



The Spring Board

Volume 17, Issue 3

June, 2021

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Park Plants Demystified By Jeff Hugo

SOUTHERN MAGNOLIA *Magnolia grandiflora*



Try it out! Take a picture of the QR code and find out more about the Southern Magnolia.

Park Volunteer Charles Lorch had a sincere desire to be able to recognize and know more about the plants in and around the main visitation areas of the Lodge, Concession Building and the Waterfront. Sadly, there was rarely anyone with the expertise around to answer his questions. An idea was born. Why not create signage with a QR code that would direct people to a page with information about the plant?

After a mid-March walk around the grounds, Park Services Specialist Jeff Hugo and Charles sat down to discuss some of the challenges ahead. What form would the signage take? What information would be included on the plant page? What internet site would people be directed to see the information? Who would create the signs, compile the information, and layout the plant information pages? Who would put the information on the internet and match it with QR codes? How would needed materials be paid for?

Following a discussion with Park Manager Amy Conyers, some of the questions had tentative answers. We would start

out with a test plot — The Butterfly Garden. We would use the sign holders already there and replace the present cards with newly laminated cards complete with QR codes.

Jeff would create the signs, compile the information and create the plant page layout.

Amy would talk to the Friends about using their website to display the plant pages.

Charles relayed what information he would like to see provided and indicated he would assist with the purchase of any needed materials.

The Friends gave their OK. Rob Gelhardt of Gelhardt Graphics would be generous and kind enough to put the pages on the website complete with QR codes.

Jeff created a plant page ID template and began researching the information with the Florida Native Plant Society and University of Florida/Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences websites. File photos taken by Robert Thompson and many new photos taken by Jeff's trusty cell-phone made up the majority of images used in the project.

The Butterfly Garden test plot was reviewed. With positive responses from Amy, former Park Ranger Charlie Baisden, and Charles Lorch, the OK was given to expand the project. By Tuesday, June 1, 74 plants had been identified and uploaded to the Friends website.

It is hoped that the easy-to-access information will inspire park guests to learn more, appreciate further the park's diversity, and to embolden guests to use native plants in their own landscapes.

Park Needs and Deeds By John Melton



“It’s getting hot quickly! More and more folks are looking to cool off in the beautiful and awesome healing waters of Wakulla Springs State Park.”

It’s getting hot quickly! More and more folks are looking to cool off in the beautiful and awesome healing waters of Wakulla Springs State Park. Get ready for some new faces on our staff as we bring on extra help for the Summer season. You will see new people in the Ranger Station as well as on the beach. Kevin Posey who was a big help last summer is back with us! Be sure to welcome Kevin when you see him.

You will also see a familiar face on our volunteer team. Retired Ranger Charlie Baisden is volunteering every other Wednesday on the grounds. We welcome new volunteer boat captain Lori Ann Firehammer. We would also like to welcome Madyson Brown and Solomon Keith to our Lifeguard staff and OPS Ranger Joshua “Aslan” Shirey.

Sadly, due to the restrictions of

the Covid-19 worldwide pandemic, there seems to be a shortage of lifeguards. If you are lifeguard certified and want one of Wakulla County’s most iconic summer jobs, give me a call at 850-561-7272. Movie stars have started their careers in the lifeguard chairs of Wakulla Springs!

Looking back on the three months since the last Springboard, we have continued the upkeep and everyday maintenance of



“Movie stars have started their careers in the lifeguard chairs of Wakulla Springs!”

LEFT: Ricou Browning played the underwater creature in *Creature from the Black Lagoon*.

Park Needs and Deeds (Continued) By John Melton

the park. We have repaired porches on residences, patched holes in the main shop drive, pressure washed the dive tower, replaced valves in restrooms and replaced outdated appliances in park residences.

Ranger Jeff Hicks recently reorganized the entire shop compound and with the help of OPS Ranger Bruce Graybeal rebuilt our grounds maintenance trailer. Ranger Maria Wilhelmy and Ranger Kat Wilson with assistance from OPS Ranger Ethan Whaley installed new flooring in the administration building. Ranger Steven and OPS Ranger Scott have been keeping wood surfaces squeaky clean with the pressure washer as well as helping with other maintenance projects around the park. Ranger Phil and Ranger Collin have been busy repairing the floating platforms at waterfront and replacing boards as needed on the boardwalks. Maintenance Specialist Cecil Lewis remains ever vigilant for problems on our tour boats.

