



# Wekiva Wilderness Trust—Newsletter

## September, 2022

### WWT News

#### **Apopka Chamber of Commerce Leadership Class of 2022**

On August 18, Wekiwa Springs State Park hosted the Apopka Chamber of Commerce Leadership Class of 2022. Park manager Robert Brooks welcomed the group and discussed the economic impact the park



**Apopka Chamber of Commerce Leadership Class of 2022 at Wekiwa Springs Apopka Chamber President and CEO, Cate Manley, holding the banner**

has on the local area—hosting around 500,000 visitors, supporting almost 1,000 jobs locally, and making an economic impact of \$70 million. Don Philpott then talked about the history of the park and led the group on a tour of the springs and the wet-dry trail.

Leadership Apopka is designed to educate future leaders from the Apopka area. The in-depth program creates opportunities for participants to engage with the area’s leading public, private and civic leaders and develop impactful friendships with other professionals from the community. Additionally, participants get to observe, interact and learn about the various



**Don Philpott & Robert Brooks**

industries and community assets, that are of great importance to the Apopka area and the Central Florida region.

The park has hosted this Leadership Class for the last several years.

Brandon French, a local blogger, blogs about the Apopka Chamber and its activities.



**Brandon French with Don Philpott**

## **Serenity Garden**

Fate works in mysterious ways. During the Apopka Chamber's Leadership Class visit, Don Philpott mentioned the problems encountered in getting a contractor to work on the Serenity Garden. The following day, Don got a call from Gerald Rooks, with Duke Energy, saying that he had found a contractor interested in the project. A very productive site meeting was held on Tuesday, August 23.

The local contractor wants to do the entire project and understands we don't have full funding yet but is willing to work with us in phases. Assuming everything works out OK, we should start within the next two to three months. We have enough money in the bank to take us way past phase 1 which was our original goal. He has also looked at the plans and thinks he can shave a significant amount off our original budget.

Duke Energy is considering removing an unsightly power pole with a line and transformer from the middle of the Garden site and burying it. Before COVID we asked Duke what this would cost and the quote was prohibitive. Now it looks as if they may do it for free or for a fraction of the price and become a proud Serenity Garden sponsor.

## **Survival Boot Camp**

Our next survival boot camp is at Rock Springs on September 10. Part of the day-long class is spent building a shelter. In previous years, we have had to search out young invasive tree saplings and chop them down so they can be used as construction materials. This is a time-consuming task and must be repeated every time we do a class, so I have been searching for a more sustainable solution. Thanks to park biologist, Paul Lommardo, we have found a forest of tropical black bamboo deep in the woods near Robert Brooks' house. Paul and Don spent a couple of hours chopping down enough bamboo for our next class and we now have a sustainable resource that we can use for survival classes for the next couple of years and a huge reserve if ever we need it.

## **Meet Up**

The Wekiva Wilderness Trust has a Meet Up page ([www.meetup.com/Wekiva-Wilderness-Trust](http://www.meetup.com/Wekiva-Wilderness-Trust)) which now has 1,126 members and is growing daily. Please check it out and add relevant posts. This is a great way to get the message out about WWT and what it does.

## Volunteer Breakfast

If you haven't already attended one of Park Service Specialist Val Hahn's scrambled eggs and pancake volunteer breakfasts in the campground, make sure you find time to go to the next one. Debbie attended the last one together with several other volunteers and rangers. It is a great opportunity to get to know everyone.

Val will send out an email inviting volunteers to the next breakfast.



Volunteers with Val Hahn (3<sup>rd</sup> from right) who enjoyed the last volunteer breakfast

## Ethel

Plans for the Ethel Historic Trail at Rock Springs continue to make progress. The trail will have interpretive panels about the Ethel township, its history and occupants, and markers will be placed on the sites of many of Ethel's important buildings, like the school, store, railway station and so on. It has also been agreed to establish a Friends of Ethel group, in collaboration with the East Lake Historical Society, although how this will operate has yet to be decided. If you haven't already read about Ethel, you can download the free e-book from the WWT website.

