



CONNECTIONS

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MORE ADVENTURES FOR FRIENDS

We have already had a number of interesting adventures this year and are excited to announce that more field trips are planned exclusively for Friends members in the coming months:

May 9, 9 am -12:30 pm - Swallow-tailed Kite Nesting at CREW

Angel Kelley, Environmental Educator at CREW and Vice President of the Ornithology Club at FGCU will lead a trip at CREW's Cypress Dome trails to look for the acrobatic birds, their nests and maybe even their offspring.

June 22, 10am -11 am, Lee County Emergency Operations Center

Kathy Cahill, Emergency Management Coordinator with Lee County, will give us a behind the scenes look at how Lee County prepares to respond to an emergency.

July Mushroom Walk at Caloosahatchee Regional Park (Date TBD)

David Outerbridge, County Extension Director, will lead us on a mushroom walk. As the wet season approaches, the fungus will be among us!

August Lee County Mosquito Control Headquarters Tour (Date TBD)

We will tour the headquarters to see how Mosquito Control operates to mitigate the problems mosquitos pose to public health. You'll get to see the aircraft and the equipment used as well as the largest mosquito sculpture in the world.

In addition, we are pleased to announce that you can now register for field trips two weeks in advance on our website. To check out the registration page, [click here](#) and press the black button to register and fill out the form. Please note registration is not final until you receive an email from the trip leader.



To view photos from past trips, go to the photo gallery on our [website](#). Here's to many adventures to come!

PRESIDENT'S NOTES



Dear Friends,

As we look back on the events over the past four months, it is hard not to feel grateful for all our excellent experiences so far this year. From educational field trips to engaging guest speakers and from a successful photo contest to new photography workshops, the past few months have been quite full of enriching experiences.

In addition, the Slough's Interpretive Center celebrated its 15th anniversary this month, marking a significant milestone in the Friends journey. Our organization is proud to have served our community for this long and looks forward to many more years of service.

With summer fast approaching, I wish all our members heading up north a safe and enjoyable time. For our full-time residents, we have some pleasant activities planned for the coming months. Plus, for our adventurers, our wet walks will resume in mid-August.

Thank you for your continued support, and I hope to see you on the boardwalk.

Best regards,

Sabine

*"I love how summer just wraps its arms around you like a warm blanket." —
Kellie Elmore*



Building the Center



Aerial View

THE SLOUGH INTERPRETIVE CENTER CELEBRATES 15 YEARS

By Carolyn Babb

Fifteen years ago, the doors were opened to the first public LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified building in Lee County, the Interpretive Center at the Six Mile Cypress Slough Preserve. The opening was a celebration of a project that one could say began in the '70s by a group of high school students called the Monday Group. This high school group began the push for acquisition of land and preservation of the Slough with an eventual referendum by the citizens to fund the first 500 acres of the Preserve. The Preserve is now over 3,500 acres through various acquisition programs. Lee County Parks and Recreation constructed and opened the boardwalk in 1991. In 2001 a group of Slough volunteer naturalists and other like-minded individuals formed the Friends of the Six Mile Cypress Slough Preserve as a citizens advocacy group and began the campaign to build the learning center. After six years of fundraising and many, many conversations with the Lee County Commissioners, ground was broken, and construction began in 2007. The building was officially opened to the public on April 12, 2008.

The Friends continue to support the Slough and the Parks and Recreation staff in many ways. We are fortunate to have the Friends Corner nature store that generates funds for many small and large projects. This is part of the partnership that our group has with Lee County. We run the store. The Slough gets the profit! There is also a wonderful group of ever-growing members and donors that support the Friends. The boardwalk entrance project that was just completed was funded by the Friends. Friends funded the metal mural on the end of the building. Many of the current information signs along the boardwalk were funded by the Friends. Summer camp extras are also provided by the Friends. You can check our annual reports for further information on our support of the Slough on our website

LEED certification was very important to the Friends and the cost for the certification was specifically funded by the Friends. The building obtained a silver certification in part by the following:

- The building was built on the Penzance Road abandoned roadbed.
- The ceiling is constructed of a rapidly renewable resource, bamboo.
- A cistern collects water for flushing toilets during the rainy season for use during the dry season.
- The floor is made of a product called marmoleum, a non-petroleum, plant-based material.