Looking ahead you will see some changes at Emerald Sink and Cheryl Sink, two karst windows in our River Sinks outparcel. The cave divers with the Woodville Karst Plains Program (WKPP), are raising funds to repair the platform and steps at Emerald Sink and the platform at Cheryl Sink. They plan to have a volunteer



“Experienced musician, Ranger Collin Johnson, has taken the lead on the [CD] project with help from Ranger Kat and Ranger Maria on vocals and lyrics.”

workday soon.

Something else to look forward to is the release of the park’s first musical album. The Friends of Wakulla Springs have been working with our many talented rangers to write and arrange songs about the park’s natural resources. Experienced musician Ranger Collin Johnson has taken the lead on the project with help from Ranger Kat and Ranger Maria on vocals and lyrics. Ranger Phil provides back-up harmonica on some of the tracts. Park Manager Amy Conyers is working up the album cover and lyric sheet. The Friends will be releasing the album “River of the Crying Bird” soon. Be certain to get your copy from the Friends of Wakulla Springs when it debuts.

Summer is here and the grass is growing faster! We are on our 12 boat a day summer tour schedule along with the constant maintenance that park life entails. We are ready to serve. Come on out and have an enjoyable experience at Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park.



“Ranger Steven ...has been keeping wood surfaces squeaky clean with the pressure washer....”

Time to Consider By Amy Conyers



I wonder how often I write about change. Likely it's every article that I write for The Springboard. I look back at the last quarter and I think about what has changed and I'm ALWAYS surprised.

Many of us are still reeling from 2020. What a year. There wasn't anyone who didn't experience some big changes last year. We're all taking part in some rebuilding efforts whether it's our work life, home life, or our psyche.

We are looking at the quickly approaching summer and I think while we are yearning for things to be the way they were, there are still remnants of the previous year that have not left us yet.

We have an opportunity before us. We all have a chance right now to steer some of those changes. We don't have to have everything go back to the way that it was.

I hope that we continue to see the limits of creativity pushed to the edges of nor-

mal. I'm excited to see the music created by Collin and those around him pressed on to CD and made available to the public. I'm glad to see a suggestion from a volunteer emerge into a terrific way to identify the plants in the park. I'm glad to see volunteers and former employees returning to the park to share their knowledge with current cadre.

I hope that we will continue to recognize that hand washing, a little distance, and some barriers are good things. It was really nice to avoid many of the common communicable illnesses this past year. It would be just fine if the common cold was not so common.

We came together even more as a team this past year. We were more conscious of how our actions and risks taken outside of work mattered more to our coworkers than it has before. I hope that we continue that deep consideration for others.

I have had so many conversations with park staff who are

putting their coworkers first with any number of professional and personal situations or decisions that they make. I think we have also gotten better at keeping an eye on each other and just asking, "How are you doing?" with a much greater understanding of the importance of that question.

We have experienced the value of putting all of our heads together to work out the solution to a problem. It's harder to get everyone together now, but I think we need to keep trying. Our various skills, experiences, and outlooks on life are so different, there isn't anything that we can't figure out when we put our heads together. No one can have all the answers, but our team will find them.

As we take down the Covid signs and we watch the summer crowds swell, let's take the time to consider, what changes can stay, what should go back to the way it was, what can continue to improve? I hope we take this time to reinvent our routines and make some choices before we go back to the way it has always been.



The Bluegill Challenge By Jeff Hugo; Photo courtesy of Robert Thompson



The increasingly hard-to-find bluegill (*Lepomis macrochirus*) might be spotted peeking out from under the boat dock.

It reminds me of a magician's trick. The magician hides something under a dark veil, waves the magic wand, removes the veil, and the object is gone. So it has been with the number of bluegills (bream) on the tour route of the Wakulla River.

Sadly, the question of when they became scarce is a mystery. The concerns of 2020 were of social distancing and mask wearing. Boat tours were suspended for almost 6 months. The rains came and went. The River turned from brown to green and back.

