



Wekiva Wilderness Trust—Newsletter

June, 2022

Events and Updates

Annual meeting

The annual meeting of WWT will take place via Zoom on Tuesday, June 14. Please try to attend as there are important matters to be discussed. The annual meeting is also the opportunity to nominate yourself or someone else to become a member of the board. All four officers of WWT – President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer – were elected at last year’s meeting and still have one year to serve although anyone else can put themselves up for any of these positions and a ballot will be held. Please forward names of nominees to me.

Ethel

Plans for the Ethel Historic Trail are moving forward and WWT has applied for a major grant to cover the costs of interpretive panels, site markers and a self-guiding walking brochure. The aim is to bring the long-forgotten community of Ethel back to life. Interpretive panels will tell the story of Ethel and the Duke Plantation, the largest pre-Civil War plantation in the area, at what is now Kelly Park. Historic markers will be placed on the sites of many of the buildings that once stood there – school, store, railroad stop and so on. Panels will also tell the remarkable story of Anthony Frazier, the slave who fought in the Civil War, who returned to the Rock Springs area afterwards, bought land and prospered, and who, in 1880, was appointed an Orange County Commissioner of Roads. His headstone was discovered during construction of the Wekiva Parkway.

There are also plans, subject to permission, to build a traditional homestead cabin as part of this project. When a homesteader was granted land after the Civil War, he had to agree to farm the land for five years and to build a home on it. These ‘homes’ were usually 16 feet square log cabins and consisted of one room. Cooking was done outside. The cabins were called 18-log cabins because each side consisted of 18 logs interlocked together – no nails were used. Once the logs were in place, a saw was used to cut out a door and window. The cabin could be used as a museum with photos and documents about Ethel.

The picture below shows William Flick outside his cabin at Ethel in the 1880s.



Serenity Garden

The long-awaited groundbreaking took place on March 16 and requests for proposals have now been sent to construction companies asking for bids to terrace the site and build retaining walls to stabilize it. We can then start work on the rest of the hardscaping such as building paths, boardwalks and raised beds. We still have fund raising to do but we have over \$400,000 in the kitty which will allow us to move ahead and, hopefully, as people see what is happening, they will be motivated to contribute to this historic project – the first garden of its kind anywhere in the United States.

Nature News

Cottonmouth, Water Moccasin (*Agkistrodon piscivorus*)

Volunteers working with snakes at the Nature Center often need to dispel myths and folklore about one of our native snakes, the Cottonmouth. I was deeply saddened recently by a man telling me that he had eradicated them on his riverfront property. These snakes are declining in numbers due to loss of habitat and, well, people like this visitor. Removing even one Cottonmouth from the environment has a huge impact, as they reproduce only every 2 to 3 years, giving live birth to an average of 7 young, most of whom will fall victim to predation before reaching sexual maturity.

This is what we most often hear:

“They’ll chase you!”

No, they won’t. Even a small human is way too big for them to eat. They have much more to fear from us, than we from them.

Their first line of defense is to remain motionless. They are well-camouflaged and most of us have probably passed by many Cottonmouths without ever seeing them. On Rock Springs Run one day, I counted 25 canoes and kayaks go by a cottonmouth coiled on a stump at water’s edge, and no one saw him. He didn’t chase them, either.

Their second line of defense is escape, often into the water. If you are between the snake and the water, it may appear he’s chasing you, but he’s not. He’ll be going past.

Their third line of defense, if they can’t escape, is to “stand their ground” coiled up and gaping, showing their eponymous cotton colored mouth. I like to think they’re saying “You’re making me nervous, leave me alone, don’t make me waste my venom on you!”

“They’ll fall out of trees into your kayak!”

Highly unlikely. Cottonmouths are short (typically around 2-3 feet long), large-bodied snakes, not built for climbing. Most “Cottonmouths” that are spotted in trees over the water are actually Banded Watersnakes or Brown Watersnakes, both of which are agile climbers, unlike the short thick Cottonmouth.



