



Wekiva Wilderness Trust Newsletter

July, 2023

News

Volunteer Awards

We had a great turnout for the volunteer appreciation hot dog supper at the end of the May (thank you Val Hahn) and it provided the opportunity to make awards to those who were unable to attend the District 3 Volunteer Appreciation Day at Washington Oaks in April, and who were not mentioned in our previous newsletter.



Robert Brooks and Val Hahn at the belated awards ceremony in the dining hall at the youth camp



Robert Brooks, Elaine Fisher, Val Hahn

Elaine Fisher who was the 2022 Statewide Volunteer of the Year – Environmental Protection. Elaine received her award in special recognition for serving as volunteer emergency personnel in situations such as prescribed fires and offering her services statewide during natural disasters.



Forest Friends Adventure Collective Representatives with Val Hahn (2nd from right)

The Forest Friends Adventure Collective received the award for being an outstanding community partner in environmental education. They represent a large group of home-schooled children in the area.

Always smiling. The Nieves family received awards for their many volunteer activities. Isabel and Emelie were the 2022 Statewide Youth Volunteers of the Year.



**The Nieves Family
Isabel & Emelie in front**

Joanne Bolemon receiving her Presidential Volunteer Appreciation Gold Medal along with a certificate and letter from President Biden.



**Joanne Bolemon (2nd from left)
with Robert Brooks, Don Philpott, & Val Hahn**

The other Presidential Gold medal winners were Debbie LaFreniere, Nancy Geffner, and Patty Geuder “in recognition and appreciation for their commitment to strengthen our nation and communities through volunteer service.”

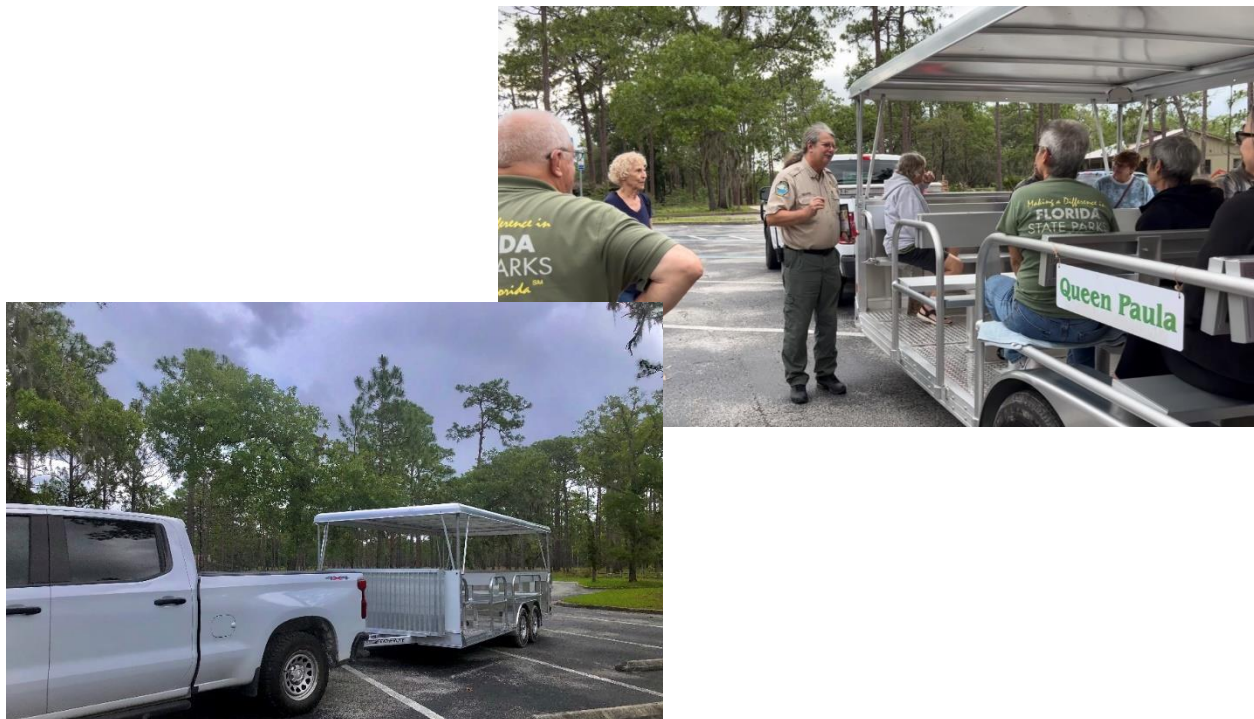
All four recipients are long standing volunteers at the park’s small nature center and members of the Wekiva Wilderness Trust, the nonprofit, volunteer organization that supports the work of the Wekiva River basin State Parks (Wekiwa Springs, Lower Wekiva River Preserve, and Rock Springs Run State Reserve). The nature center attracts more than 300,000 visitors a year from around the world.



Volunteer Mario who won the Resident Team Player Award

Tram

As previously reported, the park now has a new wheelchair-accessible tram that was donated by the Wekiva Wilderness Trust. The tram can accommodate up to 20 passengers including those in wheelchairs. It is a welcome addition to the park's fleet of vehicles and will be used in conjunction with an expanded program of park tours for visitors.



