



## Wekiwa Wilderness Trust--Newsletter

January, 2023

### Events

We have a busy January with lots of events planned from Junior Rangers Club to helping with bird counts, survival classes and hikes. We now have more than 1,320 members in our Meet Up Wekiwa group and I am amazed that our numbers keep on growing. Watch for more events on Meetup.com.

#### Junior Ranger Club

Thursday, January 5, 2023 4:30 PM-6:00 PM



Join our Junior Ranger Club! This FREE club meets once a month to learn the different skills and knowledge it takes to manage our resources. This month's topic is "The Birds of Wekiwa." All Junior Rangers 17 and younger must be accompanied by an adult. Email Ranger Jillian (see below) to join our email list and to find out more information. Water, sunscreen, and insect repellent, and closed-toe shoes are recommended. The event is FREE with paid park admission. \$4/single occupant vehicle, \$6/2-8 occupant vehicle. A Spanish interpreter is available for this program with advanced notice.

[Jillian.m.Conley@FloridaDEP.gov](mailto:Jillian.m.Conley@FloridaDEP.gov)

#### Bird Survey at Wekiwa Springs State Park

Saturday, January 7, 2023: 7.30 AM

and

#### Bird Survey at Rock Springs Run State Reserve

Wednesday, January 25, 2023: 8.00 AM

If you are interested in helping our Park Biologist on our monthly bird surveys, please email Paul Lammardo directly at [Paul.Lammardo@FloridaDEP.gov](mailto:Paul.Lammardo@FloridaDEP.gov) to find out meeting locations and details. Previous knowledge and experience are appreciated but not necessary. Come help us spot the birds!

## Sandhill Tram Ride

Friday January 27, 2023: 9.00 AM and 2.00 PM

Experience pristine sandhill ecological community of Wekiwa Springs State Park from the comfort of our open-air tram. The ride lasts about 1.5 hours. Space is limited to 19 people each tram ride so RSVP on Meetup.com as soon as possible. Water, sunscreen, insect repellent, and closed-toe shoes are recommended. For this event there is a suggested donation of \$5 per person to the Wekiva Wilderness Trust which directly supports the Wekiva River Basin State Parks. Park admission is \$4/single occupant vehicle, \$6/2-8 occupant vehicle. Spanish interpreter is available for this program with advanced notice.

## Nature News

### Longleaf pine

*Pinus palustris*

The longleaf pine is the dominant tree species in sandhill habitat which you can see in all its glory around the campground and youth camp. Longleaf pines are native to the southeast and now cover just 3% of their original habitat. They have long been prized for their commercial use in building houses, ships, and railroads and their resin was used for making turpentine.



**Sandhill habitat near the Youth Camp  
with longleaf pines and fall wildflowers.**

Apart from their commercial uses, longleaf pines have scores of edible and medicinal uses, and it provides resources throughout the year.

Pine needles contain shikimic acid, an ingredient in Tamiflu, used to treat the flu, and a tea made from the needles (see recipe below) can boost the immune system and work as an expectorant and decongestant. The needles have more vitamin C per weight than freshly squeezed orange juice, plus they contain vitamin A. In olden days, sailors would drink pine tea to prevent scurvy. Nibble on raw green needles for a trail snack.

The inner bark (cambium) has many antiseptic properties and can be eaten raw or roasted or boiled in strips as a pasta-like substitute. It can be ground and used a flour-substitute.

Pine nuts are highly nutritious. Put the unopened cones around the embers of a fire and the heat will make them open so that the seeds can be extracted. Male cones which are soft and papery) can be boiled and eaten

You can apply pine sap to a cut to act as new skin and it is especially useful as it has antiseptic properties. Mix a little sap with sand and it will act as a temporary tooth filling. For centuries, Icelanders took pine sap mixed with honey to ease lung troubles. Oriental herbalists use pine knots as medicine, especially for arthritis.

During the winter and spring, you can collect nutrient-rich pine pollen which contains androstenedione, an adrenal hormone, and small amounts of testosterone. Native Americans used the pollen to boost energy levels.

Young pine roots can be eaten raw in an emergency after stripping away the outer bark, but it is best roasted or after seeping in water. If steeping, drink the water as it contains sugar extracted from the root.

You can use inner bark and pine needles as fire starters and use the needles to weave baskets.

Finally, pinecones are a reliable, free barometer. Keep one on your back porch. They open when it is going to be fine and close before rain.



**Longleaf pinecones  
females above, males below**

### **Pine Needle Tea Recipe**

1. Pick needles close to the trunk where they are richer in vitamin C.
2. Cut the pine needles into one-inch lengths.
3. Bring water to a boil, remove from heat, add needles and steep for 3-5 minutes for a delicate, invigorating and healthy drink.
4. Use more or fewer needles and steep for shorter or longer time until you find the balance that you like best.