A mating pair of Cottonmouths, photographed by Noreen Engstrom, on a trail in Wekiwa Springs State Park.



A juvenile Cottonmouth, on Rock Springs Run, photographed by Joanne Bolemon.

Fast facts:

- Pit vipers (Cottonmouths are pit vipers) are not constrictors. They either grab their prey and swallow it, or inject venom, release it, follow it until it dies, and then eat it.
- Juvenile Cottonmouths are often mistakenly identified as Copperheads. Copperheads are not found in central Florida.
- Cottonmouths, like all snakes, are an integral part of our environment, and deserve to be appreciated or at least left alone.

Flower of the Month

American Bluehearts (*Buchnera americana*)

American bluehearts (*Buchnera americana*) is a perennial wildflower found in pinelands, prairies and marshes, and along roadsides throughout most of Florida. It prefers moist to wet, well-drained sandy or calcareous soils (soil that has an abundance of calcium carbonate) and full sun. It blooms year-round, with peak blooming in late spring through summer. It attracts many bees and butterflies, including the common buckeye, for which it is a larval host. Its seeds are eaten by birds.



The small (1/2" to 5/8") tubular flowers have five petal-like lobes and vary in color from bright violet to almost white. The entrance to and exterior of the flower are hairy. The delicate stems grow 12" to 36" tall and are covered with short fine hairs called trichomes. The narrow leaves are oppositely arranged and reduced in size as they ascend the stem. The fruit is an inconspicuous dark purple capsule which bursts open when the seed is ripe.

American bluehearts are hemiparasitic, meaning the plant can grow independently (without a host) but it grows stronger with a host. It has parasitic roots that attach to the host's root system. The parasitism is generally not harmful to the host, except during times of stress (such as a drought) when the plant will increase the parasitic effect

which could result in damage to the host plant.

Look for bluehearts in moist but not saturated habitats. Frequently the plant is surrounded by grasses so that the top part of the stem and flowers might be all that are visible. In Wekiwa Springs State Park, this observer has found bluehearts along the red/green blaze trail from trail markers #33 to #22. This area has moist sandy soil in full sun.



APHIDS - Pests of Ornamental Plants, Crops, and Trees

Moh Leng Kok-Yokomi

With spring in the air, there is abundance of new plant foliage. The fresh shoots and leaves attract aphids, soft-bodied tiny pear-shaped insects that are plant suckers. They are generally light to dark green in color and about 2 mm in size. There are many different species of aphids in Florida, for



Aphids on grape leaves

example, the melon/cotton aphid, the green peach aphid, and the oleander aphid (bright yellow in color). Some aphids are specific to particular plants such as the dark green/black crape myrtle aphid and the dark grape aphid.

Aphid infestations build up rapidly since the young are born alive and immediately begin to cause problems for the host plants. Aphids are sap feeders and consume copious amounts of sap, some of which is excreted as honeydew, a sugary sticky fluid which promotes the growth of a black sooty mold. The black sooty mold is a telltale sign that aphids are present. The honeydew attracts ants which, in return, tend and protect the aphids. Additionally, some aphid species transmit viral diseases to their host plants. Losing nutrients to these pests and perhaps contracting plant diseases causes the infested plants to become stunted with curly and distorted young shoots and leaves. As a result, the plants produce less foliage and fewer flowers.

Fortunately, nature provides predacious insects that keep aphid infestations in check. These include larval and adult lady beetles (yellow, orange or red in color, with or without dark spots), green lacewings, and syrphid flies (bee/hover flies) that mimic small honeybees which hover over the aphids. There are also some minute beneficial parasitic wasps that attack aphids

In the home garden, an aphid problem can be alleviated with a spray of a light soapy detergent solution with a drop of cooking oil added, followed by a water rinse off.



Lady Beetle Larva



Adult Lady Beetle