There are other reasons that can be explained by taking the self-guided Green Building tour.

Although it has been 15 years, it seems like yesterday. The learning and teaching about the natural world and preservation of our natural resources continues daily at the Interpretive Center. The Friends continue to preserve, protect, and promote the Slough.

DAY TRIP TO PARADISE

By Amanda A. Schelonka

At the core of adventure lie the people who shape our journey. This was no less true on the Friends' recent kayaking field trip to the Everglades on March 2. Like any field trip you may fondly remember from your youth, ours was meticulously planned and executed to perfection by Sabine Vandenhende and Pete Cangialosi who chose the top-rated river outfitter, Everglades Adventures Kayak and Eco Tours for a gorgeous day in early March. Our journey began at the historic Ivey House Hotel (which serves as base camp for the outfitter) just as the sun was stealing the dew from the sedge in Everglades City. A quick yet thorough orientation on the basics of paddling prepped us for maneuvering our craft, a brief description of the Turner River, the waterway we would be traversing, and a casual what-to-do in case of an unlikely up-close-and-personal with resident alligator and we were ready to go.

As we packed into the passenger tour vans with the kayaks on a trailer behind us, I thought about the fragile ecosystem of Southwest Florida. The Slough with which we are all familiar is just a small section of the wetlands that are the lungs of the Western hemisphere. This essential oxygen station purifies the atmosphere and water for humans, panthers, and all life down to the smallest and least known insect. I breathed deep thinking how this air was essential to all life on this planet.

This particular bit of glade proved to be breathing as we glided in the gentle ebbing and flowing of the Turner River's serene waters. Sun dappled waters in the Turner River beget a wilderness of seemingly self-aware flora including mangroves, sawgrass, and bald cypress, which shelter a mesmerizing ancient array of fauna. Once the sounds of the Tamiami Trail died out behind us, the river was alive with the sounds of birds and the whispers of sapient trees. Along the way we were spectators as much as we were spectated upon by turtles and alligators of all sizes, unnamed jumping fish, a handsome pair of northern harrier hawks, osprey, whirly gig beetles, and a diverse neighborhood of wading birds. Even 70 miles south of the Slough, the familiar mouthy green heron and the statuesque snowy egrets reminded us of the vastness of the great community of animals we so admire. Our trail snaked north on the river's abridged branch that terminates in a reflective pool with a wonderful secret. Saving the best for last, our naturalist guide revealed a treat in the Turner River's orchid grotto. In the cave of cypress trees and mangrove tunnels a startling variety of species of orchids cling to limbs including the lackluster dingy star that can be found nowhere else in the world but southern Florida. Our relatively short paddle back was a bittersweet goodbye to a new favorite place in nature.

Back at basecamp, we happy adventurers each celebrated our personal triumphs. A few of us finding ourselves still dry as successful novice kayakers, some of us having the joy of discovery in a previously unseen species, and all of us fulfilled in the pursuit of a great fish fry that we enjoyed together at Triad's Seafood. At journey's end, we surprised ourselves. I've learned not to set expectations for Friends' outings as my experience always surpasses my yesterday mind's invention. I made friends of strangers, was surprised by the shyness in Nature's fiercest creatures, and gave into pride in belonging to the persistent wild world humanity has claimed to have tamed. You don't have to be the adventurous type to join us next time we Friends of the Six Mile Slough take a field trip. You don't have to be outgoing or know how to kayak or have the proper gear. Come with a good attitude, an open mind, and know you are in the company of a humble group of humans with one goal to preserve the beauty of the natural world to which we all belong.



Amanda at Big Cypress
Photo by Sabine Vandenhende



2023 Grand Prize Winning Photo
Pat Lonergan

PHOTO CONTEST 2023

By Sabine Vandenhende

We had another great year of entries for the photo contest. Judging was again a fun process, especially since it was the first year we have a Grand Prize Winner to choose. We had 89 photographers and 263 photos. We received the most photographs in the Birds category. Our Youth winner this year lives in Poland and took his pictures while visiting the Slough. The reception honoring the winners was well attended and most of the winning photographers were present and shared a story about their photos. Enjoy seeing the winners on the following pages.