The volunteers of the wildlife survey team also endured a six-week hiatus gathering data. But even upon their resumption, bluegills were not on their radar. They had never

been part of the survey data.

And so, all that exists is anecdotal information—the stories that people tell.

The stories include the days of the glass bottom boat tours when captains would call schools of bluegills to parade behind the boat. (It didn't hurt that they cast a few nuggets of fish pellets for encouragement.)

There were schools of bluegills that hung out just off the patio where guests wait to take the river boat tour.

There were schools of bluegills easily spotted along the river boat tour.

Gone.

Former Biologist and Park Ranger Robert Thompson pointed out the lack of bluegills to me on a wildlife survey tour. I had to agree with his observation.

As I continued with wildlife surveys and river boat tours, I continued to look for bluegills. They did not present themselves. I suggested the bluegill challenge to other park rangers. Park Ranger Kat Wilson texted me on April 15, "I did see one less brim today. A cormorant caught him under the dock."

I noticed a couple weeks later that there were a number of small bluegills and bass that would peek out from under the boat dock. Perhaps there is hope.

But based upon the stories of the past, there seems to be a spiraling decrease in the number of bluegills. Could these anecdotal observations prove helpful in noting changes in other wildlife trends?

Time, consistent work, and the expertise of park volunteers and staff continues to paint the picture of changes at Wakulla Springs State Park. The data will provide some answers. But all too often, it gives rise to more questions.

If the questions are the veil, and the bluegills are beneath it, let us hope that by the time the veil is lifted with answers that the bluegills have not totally disappeared. Join the "bluegill challenge" and keep looking with a hopeful eye.

Where Have All the Anhingas Gone? By Jeff Hugo *Phots courtesy of Robert Thompson*

2021 vs 2020	3/6/21	3/13/21	3/20/21	3/27/21	4/3/21	4/10/21	4/17/21	4/24/21	5/1/21	5/8/21	5/15/21	5/22/21	5/29/21	Average
pieb-billed grebe	6.9%		-35.3%	20.0%	13.8%	n/a	-28.6%	-60.0%	62.5%	45.5%	40.0%	-50.0%	57.1%	6.5%
common gallinule	-28.3%	34.6%	-46.9%	-20.9%	-45.8%	n/a	-5.3%	-34.1%	-35.7%	-15.2%	42.9%	-12.8%	-32.7%	-16.7%
anhinga	-64.3%	-21.4%	-50.0%	-61.1%	-75.0%	n/a	-85.7%	-78.6%	-83.3%	-75.0%	-50.0%	-83.3%	-70.0%	-66.5%

Graph of weekly Wildlife Survey compiled by Robert Deyle comparing populations of pied-billed grebes, common gallinules, and anhingas on the Wakulla River Boat Tour Route between 2020 and 2021. Positive values indicate percentage increases; negative values are percentage decreases.

Habitat is the natural home of a living thing. There are four elements to habitat. They are food, water, shelter, and space. If one of those elements is damaged, destroyed or for some reason absent, the organism cannot survive in its habitat.

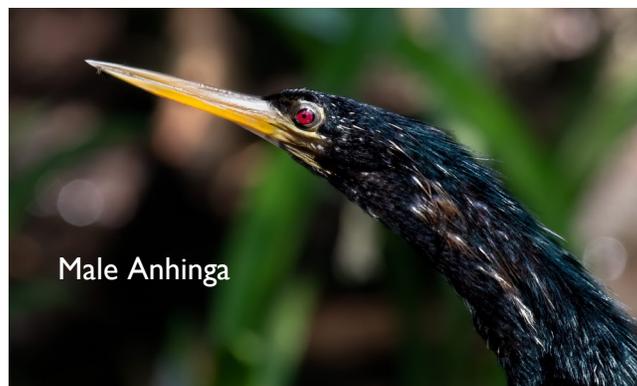
It is natural for populations of living things to fluctuate. Some years there may be an abundance of the four habitat elements and in others there may be a shortage. And sometimes an element or elements of habitat may become askew for long periods of time or even permanently, thus eliminating a living organism from its former habitat.

We are all too familiar with the story at Wakulla Springs State Park. In the late 90’s, the apple snail (the preferred food of the limpkin), and consequently the Limpkin itself, found the habitat along the Wakulla River unable to support their populations. To this day, the precipitous decrease in the apple snail population is still a mystery. It has never recovered to its former glory. Consequently, the limpkins have not returned with their preferred food source in short supply.