National Black Bear Day



National Black Bear Day was celebrated in the park with an information table near the nature center. It proved very popular with visitors.



Black Bear recently spotted by Ann & Marie while on patrol

Junior Rangers Club

The Junior Rangers Club continues to go from strength to strength. Last month's program featured camping. Wekiwa Springs was the first state park in Florida to organize a Junior Rangers Club with monthly meetings. In July it will celebrate its first birthday. Congratulations to the club and to Val for this great initiative. Today's Junior Rangers are tomorrow's park champions.





Val and volunteer Rebecca.

Ethel



In the last four weeks two people have come forward who are the great, great granddaughters of folks who lived in Ethel in the 1880s. In both instances they have been able to provide valuable information about their relatives including family trees and some wonderful old photos which will make the Ethel book even more comprehensive.

The photograph at the left is Finley Click and his wife Margaret, outside their second home at Ethel. His original cabin was built with logs laid horizontally while his new cabin uses boards secured vertically. The photograph was taken about 1910.

Nature Center

Over the last couple of weeks all the nature center critters have had what will become an annual head-to-toe inspection as well as having bloodwork done and x-rays taken. Our veterinarian, Andrew Kushnir, is something of a celebrity and is known as the nomad vet. You can read more about him at

<https://www.thewildest.com/pet-lifestyle/andrew-kushnir>.

All our animals are doing fine although the vet recommended some diet changes for Dolly as she doesn't seem to be growing as fast as our previous gators. Our thanks also to Kim Titterington, aka the 'Swamp Girl,' for doing the x-rays with her mobile machine (which the WWT helped to purchase).



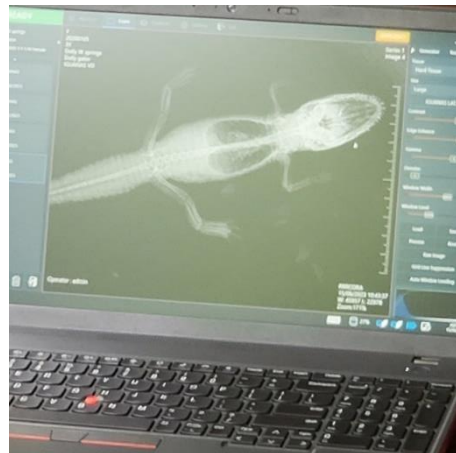
Dr. Andrew Kurshnr holding Andy



Andrew Kurshnr & Kim Titterington



Dolly posing for her X-ray



Dolly Inside Out

A Nature Center Visitor



This tiny musk turtle was handed in to the Nature Center. We thought it was very young, but Swamp Girl Kim reckoned it was about one year old. It was released safely.

Flower of the Month

Butterfly Weed

Asclepias tuberosa

Asclepias tuberosa, commonly known as butterfly weed, is a species of milkweed native to eastern and southwestern North America. It is commonly known as butterfly weed because butterflies are attracted to the plant by its color and its copious production of nectar.

Butterfly milkweed is a perennial wildflower that occurs naturally in sandhills, pine flatwoods, and other sandy uplands as well as along sunny roadsides. It is the larval host of Monarch, Queen, and Soldier butterflies. It blooms spring through fall, attracting hummingbirds, bees and other pollinators.

Butterfly milkweed's bright orange to reddish flowers are borne in showy umbrella-like clusters (umbrels) at the tops of the stems. Each flower has a five lobed reflexed (curved backward or downward) corolla with an upright corona (trumpet-shaped part of the corolla). This characteristic is typical of milkweed flowers. The stems are rough to hairy. Leaves are coarse, narrowly ovate (oval-shaped) to lanceolate (lance-shaped), and opposite each other on the stems. Seeds form in erect pods called follicles that dry and split open as the fruit matures. Each seed is attached to a white silky "parachute" (pappas) that catches the wind and aids in dispersal.



Gulf Fritillary nectaring on *Asclepias tuberosa*

Asclepias tuberosa is an exception to the *Asclepias* genus in that its stem does not contain the milky latex that distinguishes the rest of the genus and gives it the common name, milkweed.

Our love for Monarch butterflies has led to interest in including milkweed in home landscapes. It is important to use native species, rather than tropical milkweed (*Asclepias curassavica*), a non-native plant available at many big box stores and large retail nurseries.

Unfortunately, many of the tropical milkweed plants are treated with systemic insecticides which could kill caterpillars or stunt their growth.

Tropical milkweed does not die back in Florida (as do native milkweeds) and can encourage overwintering in adult Monarchs. It is also linked to the transmission of *Ophryocystis elektroscirrha* (OE) infection. OE is a protozoan parasite that is spread through microscopic spores coming off the wings and bodies of adult butterflies. These spores are packed in between scales on the Monarch's body and, when it lays eggs, they often attach to the egg shell. Because OE is a parasite, it relies on a living host and will generally not kill Monarchs but will lead to weakness, disfigurement, and lethargy. Eventually the butterfly might die from sheer exhaustion.



Native Butterflyweed
(*Asclepias tuberosa*)



Non-native Tropical Milkweed
(*Asclepias curassavica*)

Look for native butterflyweed in dry sandy habitats throughout the parks of the Wekiva River basin. In Wekiwa Springs State Park it has been observed growing near the junction of the Youth Camp Road and the service road by the native plant garden.
