



Wekiva Wilderness Trust Newsletter

August, 2023

News

Junior Rangers Club

The Wekiwa Springs State Park’s Junior Rangers Club celebrated its first anniversary on Friday, July 7 with a party in the park. Before enjoying hot dogs and cupcakes, everyone grabbed buckets and grabbers and went out picking up litter. Apart from trash, a beautiful, fossilized sea urchin was also found. Ranger Val started the Junior Ranger Club and Wekiwa Springs was the first Florida state park to organize regular monthly meetings. The club has proved so popular that several other state parks have now started their own. It was also great to see Val back on his feet again after his recent surgery.



Ranger Val talking to the Junior Rangers Club during its first anniversary celebrations.

**Top: July, 2022, Junior Rangers Club First Meeting
Bottom: July, 2023. Junior Rangers Club First Anniversary Meeting**



Junior Rangers get to handle the “rattle” from an Eastern Diamondback rattlesnake.



The ever-smiling Nieves family who helped organize the event.

Ethel Update

The Ethel Project continues to move forward. A new 20' x 36' pavilion has now been ordered for the Ethel trailhead with delivery due in October. It will be constructed near the restrooms at Rock Springs Run State Reserve. Before that, permits will have to be obtained and a concrete slab laid. The pavilion

was made possible by a \$100,000 grant from Walt Disney World. The remainder of their grant money will be used to buy picnic tables and benches for visitors and school groups.

The Project has also been awarded a \$30,000 matching grant from the Florida Department of State which will be used to fund publication of a revised and expanded Ethel book and a series of interpretive panels to be installed along the 1.5-mile, wheelchair accessible Ethel trail. The plan is to have 2,000 copies of the book printed with copies donated to every school and library in our tri-county area of Orange, Seminole and Lake. The latest version of the book will still be available online at our website as a free, downloadable e-book and we will continue to add more information to it until a new hard copy becomes necessary.

Make a note on your calendar to join us on Saturday, September 9 for an Ethel Walk-Through. We hope to get as many volunteers as possible to walk through what used to be the central part of the Ethel township. The area will be split into four quadrants and groups walking shoulder to shoulder will walk through their allotted quadrants looking for any signs of the long-vanished Ethel. From detailed research we know almost all the families who settled in Ethel over its 60 years or so of existence, and we know what land they owned and where. What we don't know is where on the land they built their cabin homes. We hope that the walk-through will reveal traces of the sand bricks that early settlers used as foundations to elevate the log walls off the earth to prevent them rotting. We also hope that amongst the woodlands, other artifacts might be found.

When the settlers moved into Ethel, they would clear their land and chop down most trees except for large oaks and cedars which provided shade for their cabins. Almost all the trees that you see today are post Ethel, but it is still possible to make out the clearings in the woods which were almost certainly the sites of cabins 100 years and more ago.

The walk-through is regarded as an archaeological ground survey and so a permit from the Department of Environmental Protection is needed and has been applied for. The walkthrough will be supervised by trained professionals. If any items are discovered, they will be photographed, and their location flagged but they will not be removed. Once the results of the walk-through have been reviewed, an historical and cultural resources team will come in to determine the importance of each finding.

Picture This

If you are interested in plants and wildflowers but often have no idea what you are looking at, try the *Picture This* app on your smart phone – it is amazing, and I use it all the time in the park. Simply take a photo of the plant and within seconds it will identify it and provide loads of information about it. There is a charge to download the app, but it is well worth it.

A caveat to the *Picture This* app. Most often the app correctly identifies the plant in your photo; however, it is a worldwide data base so sometimes it just comes close (right genus, wrong species) or miss identifies the local plants. It is a good practice to verify the identification with another resource such as florida.plantatlas.usf.edu.

Nature News

Red-bellied Woodpecker

Melanerpes carolinus

Red-bellied woodpeckers are often seen on the tall palm trees overlooking Wekiwa Springs, foraging in the bark for insects or excavating a nesting hole. Alert visitors may watch them going in and out of nest holes to feed their young in the springtime.

Although the males have a bright red nape and cap and the females have a red nape, this species is named for the blush of red on its belly, which can be seen in this photo. They're often mistaken by the casual observer for the much less common Red-headed woodpecker, which can also be found in Wekiwa Springs State Park, in upland habitats.

Found throughout the eastern United States, they make themselves at home in various forests as well as suburban back yards. They will also nest in birdhouses. They nest from April through June, usually laying 4-6 eggs. They are quite territorial and will often chase other birds away from bird feeders. Their diet consists of seeds, nuts, and insects.



Flower of the Month

Loblolly Bay *Gordonia lasianthus*

The first time I saw the beautiful flowers of the Loblolly Bay tree (*Gordonia lasianthus*) I was hiking the moist prairie trail in Wekiwa Springs State Park from trail marker #33 toward #22 and Camp Cozy. I nearly ran into a low growing flower of a young Loblolly Bay growing at trailside. Of course, I had to stop and get acquainted with the flower of this lovely tree.



The large, showy and fragrant flowers attract many insect pollinators. The flowers are about 3 inches in diameter, snowy white with five petals encircling numerous yellow stamens. The flowers resemble some camellia flowers. Flowers appear in profusion in late spring to early summer and sporadically throughout the summer.

Loblolly bay is a member of the tea family (Theaceae) and is related to the tea plant (*Camellia sinensis*) and the camellia plant (*Camellia japonica*). It is native to southern United States coastal plain from southern Virginia, west to Louisiana and south to Lake Okeechobee in Florida. Its natural habitat is in swamps, bogs, wet flatwoods and other wet areas where it often grows with sweetbay (*Magnolia virginiana*). The leaves of sweetbay have white undersides as compared to loblolly bay's light green.

Loblolly bay is a medium to large evergreen tree. Bark is grayish becoming grayish-brown, deeply ridged, furrowed and rugged at maturity. The leaves are alternate, simple, oblong to elliptic, leathery, dark green above, 4-6 inches long, 1-1.5 inches wide, with crenate (wavy) to serrate (toothed) margins.

An interesting fact: The 18th century botanist, Andre Micheaux, admired loblolly bay and shipped many specimens of the tree to Europe.

On your next hike over squishy wet ground in full sun to light shade look for the loblolly bay tree and its striking flowers.