



Osprey Observer

Winter/Spring 2024

EDUCATING . CONSERVING . RESTORING

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

BY RICK POLLAND

As I am moving my potted pineapple plants into my garage to protect them from the cold weather, which I do when temperatures go below 40 degrees, I am thinking about all the people that have asked me how you grow pineapples. Honestly pineapples are probably the easiest fruit I know how to grow.

I'll share my easy steps:

All you need is the top of any pineapple, the less meat left on it the better as it only rots and smells. My wife likes to twist the tops off which leaves virtually no meat on them.

Plant the top directly in the dirt. It is okay to bury the bottom few leaves.

If I am lazy and I do not feel like messing with the dirt at the time I place the top in a dixie cup with water filled to the top, so the bottom of the pineapple is in the water. It will grow roots and can be placed in the dirt at any time. Roots or no roots, it will grow.

I have pineapples in pots and in the ground. The pots are convenient because I live in an area with an abundance of raccoons and squirrels, and they love pineapples! These critters are very smart. As the fruit is turning a nice yellow it gives them a very nice, sweet flavor. The local wildlife is a day ahead of you when you plan on picking your pineapple. The morning you go to pick your pineapple and find it has been completely hollowed out through a two-inch hole on one side, raccoons had a very nice evening. We have even covered the pineapple with aluminum foil and doused it with hot sauce to deter them, only to wake up to find the foil across the yard and a hollowed-out pineapple. Now when they are close to turning yellow, I move them into my screened lanai.

My plants produce fruit anywhere from 12-18 months. Once they fruit, the main plant dies but produces some side shoots of pups. I will let them grow and the following season I may get two or three pineapples from a single pot. After about three seasons I pull out the plant and with new dirt, start over with a new top. As far as fertilizing them, I have seen them do just as well without fertilizer.

One easy-to-grow Florida native fruit is the American persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*). This fruit tree is well-suited to Florida's climate and soil conditions, and produces small, sweet, and flavorful fruits that can be eaten fresh or used in baking. American persimmons are low-maintenance and require little to no additional watering once established. They also attract birds and wildlife to the garden.

There's nothing sweeter than home grown fruit!

Upcoming Events

- 2/29 – LEAP YEAR! 
- 3/1 – **Summer Camp registration open to members**
- 3/2 – Blue Hike
- 3/4 - Homeschool Series ages 6-9
- **3/9 – Pours at the Preserve!**
- **3/11 – Youth Climate Project submissions due!**
- 3/12 – West Orange Walkers at ONP
- 3/15 – Summer Camp registration open to all
- 3/24 – FOLA 40!
- 3/25 – Homeschool Series ages 13-16
- 4/6-4/7 – Spring Fever in the Garden
- 4/8 - Homeschool Series ages 6-9
- 4/13 – Blue Hike
- 4/15 - Homeschool Series ages 10-12
- 4/20 – Earth Day Celebration
- 4/22 - Homeschool Series ages 13-16
- 5/4 – Blue Hike



**Be sure to follow us on Facebook
for Preserve news and events!**



Nature Fest at Oakland Nature Preserve



Save the date

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 21
10AM-2PM**

Wildlife Encounters
Guided Hikes
Food
Lake Apopka Boat Tours



Children's Activities
Merchants & Vendors
Presentations
...and much more!

Youth art show open to all 17 y/o and younger, register online.



OAKLAND NATURE
PRESERVE

All proceeds support the
Oakland Nature Preserve
www.OaklandNaturePreserve.org



Oakland
TOWN OF
FLORIDA

Matching Grant

Oakland Nature Preserve is delighted to announce that we have received a Challenge Match Grant for our environmental programs! This grant will provide matching funds of \$10,000 if we are able to raise \$10,000. Your donation will be matched, dollar for dollar, so your contribution will have double the impact and will directly help fund our mission throughout 2024. Together we can meet the goal to raise \$10,000! Visit www.OaklandNaturePreserve.org/donate for more ways to give.

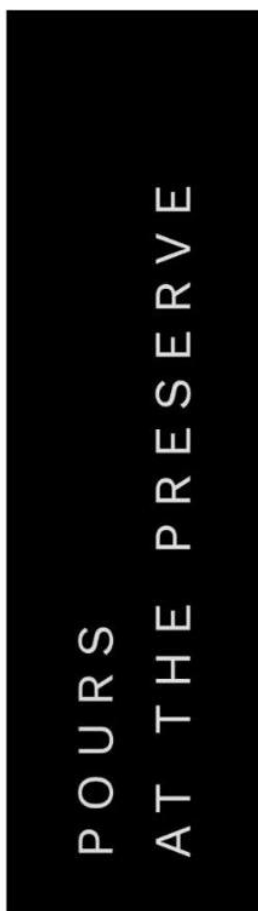
1 + 1 = 2

Your DOLLAR + Matching DOLLAR = Double the IMPACT

Double your impact for the Preserve!