PHOTO CONTEST RECEPTION



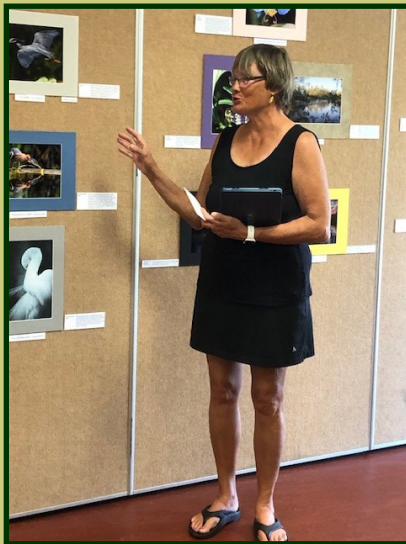
Pat Lonergan describes
"The shot of a lifetime"



Damon Bell explains
alligator and otter encounter



Winners & Judges



Judge Carol Matthai
announces Bird winners



Judge Jason Boeckman
announces Animal winners

ANIMALS



1st Place
Thomas Lonergan



2nd Place
Damon Bell



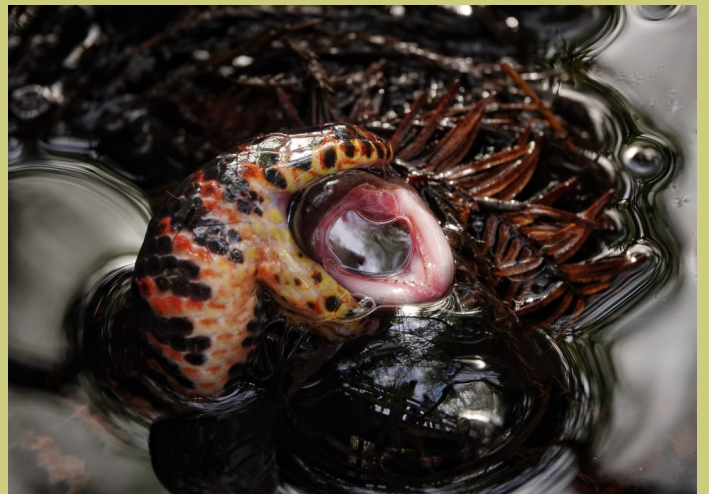
3rd Place
Damon Bell



Honorable Mention
Ron Lindensmith



Honorable Mention
Kristina Mintz



Honorable Mention
Stanislav Milov

BIRDS



1st Place
Clark Johnson



2nd Place
Lawrence Carr



3rd Place
Lawrence Carr



Honorable Mention
Thomas Lonergan



Honorable Mention
Stephen Royal



Honorable Mention
Linda Normoyle

PLANTS & LANDSCAPES



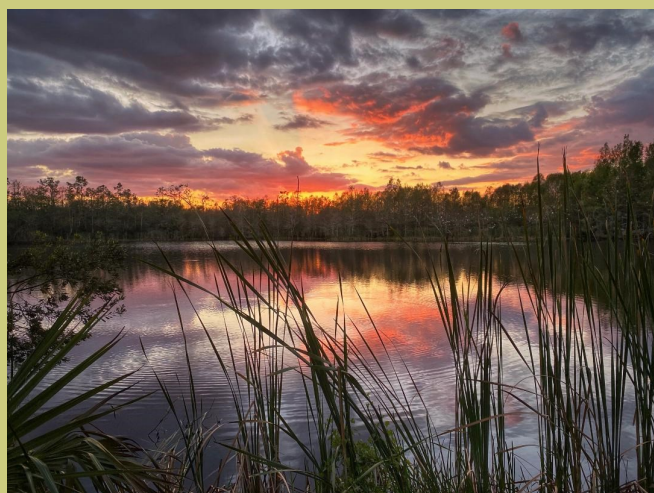
1st Place
Chuck Pavlick



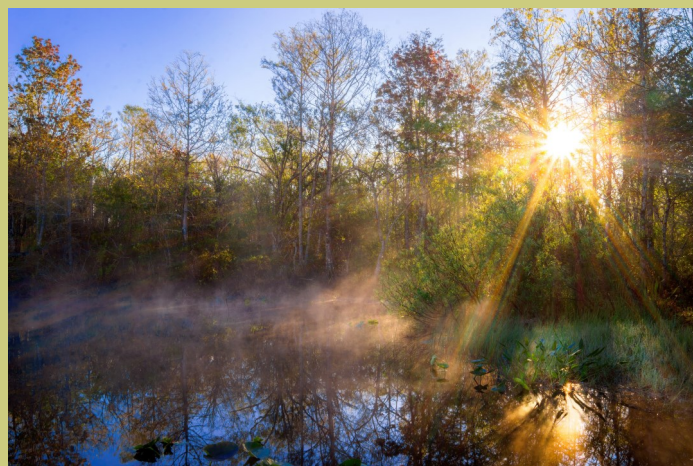
2nd Place
Jim Matiya



3rd Place
Jeremy Greenfield



Honorable Mention
Cheryll Vickers



Honorable Mention
Jeremy Greenfield

YOUTH



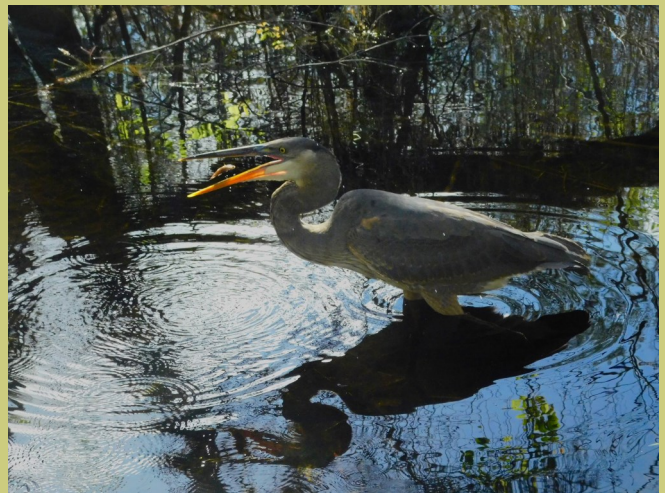
1st Place
Filip Zasada



2nd Place
Filip Zasada



3rd Place
Jenna Martin



Honorable Mention
Kaya Hammond



Honorable Mention
Cole Wesner

STAFF



1st Place
Sara Maliva



2nd Place
Sara Maliva



3rd Place
Carolyn Babb



Honorable Mention
Sara Maliva

NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY

Photographer Carol Matthai leads workshops at Slough

By Steve Parker



Group photo op at workshop



Taking photos at Gator Lake



Workshop participants at trailhead
Photos by Sabine Vandenhende

“Anybody can take a picture,” says Carol Matthai, “but not everybody can capture a moment.”

