



Serenoa Notes

The Serenoa Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society

March 2012

Invasive Plants: Are We Getting the Word Out? —Elizabeth Gandy

At the last FNPS, Serenoa Chapter meeting, a member of the audience asked the question, “What is the objection to the Australian pines?” in reference to the speaker’s including it as an invasive species to be removed from the Wildflower Park in Charlotte County. In that moment, it hit me like a ton of bricks, the person asking the question sounded like they genuinely did not understand why Australian pines are bad and I had to ask myself, are we getting the message out about invasive plants effectively?

Many newcomers and visitors to Florida expect a tropical paradise, full of year round greenery, palm trees, and showy flowers. The fact is, much of Florida is temperate, some subtropical, and a very little bit at the very southern end is truly tropical, Caribbean tropical that is. Florida is full of assemblages of plants and animals, shaped by fire and water, known as natural communities that exist no where else on earth. It is the most floristically diverse state in the continental US. There are over 4200 documented plant species in the state. Nearly 1400 of those plants are considered non-native, having arrived here after the time of European contact.

So what is the problem with those 1400 plants anyway? The answer most often is very little. The planting of non-natives is an ever present assault on our sense of place in Florida. “Stop trying to mold Florida into something it is not and should not be!” we say. Most plants that are imported to Florida and planted here exist only in cultivation. The biggest problem is with those comparatively few that do escape, take on a life of their own and do what we like to call “behaving badly.” Bad behavior can be things like spreading quickly and creating monocultures that crowd out our native plants and alter the structure and function of natural communities. It can also be altering or impeding hydrology by sucking up lots of water or clogging waterways. Many invasive plants can alter fire behavior or hinder prescribed fire by burning more or less intensely than our fire adapted native plants. I could go on and on. These are the plants that get the designation of “invasive.” There are a little more than 140 species, less than 10% of our documented non-natives, currently listed as invasive by the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council (FLEPPC).

If we as members and supporters of the FNPS intend to further our mission of preserving, conserving and restoring native plants and their

Monthly meetings at Selby Gardens:

Every third Monday.
811 South Palm Ave. Sarasota.
Doors open at 7:00 p.m,
business meeting at 7:30,
followed by program.
Everyone welcome!

In this Issue:

Notes from the Board Retreat 2
Botanical Period Piece 3
Chickasaw Plum 5
White Magic along a Country Road 6
On the Conservation Front 7
Pythons are Coming 8
Things to Do 8-9
Membership Enrollment Form 9
Events Calendar 10



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communities, we must not fail to address the threat that invasive species pose. To do that, we must first educate those that come through our doors with good information before they get back out the door. Did anyone stop the Australian pine person and seek to educate them before leaving? I know I didn't step up. We cannot forget that many of us have been immersed in the wilds of Florida for so long that we know longer even question the concept of invasive species. We just know them and we hate them and we often take for granted that those around us in our meeting room at Selby or on our monthly field trips feel the same. The truth is some of them don't. If the reason they don't is because we have failed to educate them effectively, then we have failed to further our mission.

A Few Notes from the FNPS Board Retreat, February 11-12, 2012

—Rosalind Rowe

I happened to attend this retreat, serving as the proxy for Annie Schmidt, Chair of the society's Conservation Committee. Some of the retreat highlights for me were:

- **MEETING OUR NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR.** Kellie Westervelt brings to FNPS the drive to build better cohesiveness and stronger central planning tools. She already has pulled together a small team of volunteers to research and adopt a more powerful database to centralize all our membership and other data, and she has started researching ways to fund a thorough (and very essential!) strategic planning session, which will take FNPS to the next level of organization.
- **BUILDING A STATEWIDE ANNUAL REPORT.** By gathering all the information about the accomplishments of our many Chapters, and compiling a summary report, we will have a very powerful tool. This publication can be shared with policy makers, agency managers, and even included as part of a Welcome Packet to new FNPS members. It will be great to be able to easily tout our many important accomplishments, from education and plant sales, to FNPS participation in natural lands' management reviews. Even those of us who have been members for years may not be aware of all the great things being done.
- **ADDRESSING LAPSED MEMBERSHIP.** Westervelt did a presentation on how the importance – and value – of addressing and reducing membership lapses. She showed how there are known steps for running a campaign to get members to return. After this Retreat, the Chapter Representatives will be bringing back a list of lapsed members associated with their Chapter and the steps to be followed by the Chapter. Since she also showed how the steps for such a campaign can be used for new membership campaigns, we'll have each gained the experience for that next step in building membership.

Botanical Period Piece

—Fran Palmeri

On a beautiful winter morning Serenoans are trekking through acres of plant history. We're on a field trip to Historic Spanish Point and some of us purists are aghast at seeing large numbers of exotics but then we round a corner to find marlberry and other native shrubs lining the trail. The "bones" of Bertha Palmer's estate in Osprey are pure Florida: laurel oaks crowned with masses of Spanish moss, live oaks gracing the lawn and gumbo limbos twisted into fantastical sculptures no human could ever replicate. Alongside the sunken garden with its Norfolk Island Pine an ancient red cedar stops us in our tracks. Its furrowed bark records countless storms and broiling suns it's seen over the years. Mangroves, the focus of this field trip, line the water's edge.