OAKLAND NATURE
PRESERVE



March 9, 2024
5:30pm - 8:30pm

\$45 / person



Pours at the Preserve

Come and join us at the log cabin for a delightful evening of food, beer, and wine. Enjoy the company of fellow nature enthusiasts while listening to music and engaging in great conversations.

Take a leisurely stroll down the Healthy West Orange Boardwalk, guided by luminaries that illuminate your path. As you walk, you will encounter messages and memories from residents, creating a unique and interactive experience. Listen to the owls, the frogs, maybe the whippoorwill, and keep your eyes open for fireflies!

Share a love-note, a remembrance, or honor someone on one of the luminaries, to be arranged when you register for this special event.

Limited to 125 guests.

Register at www.OaklandNaturePreserve.org/pours

This is an adult only event, ages 21 and over please.

Museum Break-in - We need your help!



Thursday February 15th the Preserve's Museum was broken into, and items were taken from an historical display. If you recognize the individual in the photo or have an information regarding the break-in please contact the Oakland Police Department at 407-656-9797.

Thank you for your help!

WHAT IS THAT PLANT ON THE ISLAND IN THE PARKING LOT AND AROUND THE PRESERVE

Those puff ball like plants are what is commonly called Deer Moss or lichens. There are a half dozen species of ground lichens, or "reindeer moss" that can be found in Florida, but only three are present at Oakland Nature Preserve. They are *Cladonia evansii* (Evans Deer Moss), *Cladonia Cristella* (British Soldier Moss) and *Cladonia subtenuis* (Deer Moss).

A lichen is not a single plant, but a combination of a fungus and an alga. Neither the fungus nor the alga can live alone. This is a symbiotic relationship. Lichens are like canaries in mines, they are very susceptible to air pollution. You won't find them in your typical urban landscape. Lichens have no roots, obtaining moisture instead from the evening air and the dew. They are brittle and crunchy underfoot when dry, but soft as cotton balls when moist.



Ready. Set.
Walk!

HealthyWestOrange.org

Looking for a way to stay active? Want to explore our west Orange Community? How about making new friends? Have we got the program for you!

Join the West Orange Walkers!

Healthy West Orange, Orlando Health, and the YMCA of Central Florida have come together to offer monthly meetups, 5ks, and breakfasts, all across west Orange, and all year long!



ORLANDO
HEALTH



EARTH CARE BY PEGGY LANTZ

My Favorite Reptile

In a lightning-started forest fire, or a prescribed burn, where do the animals go to survive?

Into a gopher tortoise burrow. They scramble ahead of the flames, heading for the deep, cool burrow, sheltered from the heat and devastation over their heads. They huddle together -- snakes, rabbits, mice, toads, lizards, even spiders – just for this time not as predator or prey, but all together as refugees needing the protection of the tortoise’s burrow.

The gopher tortoise is native to Florida and the southeast coast of the United States. It has a high-domed upper shell (the carapace) and its feet and head are large. It can grow to a foot-long or more and can live up to sixty years. It needs to live a long time because it takes about 20 years to become mature enough to mate.

I used to have several of them on my property. One day I saw a huge spray of yellow sand being thrown out of a hole. It must have flown three feet in the air and about five or six feet out. That must have been one big gopher! The resulting “apron” is a sure-fire way to find a burrow.

I once watched a fight between two of them. Male gophers have an extended front part to their bottom shell (the plastron), and they use it to try to flip over their opponent onto its back. If unable to right itself, an overturned tortoise (or turtle) will die. These two were in front of a burrow, apparently arguing over who got to use it. They sparred for a while, and then one gave up and left.



The male gopher also has an indent on its plastron to help it balance on the round carapace of the female during mating. The female eggs are laid in the apron between April and July. One day, riding my horse through my woods, I passed a burrow with a tiny inch-long baby tortoise resting on the big sprawling apron.

Tortoises are vegetarians, feeding on berries, grasses, flowers, and gopher apples (yes, there is a plant by that name).

