggs in the water. Hatchlings are called larva, nymphs, or naiads, and this underwater phase may last weeks, months, or even years, as they develop, shedding the exoskeleton many times. Nymph anatomy is fascinating, but suffice it to say that their gills are in their rectum, which serves yet another function as propulsion, by expelling water rapidly.

When it is time for a larva to become an adult dragonfly, it crawls up a vertical stem of emerging vegetation, or sometimes onto a flat surface, such as a spatterdock leaf. It takes about an hour for the dragonfly to emerge, swallow air to pump up its body, and unfold its wings. Many don't survive this vulnerable time, being subject to predation by birds and other predators. A splash of water can prevent the wings from unfolding properly, and it won't be able to fly.

Dragonflies are totally carnivorous and will eat any living thing they can catch, including other dragonflies and damselflies.

Here are a few of the species that you're likely to see as you enjoy in the park.

This is a male Eastern Pondhawk, one of the more common species in the park.



The female Eastern Pondhawk is green. (green/girl, blue/boy, easy to remember).



A Blue Dasher, another frequent flier.



An Eastern Amber Wing, one of the smallest dragonflies.



A Slaty Skimmer



A Two Striped Forceptail

A Common Green Darner



And the largest and fiercest of dragons that we're likely to see, the Dragonhunter. These can be almost 4 inches long.



If you are interested in learning more about dragonflies, a good reference is [Dragonflies and Damselflies of Georgia and the Southeast](#) by Giff Beaton.

Flower of the Month

Coastalplain Dawnflower

Stylisma patens



Let's say you decide to go for a morning hike this summer and choose your path through a longleaf pine/turkey oak/wiregrass habitat or through scrub and sandhill. You are likely to find the small white flowers of *Stylisma patens* growing close to the ground at the edge of the trail. This native morning glory has several common names, including, coastalplain dawnflower, sandhill dawnflower, sandhill morning glory, and common dawnflower. The range of dawnflower extends throughout southeastern United States from North Carolina to Louisiana and as far south as central Florida.

Coastal plain dawnflower is a prostrate trailing vine which hugs the ground. The leaves are linear in shape and much longer than wide, not more than ½ inch

wide and up to 3 inches long. The leaves alternate on the stem and lie parallel to the ground. The solitary white trumpet-shaped flowers attach to the stems at the leaf axils (where the leaves join the stems). The flowers are small, about 1 inch across, usually solitary, with five lobes and five stamens. The stamen filaments are hairy. Flowering time extends from spring into fall. Bees and butterflies nectar on dawnflower.

A good place to find coastal dawnflower is the along the orange and white blazed trail from trail markers #3 to #6. Also from the Sand Lake parking lot, especially between trail marker #31 and #10, and then from #10 to #16. Because this flower lies close to the ground it is easiest to spot where there is sparse ground vegetation and litter.

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