The work carried out by the volunteers of the weekly wildlife survey could be indicating a sad sequel starring two different species. With bluegill populations mysteriously hard-to-find, a significant decrease in anhinga populations has been documented on the tour route.

One question is whether the population decrease is part of the normal swing of life’s pendulum. Data (such as that in the table above) is what is needed to answer questions such as that. Sadly, we don’t have any data (except anecdotal evidence) of bluegill populations.

Whether we will one day be able to explain the decrease in the anhinga population on the Wakulla River Tour Boat Route or understand its hopeful rebound remains to be seen. The time generously offered by the park volunteers may make the difference. We all hope that the two young anhingas currently on the tour route's one nest are not the last to be seen.



Male Anhinga



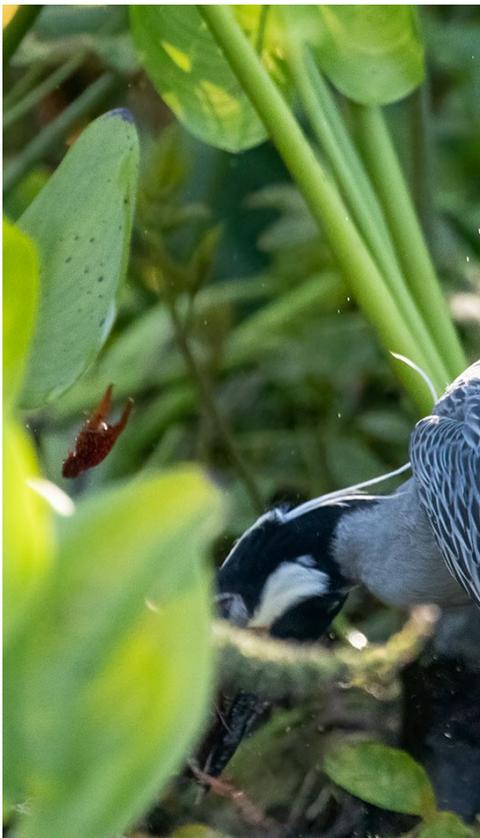
Baby Anhingas on the Nest

A Wildlife Survey Photo Tour By Jeff Hugo Photos Courtesy of Robert Thompson

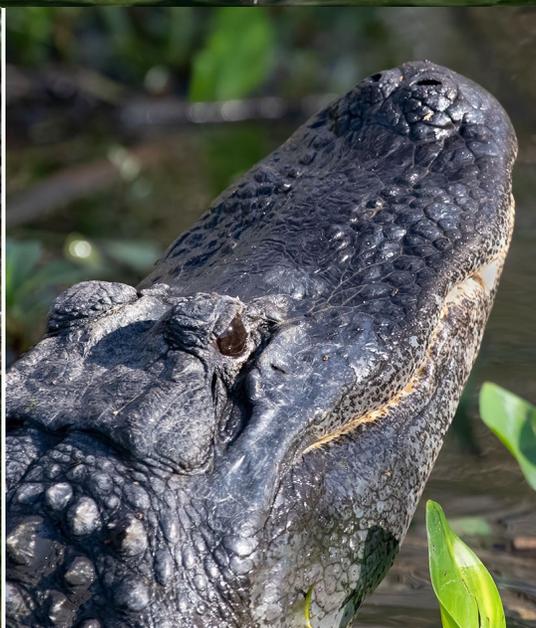
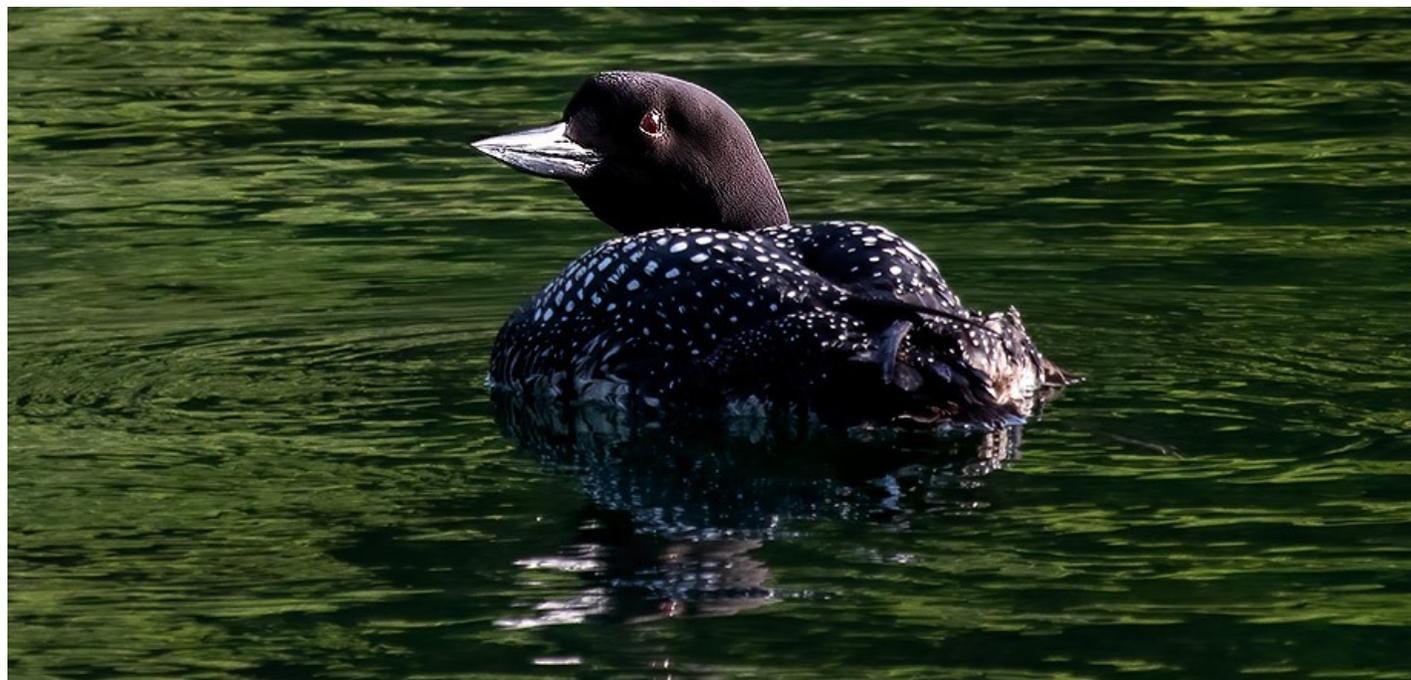
Wakulla Springs State Park can be very thankful for the volunteers that conduct the Weekly Wildlife Survey on the Wakulla River.

Their work every Saturday morning has provided the data to support wildlife population changes on the river, unusual wildlife sightings, and a photographic record of its splendor.

Former Park Ranger Robert Thompson is responsible for the vast majority of the impressive photos. Enjoy a few of them along with the survey team.