Gopher tortoises are protected by law. They have been killed for food or destroyed because ranchers find the burrows hazardous to their cattle and horses. They have been buried alive in their burrows by bulldozers when developers want their land. A ten-acre piece of dead orange grove adjacent to my property had 24 gopher burrows on it.



When the developer sent out his bulldozers, I stopped the operator and called the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission, who were here in 20 minutes. At that time, it was still allowed for gophers to be buried in their burrows. The developer told me it cost him \$20,000 to bury them. At least one managed to escape onto my property. Now developers are required to remove the gophers to a safe haven.

Not only is the gopher a protected species, but so is its burrow.

An adult gopher has few enemies. Its heavy shell protects it from all but the most determined predator. Baby gophers, however, are eaten by birds, coyotes, and other carnivores. The gopher's primary enemy is us and our vehicles. Gophers are slow-moving animals, so it takes them quite a while to cross a road. If you see one, help it across by carrying it to the side it was heading for. It's a land animal; never put it in the nearest pond. If you're walking around a burrow, stay off the entrance above the apron where the roof is the thinnest. My horse stepped too close one time and sank in up to her hip.

I like gophers. I have a five-acre piece of property that I am trying to restore to its long-ago longleaf pine sandhill habitat, where gopher tortoises will be more than welcome.

Gophers are also welcome at Oakland Nature Preserve. ONP has over 150 suspected active burrows, is a mitigation site for them, and has received several of them from sandhills that are going to be turned into houses. My sandhill will not be turned into houses.

We love our volunteers! by Nicole O'Brien



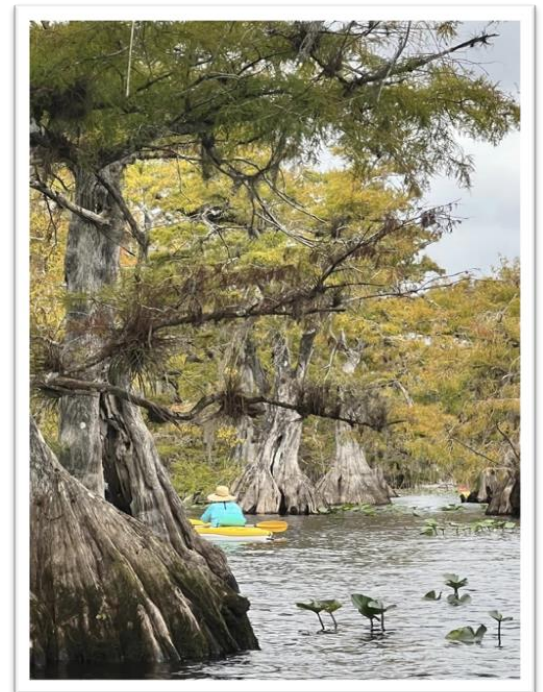
Share your enthusiasm and appreciation of the environment, increase your own knowledge of the natural world, spend time outside and meet people with similar interests.

Oakland Nature Preserve encourages the teamwork of employees and volunteers so that we can effectively educate visitors and restore and conserve the lands within the Preserve. Volunteers contribute their unique talents, skills, and abilities to complete physical and non-physical tasks, enable the paid staff to concentrate on the work for which they were trained, and educate the public about our organization and its cause. Every hour you invest here helps the Preserve provide more opportunities for our community to explore, learn about, and develop an appreciation for the environment.

Spring Blue Hikes

ONP is delighted to announce upcoming Spring dates of our Blue Hike Paddle Tours. This special program is made possible by generous support from Duke Energy. ONP's Blue Hikes show paddlers the natural beauty, history, plants, and animals of Lake Apopka, along with an interpretative telling of the restoration progress of the lake. They have since diversified to include several other locations, highlighting features and importance of many other Central Florida waterways. Upcoming Blue Hikes include:

- March 2 – Bugg Spring
- April 6 – Alexander Springs
- May 4 – New Location TBD
- June 1 - New Location TBD



For more information and registration visit www.OaklandNaturePreserve.org/blue-hike



Explore Nature!

2024 Summer Day Camps

Explore the environment while gaining an understanding of plants, animals, and the ecosystems in which they exist. Guest speakers, wildlife encounters, games, crafts, outdoor activities, and more!

