



Wekiva Wilderness Trust Newsletter

April, 2023

Event News

Real Florida 5K-10K Race at Wekiwa Springs State Park

We had another great Real Florida race on February 25 even though the weather was unseasonably warm. Thank you to all the great volunteers who turned out to help, including a large contingent from Apopka High School. Special thanks to Rangers Lee and Val for marking the trail. There were lots of comments from runners about how well the course was marked.

Also special thanks to Jim Payne, WESH 2 news anchor, for once again agreeing to be our VIP Race Marshall. Jim not only runs the race but graciously hands out the prizes afterwards.

This year's race attracted 301 runners, despite several competing events in the area on the same day, and we have many people who have been running the race – now in its 36th year – for twenty or more years.

Worthy of special mention are Janice and Seth Elsheimer from Winter Park, who met while running in our race in 1993. They both ran the 5K race this year celebrating their 30th wedding anniversary.



Jack Finucan with Jim Payne

Wekiva Paint Out, February 26-March 4

It is amazing that this year's Wekiva Paint Out was the 17th we have held. We had perfect weather all week and our 26 artists painted from dawn to dusk every day producing wonderful paintings. The event is co-organized by Wekiva Wilderness Trust and Keep Seminole Beautiful. Both nonprofits benefit from art sales. All the artists donate one painting which goes to the highest bidder at the Wednesday night auction and the two nonprofits receive 50 percent of every other painting that is sold. Mark your calendars for next year's event, the 18th Wekiva Paint Out, March 4-9, 2024.



Paintings on display in the Gallery at Wekiva Island



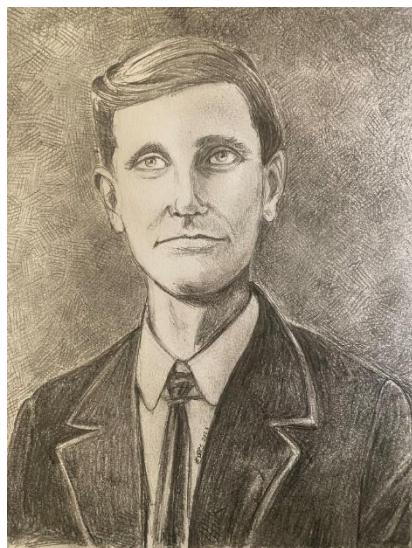
Tom Sadler, one of our regular Paint Out artists.



The Wednesday night auction – always a lively affair

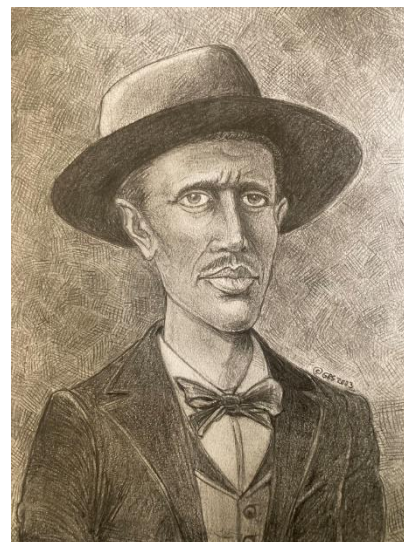
Ethel

The Ethel Project continues to gather steam. Our regular Ethel Hikes are always well attended, and we are nearing completion of the second edition of the Ethel History. Despite more than 15 years of research we have not found a single photograph of Anthony Frazier, the freed slave who became an Orange County Commissioner for Roads in 1880. We have pictures of many of his sons and his wife Mary, who was the local midwife and delivered many of the babies born in Ethel. It is assumed that Anthony took those photographs so was always behind the camera and never in front of it.



**William S. Delk
(Artist's rendition)**

Senator Dennis Baxley is President of Friends of Ethel. His district covers Rock Springs Run State Reserve and Ethel. Recently Don Philpott met with Senator Baxley to discuss Ethel plans. Don was also advocating on behalf of the Florida State Parks Foundation for the legislature to approve the Governor's request for \$50.6 million funding for the Florida Park Service.



**Anthony Frazier
(Artist's rendition)**

Since we have pictures of three of his sons, and they all have a strong family resemblance, we asked an artist to visualize what he thinks Anthony Frazier would have looked like. We also asked the artist to do a sketch of how William Delk Sr, would have looked like in his later years. Delk was the first plantation owner at Rock Springs in 1854 and Anthony Frazier was one of his slaves.