Matthai, a professional wildlife and nature photographer, has been showing others how to capture moments in a series of photography workshops she’s been leading at Six Mile Cypress Slough Preserve.

Teaching the workshops was a natural progression for Matthai, who lives adjacent to the Slough in the Cross Creek neighborhood and is a frequent visitor. “Whenever I would be on the boardwalk shooting, people would start asking me questions.” Matthai had been leading photography workshops at Lovers Key State Park, where she is the photographer-in-residence. When Hurricane Ian closed the park, she accepted an invitation from the Friends of Six Mile Cypress Slough to lead sessions here. The last workshop this season was April 29.

Matthai also served as one of three judges in this year’s annual Friends Photo Contest, as she did in 2022. Before becoming a professional, Matthai entered the Friends Photo Contest, open only to amateur photographers, and took 1st Prize in the Birds Category in 2020. She said this year’s photos were “awesome, one of the best years I’ve seen. The difference in 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place came down to minute details.”

She’s lived in Fort Myers for six years, retiring from a marketing position in Maryland. Matthai sells her wildlife and nature photography at local art fairs and on her website, www.matthaiphotography.com

She says she takes “the mystery out of the camera” during her workshops. “My main goal is to get them out of the automatic setting.”

Some basic tips:

- Watch the background
- Keep the subject in light
- Be patient.

And she always offers this caution: “Wildlife is not under contract to perform.”

DO YOU KNOW?

Photo Contest Trivia

By Theresa Roake

Bobcats are crepuscular. What does crepuscular mean?