Week 1: ONP Adventure Days

June 10-14

Join us for this in-depth week as we look at the wonders and inner workings of nature and what makes Oakland Nature Preserve such an important place! **Ages 6-12**

Week 2: Habitat 101

June 17-21

Nests, and burrows, and dens, oh my! In this week of camp we will look at habitats where animals live, animal engineering, and the adaptations they use to survive. **Ages 6-12**

Week 3: The Nature of Minecraft (session 1)

June 24-28

What can we learn from Minecraft IRL "in real life"?!? In this camp we will compare the Minecraft world to the real world, real world geology and biomes, relate survival mode to past human culture and technologies, and, of course, craft, build, and journey into the Nether! **Ages 8-12**

Week 4: What's Your Calling

July 8-12

Are you considering a career in the environmental field? Join us for a week exploring environmental jobs such as water ecology, fire technology, public service, international conservation efforts and more! **Ages 13-17**

Week 5: Anatomy of Nature

July 15-19

From mammoths to marsupials, Florida's animals have changed greatly over time. Campers will travel through time and discover the wonders of Florida's animals and people. **Ages 6-12**

Week 6: The Nature of Minecraft (session 2)

July 22-26

What can we learn from Minecraft IRL "in real life"?!? In this camp we will compare the Minecraft world to the real world, real world geology and biomes, relate survival mode to past human culture and technologies, and, of course, craft, build, and journey into the Nether! **Ages 8-12**

Camp hours: 9:00am– 4:00pm

\$185 for members / \$210 non-members

Register at OaklandNaturePreserve.org

7TH ANNUAL FOLA 40

Cycle around Lake Apopka, Florida's 4th largest lake.

Choose from 8, 16, 32, 40 mile rides.

Strongly recommend hybrid, mountain, or cyclocross style bike.

Helmet required.

March 24, 2024 | 8:30 AM

40 mile ride starts in downtown historic Winter Garden

All other distances start at Magnolia Park

Thank you to our sponsors:



SCAN ME



Friends of Lake Apopka



info@fola.org



www.bikereg.com/7th-annual-fola-40

What's In Bloom

It's that time of year when grasses are beginning to turn brown, trees are shedding some leaves, and oaks are dropping their acorns. Most of ONP's Fall bloom is heading toward dormancy, but despite the shorter days and less sunlight, there is still lots to see at the Preserve!

- Most of the flowers on our Firebush, *Hamelia patens*, in our Bird and Butterfly gardens have been replaced with berries that change color as they ripen. Fruit-eating birds such as Mockingbirds, Catbirds, and Blue-headed Vireos feed throughout the Winter on delicious, ripe black berries.
- Similarly, throughout the Preserve, many of our Beautyberry bushes, *Callicarpa americana*, are still laden down with purple colored berries. These berries hang on throughout the Winter to keep on feeding the birds when other fruits are gone.
- ONP's Wild Coffee plants, *Psychotria nervosa*, provide food and cover for wildlife. It is a nectar source for numerous butterflies, including *Atala Eumaeus atala*, and the Great Southern White, *Ascia monuste*. The fruit feeds many species of birds including the Northern Mockingbird.
- Blue Porterweed, *Stacytarpheta jamaicensis*, and Scorpion Tail, *Heliotropium angiospermum* are also still in bloom, providing a valuable source of nectar to pollinators at this time of year.

We also have several year-round bloomers to keep an eye out for on your next visit:

Spanish Needles, *Bidens alba*

Coral Honeysuckle, *Lonicera sepervirens*

Beach Dune Sunflower, *Helianthus debilis*

Firebush, *Hamelia patens*



Beautyberry, *Callicarpa americana*



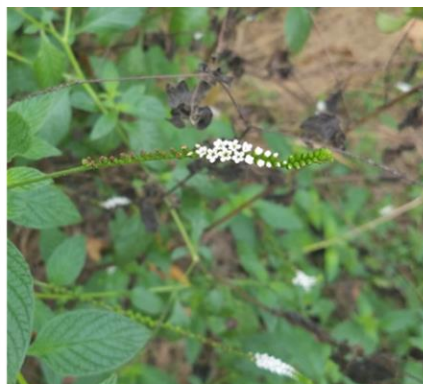
Wild Coffee, *Psychotria nervosa*



Blue Porterweed, *Stacytarpheta jamaicensis*



Scorpion Tail, *Heliotropium angiospermum*



WHO IS ON THE PROWL AT OAKLAND NATURE PRESERVE?

Our Trail Cameras are staying very active photographing resident bobcats, coyotes, raccoons, opossums, and rabbits in the uplands. They snapped a bobcat family recently, along with owls, and a Whip-poor-will (a first on the cameras at ONP!). Check out the album in the museum or our Facebook page for the most recent photos. A big thank you to our wonderful volunteer Gloria, who keeps the kiosk on the Orange Trail updated with recent photos too!

