

WINTER 2021 NEWSLETTER

FLORIDA MASTER NATURALIST PROGRAM

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FMNP Festival & Year-End Recap

By Dr. Martin Main

20 years of FMNP courses have come and gone. It's hard to believe how much has been accomplished during that time by instructors, graduates, and FMNP staff. To put this in perspective, over the last 20 years:

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masternaturalist.ifas.ufl.edu

- 10 FMNP courses have been developed (and several more, including Freshwater Restoration, are in the works)
- 532 individuals have contributed as certified FMNP instructors in the program's lifetime, with 176 active instructors representing 64 instructor teams currently
- We've issued approximately 20,000 FMNP certificates to nearly 9,000 individuals
- We responded to the COVID pandemic with online and hybrid course offerings that we will continue to offer along with traditional in-person courses
- FMNP graduates around the state continue to promote the mission of the program as volunteers, educators/ecotour guides, and by sharing enjoyment, respect, and sensible use of our valuable natural resources

For all these and many other contributions, we are grateful to all our FMNP instructors and graduates and to the folks who have worked behind the scenes to help make these things possible. It's been an amazing 20 years, I look forward to the next 20!

Our recent 20th Anniversary FMNP Festival was a great success! About 300 FMNP graduates, friends, and instructors participated in the festival and with their support, the over \$10,000 raised will support the FMNP Endowment Fund. This newly established fund will ensure the FMNP continues to provide courses and encourage FMNP graduates to share their knowledge and passion for nature with others.

We had 6 amazing online events with speakers from Audubon Florida, Florida Wildlife Corridor Coalition, Florida DEP Office of Greenways and Trails, Florida Wildflower Foundation, and Mote Marine Laboratory and Aquarium. We also came together to celebrate in person! We had 12 in-person events across the state. Here are a few highlights from the events:



Photo by Catherine Vecchio

Cruickshank Sanctuary Birding Field Trip (Brevard), Pictured Left

About 20 people enjoyed a walk, learned about the Helen and Allan Cruickshank Sanctuary and its ecosystem, and watched as a few Florida Scrub-Jays landed on fellow participants. It was a cool, breezy morning for Central Florida but 18 different species of birds were seen, including Red-tailed Hawks, Roseate Spoonbills, Northern Flicker and over 25 Florida Scrub-Jays.

-Bert Alm, Field Trip Director of the Space Coast Audubon Society

Sunset in the Hollows (Brevard)

Close to 50 people came out to explore Hundred Acre Hollows. Some visitors went for walks on their own around the property while others went with Bert Alm, Field Trip Director of the Space Coast Audubon Society, around a section of the property. Hundred Acre Hollows is home to Native Plant Gardens, bat houses, and an owl box. Some of the visitors saw a deer, a bobcat, and many species of birds. Bert provided a history of the property, a discussion of how the Hundred Acre Hollows nonprofit was formed, and how the neighborhood youth is engaged through the Junior Ranger program. And as a fun bonus, the interpretative signs at the native plant garden on site were influenced by Rochelle Hood's FMNP Environmental Interpretation Class, as part of the course project.

-Bert Alm, Field Trip Director of the Space Coast Audubon Society

Babcock Ranch Preserve Swamp Walk (Charlotte), Pictured Right

Over 3 inches of rainfall the day before made for an excellent swamp walk that was far more wet than dry. The hike was led by Jamie Reynolds, Charlotte County's lead FMNP instructor and Glen McLean, associate instructor. The hike included presentation stops with topics ranging from the history of the property to the latest news of the panther kittens which have been photographed there. The discovery of a barred owl perched on a cypress limb over the trail had everyone smiling.

*-Glen McLean, FMNP Associate Instructor
Charlotte County*



Photo by Glen McLean

Rookery Bay Environmental Learning Center Tour (Collier)

Florida Master Naturalist alumni visited the Rookery Bay Environmental Learning Center for a guided tour with Sarah Falkowski, education coordinator and lead coastal module instructor. Participants enjoyed the new "Natural Selections: Painting Annual Exhibition" in the art gallery and explored the interactive exhibit hall. Athan Barkoukis, the Friends of Rookery Bay executive director, popped in to say hello and thanked everyone for their support of the iconic Florida Master Naturalist Program. Alumni engaged with volunteer docents at the Estuary Encounter touch tank, meeting a few

of the live creatures that call the Reserve home. And of course, the visit wasn't complete without a stop in the Palmetto Patch Nature Store for souvenir gifts.