A Wildlife Survey Photo Tour Photos Courtesy of Robert Thompson



Resource Management News and Notes By Patty Wilbur Photos by Patty Wilbur



“Probably the biggest change for me this year has been the addition of Josh Rowe to our team,” reflects Patty Wilbur.

Spring is always a season of change, and this year it’s certainly brought plenty. Probably the biggest change for me this year has been the addition of Josh Rowe to our team, in a new OPS Environmental Specialist I position.

Josh is a graduate of Palm Beach Atlantic University with a bachelor’s degree in Biology. He began his Florida Park Service career as an intern at John D. MacArthur Beach State Park, and later worked there as an Animal Care Specialist. He then joined AmeriCorps, working out of Alfred B. Maclay Gardens State Park for the past two years. While there he helped to survey and treat exotic

plant infestations and became a prescribed burn crew member.

I’ve been thrilled to have Josh’s assistance, especially as the park shifts into the busy season when it can be a bit more difficult to find spare hands. He’s been a joy to work with, and a great help to me in prescribed burning and prep, exotics surveys and treatments, trail and equipment maintenance, and many other tasks.

In 2019, Assistant Park Manager John Melton and Park Rangers Kat Wilson and Steven Urling attended in-person trainings to become prescribed burners. After each completing three trainee burns since then, all three became full-fledged burn crew members by early this year!