## Nature News

### A Season for the Bright and Beautiful

The first time I saw one of these little beauties, I had no idea what it was. A fly, a bee, a wasp? Nope, it is a moth—a scarlet-bodied wasp moth (*Cosmosoma myrodora*).



Small but striking in appearance, with the metallic blue head, red thorax, abdomen with blue markings, and lacy wings, it resembles a wasp much more than a moth. Its appearance, along with its wasp-like flight, provides some protection from predators. Also, the adult male feeds on dog fennel, and is capable of extracting poisonous alkaloid chemicals from that plant. This protects it from predators such as the garden orb weavers that are abundant at this time of year. The female doesn't have this ability, but the male passes this protection to her during courtship and mating, and she passes it to the eggs she lays.

The first one I ever saw was laying eggs on the leaves of a hempvine, its host plant, not far from Wekiwa Springs. The larval stage lasts about 11 days, and the adult stage around 40 to 50 days.

These moths are found throughout Florida, and along the southern coast from Texas to South Carolina.

Unlike most moths, the scarlet-bodied wasp moth is diurnal (active during the day). As the late summer and autumn wildflowers begin to bloom, you might see them as you hike the trails or paddle the waters of Wekiwa Springs State Park.



## Flower of the Month

### Fragrant Eryngo (*Eryngium aromaticum*)

September, October and early November are prime months to view the wildflowers of scrub, sandhill, dry pine flatwoods and scrubby flatwoods habitats. Starting with partridge pea (*Chamaecrista fasciculata*) in September, followed by Florida paintbrush (*Carphephorus corymbosus*), vanillaleaf (*Carphephorus odoratissimus*), several species of blazing star (*Liatris spp.*), coastal plain honeycomb head (*Balduina angustifolia*), several species of goldenrod (*Solidago spp.*), narrowleaf silkgrass (*Pityopsis graminifolia*), summer farewell (*Dalea pinnata*), among others, and ending with garberia (*Garberia heterophylla*) in November. These wildflowers have all been featured in previous newsletters. The fall wildflowers listed above, form large beds of yellow, purple and white flowers which are visited by many species of butterflies and other pollinators. (For photos consult [florida.plantatlas.usf.edu](http://florida.plantatlas.usf.edu))

A less showy wildflower, the fragrant eryngo (*Eryngium aromaticum*) is this month's featured wildflower. It belongs to a group of plants known as rattlesnake masters, so called because some Native Americans used the root as a medicine to treat rattlesnake bites. Nine species of *Eryngiums* grow in Florida, 7 of which are native. Two *Eryngium* species grow in Wekiwa Springs State Park.

Fragrant eryngo is an interesting and beautiful scrub wildflower but it is easy to miss because it grows close to the ground and is often hidden by grass and fallen pine needles. If you spot it, be sure to spend a few minutes getting acquainted with its characteristics.



Fragrant eryngo hidden among the grass and pine needles.

The flower cluster is flat topped with the main and branch stems each ending in a round, compact head of tiny whitish blue or lead colored flowers. Flowers bloom in fall. Butterflies, bees, wasps and other pollinators visit fragrant eryngo.

The stems are smooth and sprawling or erect, 4 to 28 inches long. The lower branches lie on or near the ground with the tips of the stems curving upward. The leaves are sweetly aromatic, hence the species name, *aromaticum*. The leaves are compound, stiff and deeply cleft into 3 sharply pointed leaflets.



A hike in Wekiwa Springs State Park of less than 1 mile from trail marker #3, near the family campground, to trail marker #6, where the trail crosses the youth camp road, it is possible to observe all of the wildflowers listed in this article. You will need to hike that trail several times to see all of them since not all bloom at the same time. Look for fragrant eryngo at the edge of the trail after crossing the service road at trail marker #4 before reaching trail marker #6.