-Sarah Falkowski, FMNP Lead Instructor Collier County

Birding on a Bicycle (or Hike) (Indian River)

Craig Weyandt, Florida Master Naturalist, and Ken Gioeli, UF/IFAS Extension agent and lead instructor, led an adventurous group of Florida Master Naturalists and guests on an excursion at Stick Marsh CWA, which is adjacent to T.M. Goodwin Wildlife Management Area, a site along the Great Florida Birding Trail. It was a brisk morning but participants enthusiastically rode 12.08 miles in awe of the amazing birding. Osprey, cormorant, anhinga, great blue herons, egret (snowy, great and cattle), kestrel and more were observed. There was even one roseate spoonbill at the very end of the ride which was like the icing on the cake.

-Ken Gioeli, FMNP Lead Instructor St. Lucie County



Lilly, a recent inductee of the Jr. Ranger program at the park, braved a visit from an eastern lubber grasshopper. (Photo by Cassi Bliss)

A Walk for Wildflowers (Martin), Pictured Left

The wildflower walk at Jonathan Dickinson State Park was a nice mellow hike where participants literally stopped to smell the flowers! The group followed the Kitching Creek Nature Trail, which is only about a mile long, but as true wildflower spectators they spent about three hours just hanging out and having fun along the trail. Lilly, a recent inductee of the Jr. Ranger program at the park, braved a visit from an eastern lubber grasshopper.

-Cassi Bliss, Park Ranger at Jonathan Dickinson State Park

Friends of Pinellas Master Naturalists' FMNP 20th Anniversary Beach Cleanup (Pinellas)

The Friends of Pinellas Master Naturalists went to Clearwater's Sand Key beach to remove litter. Although it was a very brisk and breezy morning, we were excited to come together safely and share some time

outdoors. One of the members brought delicious hot cider, which kept us warm and energized before and after the cleanup. By the afternoon, 11 dedicated Friends members and their guests removed approximately 12 pounds of litter ranging from a soggy diaper to numerous cigarette butts and small pieces of plastics. Everyone had a fun time, and it felt good helping nature wave off some of the beach trash, thereby making a positive difference in the health of our shoreline habitat.

-Jeanne Murphy, FMNP Lead Instructor Pinellas County

Fundy Bayou Paddle (Santa Rosa)

A small but mighty group hit the water just as the air temperature broke 60 degrees. The group kayaked up Fundy Bayou and out to Fundy Cove located along the southeast side of Blackwater Bay. They traveled through freshwater and saltwater marshes, along scrubby flat woods, beach and mesic hammock habitats. Ospreys, a kingfisher and red-headed woodpecker entertained the group.

-Chris Verlinde, Lead FMNP Instructor Santa Rosa County

Ten Mile Creek Paddle (St. Lucie), Pictured Right

Five intrepid kayakers and host Susan Hamburger braved the early morning light rain to paddle three miles of the north fork of the St. Lucie River from Ten Mile Creek Preserve. As the clouds parted and the sun shone, the paddlers saw anhinga and osprey, majestic oaks festooned with bromeliads, a hidden strangler fig, swamp lillies, and invasive Brazilian pepper trees and apple snails' bright pink eggs while learning about the history of the river's straightening and dredging.

-Susan Hamburger, Ph.D., Advanced Florida Master Naturalist and Land Steward



Photo by Ken Gioeli

North Central FMNP Networking, Invasive Plant Removal, and Picnic (Wakulla)

On Oct. 30, three Florida Master Naturalist graduates and lead instructor Rosalyn Kilcollins met at the St Marks River Park in the City of St Marks. The group used rakes and buckets to remove water hyacinths from the shoreline of the park, and then traveled a few blocks away to the Wakulla River Park to do the same. Most of the plants at this park were not accessible from the shoreline, but there were a couple of areas the group could reach. The day finished with a picnic lunch.