- A. Warm-blooded
- B. Active at twilight
- C. Small feline
- D. Golden-eyed



Photo by Pat Lonergan



Photo by Chuck Pavlick

This flower is a:

- A. Morning Glory
- B. Sweet Pea
- C. Dayflower
- D. Pickerelweed

Yellow-crowned night herons' favorite food is:

- A. Crustaceans
- B. Insects
- C. Fish
- D. Small birds



Photo by Lawrence Carr



Photo by Cole Wesner

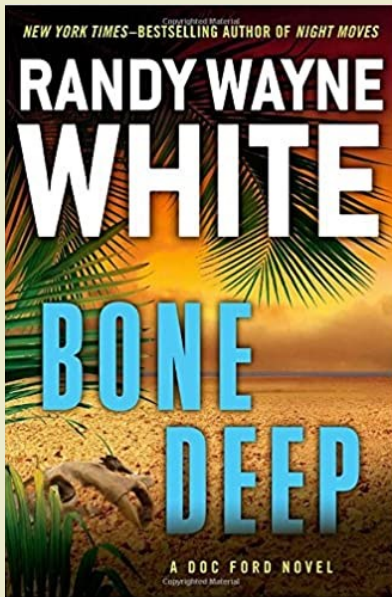
Alligators like to eat:

- A. Snakes
- B. Turtles
- C. Fish
- D. Birds
- E. All of the above

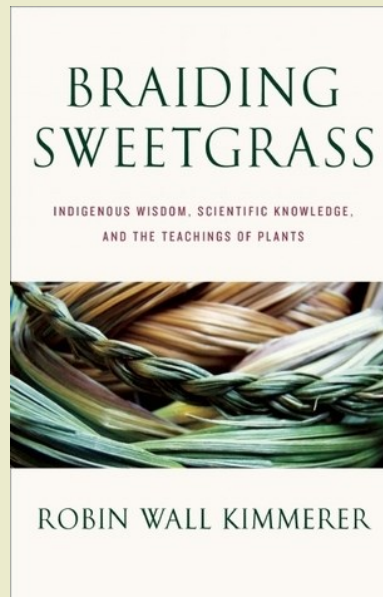
Answers on page 14

SLOUGH BOOKWORMS UPDATE

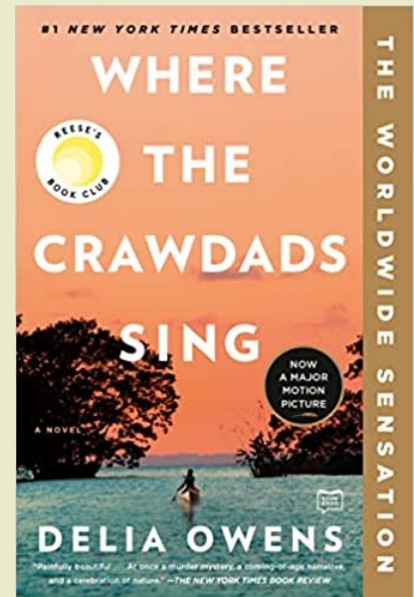
Here's your summer reading list...



June's book



August's book



October's book

In early April, Slough Bookworms met to discuss the book *Finding the Mother Tree* by Suzanne Simard. We also selected the next three books so that you can plan ahead for your summer reading. June, August and October meetings will be via ZOOM.

On Monday, June 5, we will be discussing New York Times Bestseller *Bone Deep* by Randy Wayne White, a local Sanibel author. *Bone Deep* is an installment in the Doc Ford adventure novel series where the main characters take on relic thieves and the multibillion-dollar phosphate industry in central Florida.

On Monday, August 7, we will delve into *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer. Drawing on her life as an indigenous scientist, and as a woman, Kimmerer shows how other living beings—asters and goldenrod, strawberries and squash, salamanders, algae, and sweetgrass—offer us gifts and lessons, even if we've forgotten how to hear their voices.

On Monday, October 2, it's time for *Where the Crawdads Sing* by Delia Owens. Owens juxtaposes an exquisite ode to the natural world against a profound coming of age story and haunting mystery. Thought-provoking, wise, and deeply moving, Owens's debut novel reminds us that we are forever shaped by the child within us, while also subject to the beautiful and violent secrets that nature keeps.