**For more information about the Longleaf Pine/Sandhill habitat see the November, 2022 Newsletter.**

### **Anhinga**

#### ***Anhinga anhinga***



**A beautiful pair, showing the different “eye makeup” between the female on the left and the male on the right.**

The Anhinga, also known as “snake bird”, “piano bird”, and “water turkey”, is entering its most beautiful time of year right now; both the males, who are black, and the females, who are black with tan necks, are acquiring tufts of gray feathers behind their heads and necks. The area around their eyes is becoming a brilliant blue for the males, greenish-blue for the females. All of this signifies that it will soon be breeding season, and the anhingas will be nesting in colonies, often in cypress trees along with great blue herons and great egrets.

Both male and female birds will incubate the 3-6 eggs, and both will feed the hatchlings partially digested regurgitated fish.

These birds look rather prehistoric, and indeed their oldest fossils date back more than a million years, according to David Sibley in *The Sibley Guide to Bird Life and Behavior*.

Gracefully swimming underwater, an aninga spears a fish, then comes to the surface and tosses the fish in the air, catching it head first and swallowing.

Aningas can be seen soaring with eagles and vultures; they've surprised many a boater with their head and neck suddenly rising from the water ("snake bird"); observing one with wings outspread displaying the white on black wing feathers it is easy to see how the nickname "piano bird" came to be.



**Snake bird! Head and neck will appear for a few seconds, then resubmerge.**

Aningas don't lack oil glands for their feathers, as is

commonly believed, but their feathers become saturated so that they lack buoyancy. This makes it easy for them to submerge and dive.

The bill of the aninga has sharp barbs inside that point backward, making it easy to swallow fish, but also making it nearly impossible to free themselves once string, fishing line, old socks, stuffed toys, etc. become stuck on their bills. Here is yet another good reason to avoid

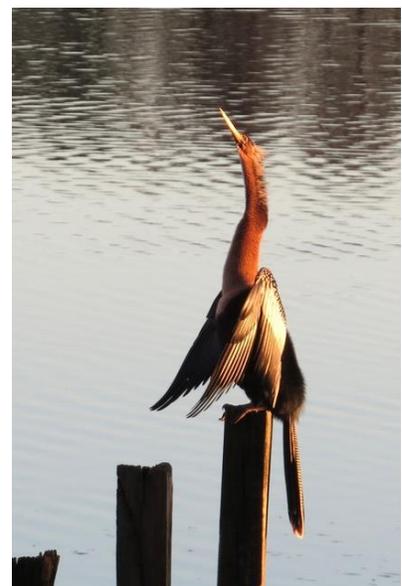


**Tangled in pink string**

littering, and to clean up our waterways. Rescue of a bird in this fix is extremely difficult, since they can still dive and swim underwater, and they can still fly.



**Down the hatch**



**Female aninga, in early January, drying her feathers after feeding, and regulating her body temperature in the morning sun**

## Flower of the Month Beggarticks (*Bidens alba*)



This month's featured flower is the ubiquitous, much maligned and very important beggarticks (*Bidens alba*). (Also known as Spanish needles, pitchfork weed, romerillo, monkey's lice, shepherd's needles, butterfly needles, etc.) Most people consider this native wildflower a weed and I suppose we must forgive them for once you have this plant in your landscape you will always have this plant in your landscape. It grows nearly everywhere, especially in disturbed soil such as roadsides, orchards, lawns and gardens. It blooms all year and is a prolific seed producer. Yet without this flower honey production would be hurt for *B. alba* is the third most common reliable source of nectar in Florida. In addition to honey bees, it attracts numerous native bees and

butterflies and is host to the dainty sulphur (*Nathalis iole*) butterfly. The young leaves and flowers are edible and are used as medicinal remedies. There are many websites and books with additional information regarding uses of *B. alba*.

Beggarticks blooms are daisy-like with five to eight white ray florets surrounding many yellow tubular disk florets. Young leaves are simple and oppositely arranged. As they mature, they become compound with three to nine lobed leaflets that are bright green on top and have hairy undersides. Margins of the leaves are toothed. Stems are mostly hairless and green to purplish in color. The plant grows one to three feet tall, but it often matures and blooms when much shorter. One plant can produce 3,000 to 6,000 seeds. The flat seeds have two barb-like bristles on the end that stick to clothing, hair, and animal fur.



Honey bee on Beggarticks

The genus name, *Bidens*, comes from the Latin words *bis*, meaning "two", and *dens*, meaning "tooth" and refers to the barbed bristles on the seed. The species name, *alba*, is the Latin word for "white" and refers to the white ray florets.

The next time you enjoy warm toast with butter and honey, raise a salute to *Bidens alba* and the honey bees that help make honey possible.