-Rosalyn Kilcollins, Lead FMNP Instructor Leon County

Hickory Mound Field Day and Picnic (Taylor), Pictured Below

After a briefing about the Wildlife management area and ecological description of the area, the participants met at the observation tower and started a clean-up walk for 1.5 miles. The group removed about 300 pounds of trash found in the margins of the road, which included glass bottles, drink cans, plastic bottles and containers, cigarette butts, aluminum foil, plastic bags, pieces of fabric, fishing lines and rope, snack bags, and more. At the end of the activity the group enjoyed a lunch in the picnic area. During the clean-up, the group was able to discuss and identify a diversity of plants, butterflies, and birds.

-Victor Blanco, Lead FMNP Instructor Taylor County



Photo by Victor Blanco

INCLUSIVE SCHOLARSHIP



The Florida Master Naturalist Program is committed to celebrating diversity of people, thought and opinion and to promote inclusiveness, respect and equal opportunity for everyone.

- Scholarship priority will be given to new applicants, those from historically underrepresented groups, and/or those in most need of financial assistance.
- The scholarship is available to any Florida resident or person residing in Florida more than 6 months out of the year
- Scholarships awarded will cover the entire cost of one FMNP core module or special topics course
- Scholarships are awarded semi-annually. The number of scholarships awarded each year will be dependent on funding.

FIND MORE INFORMATION
AND APPLY [HERE](#)



Find information on our other scholarships [here](#)

Space Coast Regional Friends Group Recognizes Holly Abeels



By Deborah Heystek

The Space Coast Regional Friends Group would like to formally recognize UF/IFAS Facilitator, Holly Abeels, for all her efforts to support the success of our local chapter of the Florida Master Naturalist Program.

Holly was instrumental in founding our Friends Group in 2015. She worked diligently to set up a structure that would serve us into the future. She recruited a Board that would establish us as an organization dedicated to serving a diverse group of people that included degreed biologists, citizen scientists, long-time and recent Florida residents, college students and retirees. And she would start us on a path to county-wide outreach and involvement.

Since founding the Space Coast Chapter Friends Group, Holly has continued to play a vital role in our organization. A volunteer organization, such as ours, is a tricky balance between maintaining some level of professional efficiency and enticement through fun activities and events. Holly is always quick to contribute an idea for an event that will encourage people to get out and experience something new. She is well-connected in the community and is able to offer up names and



Photo by Deborah Heystek

contact information for potential speakers, day trip excursions to experience conservation efforts, and to expand our awareness of research going on at some of our parks and Environmentally Endangered Land (EEL) sites. Holly has also been instrumental in setting up on-line polls to gauge membership interest on topics, setting up SignUpGenius to help us organize events, and setting up our Zoom meetings during the COVID-19 shutdowns.

Our Space Coast Regional Friends Group owes a huge debt of gratitude to Holly for her untiring efforts to ensure the continued success of our organization. We continue to be grateful for all she does.

A Fond Farewell to Haley

After seven years working with the FMNP, Haley will be leaving us and moving on to a new career as a financial advisor. I remember meeting Haley for the first time at “Festival in the Woods” held at the Picayune Strand State Forest in 2014. Haley was an energetic and enthusiastic graduate of the FMNP who was starting as a graduate student at the University of South Florida. She sought me out to ask if she could assist the FMNP by developing a Facebook page and social media component, which was something we desperately needed. During the next seven years, Haley was the social media program for the FMNP, managing our Facebook site among other things as she juggled her graduate student classes and responsibilities. Over the years Haley has taken on other tasks and become increasingly important to our program, and during this past year, she coordinated the FMNP 20-year celebration Festival presentations, activities, and raffle. We couldn’t have done it without her.

We’re all going to miss Haley and not just because she is a great member of the FMNP team. We’re going to miss her endlessly positive attitude, her energy, and regular interactions as we all work together to keep the FMNP “ecosystem” vibrant, healthy, and growing. Thank you, Haley, for everything you’ve done for the FMNP and for all of us who have had the good fortune to work with you and get to know you as a friend. May the best of good fortune be your constant companion as you embark on your next adventure.

