



## Wekiva Wilderness Trust Newsletter December, 2023

### News

#### Junior Rangers Club

Junior Rangers Club is back by popular demand. Wekiwa Springs was the first Florida State Park to launch a regular Junior Rangers Club and it celebrated its first birthday in July. There was a short break after Ranger Val left and before Ranger Brent took over, but the Club met at the end of November and new programs are being arranged. While Wekiwa Springs was the first park to launch a Junior Rangers Club, several other parks have followed our example.



**Brent and the ever-smiling Nieves family, one of the driving forces behind the Junior Rangers Club.**

**JOIN US FOR  
JUNIOR RANGERS  
FRIENDLY FLAMES**

**LEARN:** LEARN MORE ABOUT FRIENDLY FLAMES  
**EARN:** NATURAL RESOURCES STAMP  
**GIVE BACK:** SHORT COMMUNITY TRASH CLEAN-UP

PARTICIPANTS UNDER 18 MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY AN ADULT.  
**Please bring water & closed-toe shoes**

TUESDAY NOVEMBER 28, 2023  
5:00 PM - 6:00 PM  
WEKIWA SPRINGS STATE PARK  
SINK HOLE PAVILION

DISPONIBLE EN ESPAÑOL  
TO RSVP EMAIL  
Brent.saulsbury@FloridaDEP.gov

SPONSORED BY  
WEKIVA WILDERNESS TRUST  
FLORIDA STATE PARKS

## Ethel

The Historic Ethel Trail, which winds through what was once a thriving post-Civil War township, is now open at Rock Springs Run State Reserve in Sorrento.

Visitors can walk the 1.5-mile, wheelchair accessible loop and view twelve interpretive panels along the way which describe the history of Ethel and what life was like back then. The trail goes through what would have been the heart of the sprawling township which had a station, store, post office, cemetery, and one-room school.

Guided tours are conducted twice a month, but visitors can now do the walk themselves with a self-guided brochure available at the trailhead. School groups are also being encouraged to visit to learn more about their local history.

A pavilion with picnic tables and benches is being erected at the trailhead and there are plans to reconstruct two homestead cabins, based on a photograph (below) of a typical 16' x 16' one-room cabin built at Ethel in 1888. One will be a small museum and the other will be furnished – sparsely – as it would have been around that time.



**Cabin built at Ethel by Finley Click around 1888**

In addition to opening the trail, a book about Ethel's history has been published. An e-book version can be downloaded free at [www.wwt-cso.com](http://www.wwt-cso.com). Hard copies are being distributed to every school and library in Lake, Orange, and Seminole counties.





The Wekiva Wilderness Trust has also contracted with Chronicle Heritage, a professional cultural resources management company, to conduct an archaeological survey of a 32-acre area that would have been the heart of the Ethel township. They will identify, map, document and record potentially unrecorded historical artifacts, features, sites, and structures with the goal of collecting historical data and expanding interpretation of the historic town site.

### Fort Clinch

If you have never visited Fort Clinch in Fernandino Beach, you need to. It is one of the most impressive of Florida's state parks and has a long and fascinating history. At the beginning of November, the Florida State Parks Foundation held its quarterly board meeting there and we were privileged to enjoy a lantern-lit dinner in the former barracks.





Afterwards, there was a hand over from President Tammy Gustafson to incoming president Kathleen Brennan and a cannon was fired in Tammy's honor to ensure she went out with a bang.

### **MeetUp Wekiwa**

By the time this newsletter reaches you we should be close to 2,000 members. What an incredible achievement.

### **Rolling Stones**



The Rolling Stones will be performing in Orlando next June so maybe we will get to see Mick Jagger back at Wekiwa again. The last time they performed – at the Orlando Citrus Bowl in June 2015 - Mike popped in to Wekiwa after performing the night before. As a nature lover and birdwatcher, he often tries to visit nearby parks when he is on tour.

**Mick Jagger, Sat June 13, 2015,  
the day after concert at the Orlando Citrus Bowl.**



## Nature News

### ROBBER FLY (Family: Asilidae)



There are about 100 different species of robber flies in Florida, but these large green-eyed ones are most often seen in Wekiwa Springs State Park. They are about two inches long, with yellow tiger-stripes on the abdomen. One species specifically preys on bumble bees, and actually resembles one itself. That one's scientific name translates to "wooly one from hell." Another name for robber flies is Hanging Thief. They are fierce predators, and best left alone as they can deliver a painful bite to humans.

Their diet is mostly but not exclusively other flying insects, and their hunting styles resembles that of fly-catching birds. They perch on a bare twig watching for prey, and spotting one, anticipate the flight pattern then fly to intercept their prey instead of chasing it. Once prey is captured, as seen in these photos, the robber hangs from a blade of grass or twig with one foot while grasping the insect and injecting a paralyzing, liquefying venom into its abdomen. It then sucks out the liquified abdominal contents.



Eggs are laid in soil or in dead wood, and hatch into larvae. There are four larval instars before pupation, and the entire life cycle takes one to three years, depending on the species.

Watch for Robber Flies on the orange trail, and on the Mill Pond trail, in both drier upland areas and wetland areas. Some seem to be territorial and stay in one area for a while to hunt.



## Flower of the Month

### Painted Leaf; Fire-on-the-Mountain

#### *Euphorbia cyathophora*

December is here and every nursery, grocery, big lot store and many others are selling poinsettia plants, famous for their bright red upper “leaves”, which we think of as flowers but are actually leafy bracts.

Did you know that a relative of the commercial poinsettia (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*) is native to Florida? The wild poinsettia (*Euphorbia cyathophora*) is known by many common names including Painted Leaf, Mexican Fireplant, Fire on the Mountain, Painted Euphorbia, Wild Poinsettia, Florida Poinsettia, Dwarf Poinsettia, and Desert Poinsettia. The Florida Plant Atlas lists two common names, Paintedleaf and Fire-on-the-Mountain. The atlas is available on line at <https://florida.plantatlas.usf.edu>.

Paintedleaf (*Euphorbia cyathophora*) is an erect growing annual or short-lived perennial. The tiny flowers are greenish-yellow and produce large three-lobed ovaries. Flowers are borne at the top of the stem in a cuplike structure called the cyathia. Nectar glands are at the base of the flowers inside the cyathia. Below and surrounding the flowers are conspicuous leafy bracts with distinctively red bases, giving the plant its common name.

Flowering occurs all year, although the plant might be winter dormant in northern Florida. Leaves have petioles (the leaf stem attaching to the plant stem) and are arranged alternately on the stem. The leaf shape varies from linear to oblong to fiddle-like, and may be lobed and/or toothed. The stem is thin but sturdy, smooth and bright green. It contains a milky sap which is a characteristic of the Euphorbiaceae family. Seeds are oval, brownish-black and borne in sets of threes.



Painted leaf occurs naturally in pinelands, hammocks, by roadsides and in other disturbed sites. It prefers full sun to part shade and moist to dry, well drained sandy soil. Its tiny flowers attract butterflies and bees. The seeds are a favorite of mourning doves.

The genus name *Euphorbia* (as well as the family name Euphorbiaceae) refers to the Greek physician Euphorbus who discovered many medicinal properties of plants in this genus.

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## Happy Holidays Everyone