With the addition of Josh to our staff, we now have six prescribed burners in-house at Wakulla Springs including Park

Manager Amy Conyers and myself. It’s been wonderful having so many of our own staff members on our burns. They’re great to work with and know our park well.

We’ve sure kept busy with prescribed burning this spring! After a very rainy January, the weather took a turn for the better in late February. We started off the season assisting with a burn at Torreya State Park.

March began with the first park service burn at our new Ferrell tract, burning the pasture area and the young pines to the north of it. The following week we burned the areas around our administrative building over two days, then helped with a burn at Ochlockonee River State Park. The week after that we burned an 80-acre zone in the sanctuary and a 249-acre block surrounding



Steven Urling is igniting a prescribed fire.

Resource Management News and Notes By Patty Wilbur Photos by Patty Wilbur



“Sasha Ernst led us on a burn at the Ferrell tract to renew his burn boss certification.”

Cherokee Sink. We were able to burn the open pine area along the south side of Hwy. 267 at the end of March.

The good burn weather continued into April, and we continued lighting. We were able to burn two large zones at the south end of the sanctuary on April 4th, for a total of 350 acres that day.

The next week I turned over the reins to FPS Fire Management Program Coordinator Sasha Ernst. He led us on a burn at the Ferrell tract to renew his burn boss certification.

We'll be assisting Ochlockonee River and Torreya State Parks

with more burning this week. We still have a couple burns we'd like to conduct in the sanctuary area of the park; we've just been waiting for the wind to blow in a favorable direction.

We've also had some burning conducted by our forestry contractor F4 Tech this spring. They've prepped fire lines at the Ferrell and Cherokee parcels and have conducted three burns at the Ferrell tract at this point. They plan to do additional burning for us at these outparcels over the next year, as soon as the weather and season are right for each zone.

Our longleaf pine restoration project at the River Sinks parcel is continuing. The timber crew recently shifted across Hwy 319 and began harvesting timber in the block surrounding Emerald Sink. They plan to resume thinning a bit more along the east side of Hwy. 319, once the highway widening crew finishes firming up our access points there.

This work will be followed up by another crew, who will pull stumps in the patch cuts, burn the logging slash, and level the ground to prepare for planting longleaf pines and na-

tive groundcover seed. We're looking forward to seeing a more diverse and productive wildlife habitat there in the future.

As we move into summer and prescribed burning winds down a bit, we'll be ramping up our efforts to survey and treat invasive exotic plants throughout the park.

Josh and I have already been covering a lot of ground this spring to keep these in check. We've recently hand-pulled or treated Chinese tallow, camphor tree, water lettuce, Japanese climbing fern,



Can you see this plump eastern diamondback rattlesnake Patty discovered in the Sanctuary? She's glad she didn't step on it!



MISSION: To provide resource-based recreation while preserving, interpreting, and restoring natural and cultural resources.

Wakulla Springs State Park
465 Wakulla Park Drive
Wakulla Springs, FL 32327
(850) 561-7276

Upcoming Events

Thursday, July 15
6:00pm–7:00pm
A Timeless Glimpse

Thursday, July 29
6:00pm–7:00pm
Mystery in the Swamp

Thursday, August 12
6:00pm–7:00pm
Going Native

Saturday, August 17
5:00-8:00pm
Dinner Cruise

Saturday, August 21
8:00-9:00am
Early Boat Tour

Thursday, August 26
6:00pm–7:00pm
A Timeless Glimpse

Saturday, August 28
8:00-9:00am
Early Boat Tour

Saturday, Sept. 11
5:00-8:00pm
Dinner Cruise

Saturday, Sept. 11
7:30pm-8:30pm
A Swift Night Out

Saturday, Sept. 11
8:30pm-9:45pm
CD Release Party

tropical soda apple, mimosa, coral ardisia, nandina, Chinese wisteria, and Chinaberry.

There’s always plenty more to do, but it’s rewarding work.



Patty and Josh came upon these “Outer Space” trees (probably tupelo—*Nyssa aquatica*) while surveying for exotics in Upper River Sink.



A Park Ranger Points : Park Biologist Patty Wilbur points at the Oscar Mayer Wienermobile which visited the park on May 18.