Warmest regards,

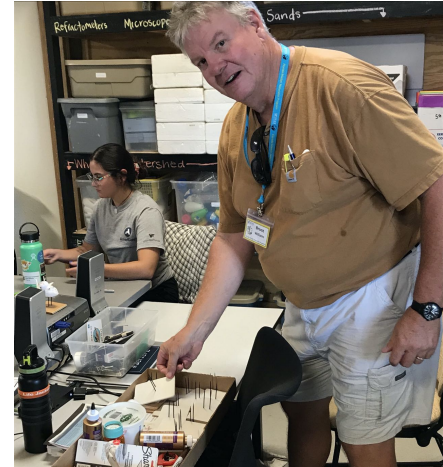
Marty, Savannah, Caitlin, Shelby, and the entire FMNP instructor family



Good Teachers

By Laura Tiu

There are tons of them out there, and many do not get the recognition they deserve. And many come through our Florida Master Naturalist Program. In fact, this is part of the curriculum, helping you become better. But we always find good ones in this program. In this article by Okaloosa/Walton Sea Grant Agent Dr. Laura Tiu, we learn about one of them and the importance of the work they do. Read the article [here](#).



Florida Master Naturalist Student and Florida State Park Ranger, Bruce Williams, prepares for his snowy plover lesson.

Space Coast Regional Friends Group Updates

By Catherine Vecchio

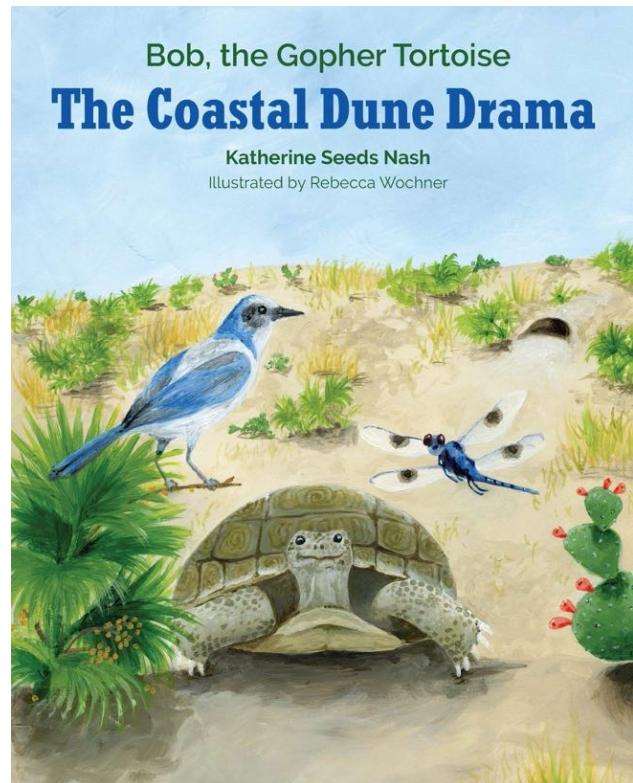
The Space Coast Regional Friends Group (SCRFG) has had an exciting year amid COVID. I received the great opportunity to serve the SCRFG in 2022 along with Treasurer Sharon Smeenck, Secretary Tara Miller, President Elect Ann Cook. Thanks to Deb Heystek for her contributions as President in 2021 and Kerri Lubeski our Past President. She will carry on in 2022 as the Past President. Thank you Tara Miller for continuing to serve on the Board in 2022.

We had the great opportunity to host events in support of our 20th year of the FMNP lead by Bert Alm, where we visited Cruickshank Sanctuary and Hundred Acre Hollow for a sunset in the Hollow. We were fortunate to have encountered multiple groups of scrub jays at Cruickshank. The sunset in the Hollow was icing on the cake to end our week of zoom programs. Thank you Bert! We finished our year at the quarterly meeting with a presentation by Kevin Smith the Special Projects Coordinator for Brevard County Solid Waste Management Department. Kevin gave us an insight into our counties recycling challenges and solutions. I think a field trip is in our chapter future. The Board presented our fearless leader Holly Abeels with a beautiful work of art. Thank you Holly for all that do for the Group and the Program. I look forward to carrying on the mission and grow participation for the SCRFG of the FMNP.