**Senator Dennis Baxley (standing) and Don Philpott
(seated) in Senator Baxley's office in Tallahassee.**

Nature Center

We had a great and well attended meeting/picnic of nature center volunteers on Sunday, March 19 to discuss a redesign of the facility which attracts more than 300,000 visitors a year. One of our volunteers, Steve, was an architect and he has kindly agreed to come up with a design for a new layout. This will mean new habitats and racks to support them and new glass windows. It was agreed that the taxidermy exhibit will go, and this space will be used for displays and exhibits about the park and its wildlife etc., that can be rotated out every two or three months.

Also agreed was that the first move should be a thorough clean out of the nature center to get rid of accumulated debris, dead roaches and lizards etc. that have been in hard to get to places for years. Wednesday, March 22 was the day set to tackle this project. The pictures below show them hard at work.

Ranger Jillian has fun whether she's cleaning a dirty window, or cuddling our gentle giant, Peaches Pine Snake. Peaches, at 6 ft, is longer than Jillian is tall.



Peaches Pine Snake

April is a great time to visit the park and the Nature Center, and we hope some of you will be inspired to volunteer. We need people who are interested in working with reptiles: three snakes, two turtles, and for now at least, a baby alligator. It is a commitment; most of our volunteers are at the center for several hours, one day a week. We clean the habitats, feed the animals, and take them out to meet the public. If you've never handled snakes, or don't know much about the care and feeding of reptiles, no problem. We can teach you.



Charlie Russian Tortoise

Charlie Russian Tortoise is our only exotic species, but he represents the tortoise family, including the native Gopher Tortoise. Russian Tortoises are much smaller than Gopher Tortoises, and therefore a better fit for our enclosure. In his native Asia, he burrows and provides shelter for many other species, just like our native tortoise does. In this photo, Charlie finds something funny—or else he's just having a big yawn. He has proven to be a very popular animal ambassador.

Below is Andy Corn Snake. He is amelanistic, meaning he has no dark pigment. The other snake is Stevie Corn, who is the normal wild color, and also happens to be Andy's daughter. She took after her mom.



Andy Corn Snake



Stevie Corn Snake



This is Salty King Snake.

Salty Florid King Snake

Dolly Tick Tock is a wee gator on loan from Gatorland. We're currently considering whether to keep the gator exhibit, as it takes up a lot of space, but some of us would really like to keep her. We usually keep a baby gator a bit less than a year, and when they get too big for our habitat, we take them back to Gatorland and exchange for a smaller one. Many visitors are from other parts of the world, and have never seen an alligator up close.



Dolly Tick Tock Alligator

And last, here is Flash Florida Box Turtle. If you find this face irresistible, contact us at info@wwt-cso.com, and get ready for a wonderful volunteer job.



Flash Florida Box Turtle

Flower of the Month
Netted Pawpaw (*Asimina reticulata*)



This month's flower, netted pawpaw (*Asimina reticulata*), is a deciduous flowering shrub found in pine and scrubby flatwoods, sandhills and coastal scrub habitats throughout peninsular Florida. It blooms late winter through spring, producing many flowers that attract a wide variety of butterflies. Netted pawpaw is a larval host for the zebra swallowtail and pawpaw sphinx moth.

The showy flowers are creamy white and fragrant with six petals. The three outer petals are large, oblong and outward spreading. The three inner petals are small, fleshy and inward pointing or upright. All petals have a purple base. The blooms appear before the leaves.

Leaves are oval to oblong, leathery and smooth on the upper surface. The underside of the leaves may have a few orange hairs. The leaf margins are smooth and curve toward the underside of the leaf. The species name, *reticulata*, and the common name, netted, refer to the plant's reticulated or netted leaf veins.

The fruit of the netted pawpaw appears in spring and summer. Birds and small mammals eat the fruit and it is edible for humans as well.

Netted pawpaw plants grow 1 to 4 feet tall and 1 to 3 feet wide, in full sun in dry to well-drained sandy soil. Recently several plants were observed growing along the trail between the horse corral to trail marker #32 and at trail marker #33.

April WWT Events

- April 1: Ethel Walk at Rock Springs
- April 2: Wildflower Walk
- April 6: Junior Rangers Club--Spiders
- April 9: Ethel Walk at Rock Springs
- April 12: Junior Rangers Club—Water Safety
- April 15: Survival Boot Camp
- April 16: Wildflower Walk
- April 23: Ethel Walk at Rock Springs

To register go to [Meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com) and join the Wekiva Wilderness Trust—Family Hike and Outdoor Discovery Group