Days to celebrate Nature

May 16, Love a Tree Day

May 19, Endangered Species Day

May 20, World Bee Day

June 3, National Trails Day

June 5, Play Outside Day

June 15, Nature Photography Day

Answers to Photo
Contest Trivia:

1. B
2. C
3. A
4. E



Bill Hammond tells Monday Group story
Photo by Sabine Vandenhende

Save the Date(s)

Environmental Educator Extraordinaire Bill Hammond will share stories of the Slough and his career in the Amphitheater at Gator Lake from 9:30—11 am on May 13 and May 20.

Puppet Players

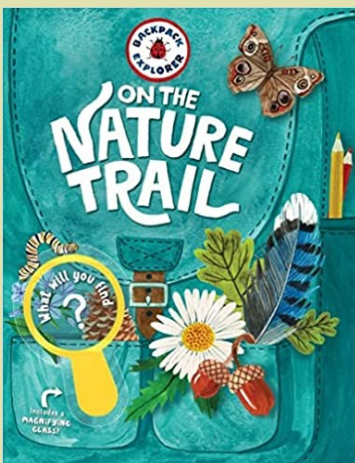
Friends members entertained visitors at the Interpretive Center's 15th Anniversary celebration with a puppet show based on Bill Sanders' book "The Slough and You."



Puppets on stage
Photo by Carolyn Babb

Around the Corner...

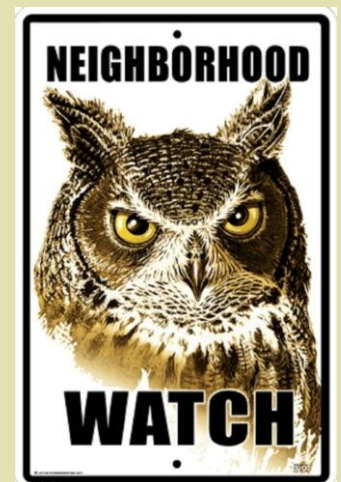
Head to Friends Corner, our nature store, to check out ideas for gifts and fun activities over the coming months. Don't forget your member discount!



Go on an adventure with your kid or grandkid



Made from recycled cereal boxes



For when you go on your summer vacation

Renewing Members. Thank you for your continued support.

Katie Baker
 Tom Bartholomew
 Kris & Steve Bauer
 Sue Beavers
 Brenda Berg
 Bill Black
 Jerry Boeckman
 Tom Brown
 Janet & Bruce Bunch
 Charlotte & Gerry Canelli
 Geoff Coe
 Ian Comly
 Susan Crawford
 Donna Cressman & George Boyer
 Brice Cropper
 Carol Cummings & Greg Podczaski
 Jodi & Terry Deane
 Gayle & Paul Edwards
 Lance Ford
 Nancy & Michael Frazier
 Christine Grannis
 Jayne Griffes
 Anne Gross
 Kati & Steven Heysinger
 Terri Krass
 Jean Landon
 Marty Linnemeyer
 Tom Mahoney & Maddy Maxeiner
 Adrienne Martin
 Richard Martinez
 Jim Matiya
 Maggie & David Minnick
 Nancy & Jeff Montgomery
 Toni & Tom Olsen
 Nancy Olson & Mike Talbert
 Sherry Patterson
 Chuck Pavlick
 Betty Ann Prevatt
 Anne Rapp
 Arnie Rosen
 Lynn Schaper
 Cathy & Walter Sedlacek

Sue Stevens
 Claudia & Don Stohler
 Bill Toelke
 Sabine Vandenhende & Lee Rosenbaum
 Linda Varga
 Margaret & Fred Walker
 Sari Young

Welcome New Members.

Lyn-Ann Bedoun
 Nicole Carignan & David Raphael
 Gina Delano & David Link
 Mel Dell
 Tiffany Glass
 Dave Haar
 Gene Kidd
 Jean King
 Cheryl & Mark Klimek
 Becky Lommen
 James Mann
 Kathy Potter
 Michele & James Rohan
 Elise & Josh Smith
 Mary Ann Strohmeyer
 Richard Turner

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