Bob, the Gopher Tortoise: The Coastal Dune Drama

By Katherine Seeds Nash

During the 70's the Environmental Protection Agency, the Audubon Society, the Nature Conservancy, and the Sierra Club all made great strides in promoting and protecting our extended families outdoors and the delicate balance we all need for survival. My parents inspired me to get a B.S. in Forest Resources and Conservation at the University of Florida, so I could join the movement to make a difference. During a presentation of a project, I realized reaching children would be the most efficient and effective way to promote awareness. Children are naturally fascinated by nature! When I became a teacher, I started fostering an attachment to the great outdoors one classroom at a time, but this was still limited. Then I discovered the Florida Master Naturalist Program. This is the most inspirational and beneficial program in Florida, as it promotes getting out there and advocating and inspiring others to pick up the cause and do the same.



As a final project for the Coastal Systems course, I wrote "Bob, the Gopher Tortoise: The Coastal Dune Drama." This children's book describes how Bob, the Gopher Tortoise is illegally picked up by a child and taken from his safe environment and left on a dangerous beach. The other animals in the ecosystems between the beach and his home help guide Bob's journey back to safety. All the while they educate Bob as to his importance as a keystone species in his neck of the woods. Gopher tortoises provide shelter and habitat for over 350 different species, thus making them a keystone species. The positive reaction from my colleagues made me realize this was my opportunity to reach more than one classroom at a time.

In the book, I added a lot of science so students could learn about their own environment and the ecosystems involved. I wrote the story of Bob being helped by friends so a connection could be made from human species to other species, showing we're all animals and really not all that different. I have contacted the Florida Department of Education and "Bob, the Gopher Tortoise" is now on their Language Arts website for 2nd Grade. I have also sent a copy of the book and a list of possible activities to all the Florida School District Superintendents, encouraging a celebration, outdoors, for Florida Gopher Tortoise Day, April 10th. It's time to get this new generation away from their virtual reality and to rediscover what is just outside their doors!

For more information or to purchase a copy, click [here](#).

EVENTS

Nature Knowledge

The Nature Knowledge program hosts expert speakers to share current scientific knowledge on topics affecting nature in Florida, supported by UF/IFAS Natural Resources Extension. This program provides continuing education for IFAS Extension personnel, volunteers, and program participants, college/university faculty and students from across Florida, natural resource professionals, and environmental educators. This program is open to anyone! Find registration links and past recordings [here](#).

OPPORTUNITIES

Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Docent

Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary in Naples currently has openings for docents (volunteer educators) to assist with the 2nd and 5th grade educational programs starting this fall/winter semester. The Insect Adventure program teaches students about insects while enabling them to look at their environment with a holistic view. The Wild Florida program covers habitat, adaptations, hydroperiods, endangered species, natural and human disturbance, sustainability and conservation issues. If you live in Southwest Florida and are looking for a great way to make a difference using your Master Naturalist interpretive skills, consider joining our volunteer team. Find more information [here](#).

Florida Horseshoe Crab Watch - Bald Point State Park

We are recruiting new volunteers for the Florida Horseshoe Crab Watch Horseshoe Crab Surveys at Bald Point State Park. The surveys are done for three afternoons at highest tides around the new and full moons in March and April. We have two survey segments at Bald Point State Park, about 1/3 mile each. We count mating horseshoe crabs and collect some in buckets to weigh, measure and tag them. Volunteers can come for one or more days, depending on their interest and schedules. For more information contact Rosalyn Kilcollins at Rotztally@gmail.com.

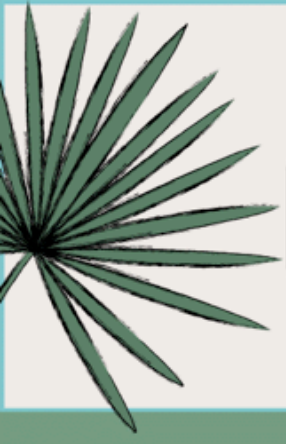
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All 2021 donors will receive
a commemorative pin
(design above).

The Florida Master Naturalist Program was created with a vision to inform, prepare and empower individuals to strengthen the conservation ethic of the people of Florida. To celebrate our accomplishments and secure the future of FMNP, we are aiming to grow our endowment! Your gift helps train more Master Naturalists, develop curriculum resources and protect natural Florida through education.

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