We're a long time getting to the mangroves because there is so much to see along the way. Dave Feagles is keeping a list. There are fifteen discoveries not on Spanish Point's plant lists. This brings the count above 200 (203). "Unfortunately most are exotics," our trip leader Bruce Holst, tells us. "Some of the better species added are woodsgrass (*Oplismenus hirtellus*), coinvine (*Dalbergia ecastaphyllum*), and giant leather fern (*Acrostichum danaeifolium*)."

Continued on page 4



PHOTO BY FRAN PALMERI

Trip leader Bruce Holst examining a new addition to the Historic Spanish Point plant list

Ancient and gnarled live oak at Historic Spanish Point

PHOTO BY FRAN PALMERI





Watchful osprey at Historic Spanish Point

Coastal hammock



Fifteen plants added to the Spanish Point plant list during the FNPS fieldtrip:

Acrostichum danaeifolium
*Arundo donax**
*Asclepias curassavica**
*Asparagus setaceus**
*Bischofia javanica**
*Cupaniopsis anacardioides**
Dalbergia ecastaphyllum
*Jasminum multiflorum**
Oplismenus hirtellus
*Panicum maximum**
Solanum americanum
*Solanum diphyllum**
Solanum erianthum
Taxodium distichum
*Thunbergia fragrans**

* non-native

This land was once part of Bertha Palmer's huge estate. She arrived in 1910 from Chicago and bought up thousands of acres in Sarasota and Manatee counties to be used for ranches, citrus groves and real estate development. This tract is part of 350 acres in Osprey, which became her winter estate.

The early twentieth century was a time of plant collecting mania and importing plants had become easier with faster transportation and better ways of preserving plants in transit. An affluent Sarasota gardener like Bertha Palmer had the world on a string. On May 18 1916, the Sarasota Times reported "at the Seaboard Air Line Depot...a truck load of flowering plants and shrubs...destined to Mrs. Potter Palmer...for adding more beauty to her already beautiful place in Osprey." There were Japanese persimmons, a Bird of Paradise from Africa, crotons from Asia, an Italian cypress in the Sunken Garden, and Washingtonian palms on the Duchene Lawn. Many of these plants found their way into the yards of ordinary people. (Birds of Paradise are still planted in the common areas of Palmer Ranch.) The concept of native versus exotic was unknown.

While Bertha Potter was thinking globally, John Kunkel Small, curator of the NY Botanical Garden was reveling in Florida's flora. Following in the footsteps of botanizers including the Bartrams in the mid 1700's, he drove his "weed wagon" all over the state for more than thirty years starting in 1901 on a native plant quest, discovering or referencing some of our most familiar species including saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*) discovered by William Bartram.

The two plant lovers with two different approaches were living at the same time. There were intersections. Saw palmetto grew in Bertha Palmer's garden along with coontie and frostweed, all referenced by Small.

Species Spotlight—Chickasaw plum

—Russ Owens

The Buzz this month is on *Prunus angustifolia*, the Chickasaw plum. *Angustifolia* means narrow leaves. This member of the Rose family is one of our most attractive natives. It flowers profusely in the early Spring, and if not doing so now, will be soon.

The Chickasaw's growth habit is to form large clumps from many root sprouts. This habit results in dense stands and when blooming creates a large source of nectar for bees, wasps and other insects. Mowing or cutting back the sprouts can result in a small tree to twenty-five feet. *P. angustifolia* prefers deep sandy soils and full sun, but will have good success in partial shade.

P. angustifolia has an interesting range. From just below New York across the country to Washington and Oregon the range skips the coldest and driest areas of the nation, as well as the very tip of Florida.

The fruit are about a half inch in diameter. Start out as red and turn yellow when ripe. The fruit provide nourishment for much wildlife and man. Jellies and jams can be made from the fruit and it can be eaten fresh. Wine is also a possibility. Plums are also a good fruit for diabetics.

Plum pits have been found in the dung of Mastodons that roamed between Florida and Georgia.

Continued on page 6

Prunus umbellata flowers

PHOTO BY FRAN PALMERI



For those interested in catching a glimpse of Chickasaw plum locally, there are some at Southfork State Park and Lake Manatee State Park. Blooming trees at Lake Manatee can be seen just inside the fence line of the park along SR64. What a treat!

White Magic along a Country Road

—Fran Palmeri

In late winter in Florida flatwoods plums erupt in a cloud of white blossoms, a feast for winter weary eyes. At dusk along a country road they materialize out of the darkness like ghosts. Some appear to have been here forever and show signs of pruning by someone who loved them. As the light fades their fragile white blossoms light up the night and I am transported back to the early nineteen hundreds when the first settlers arrived here. I can almost hear the wagon wheels.

Prunus umbellata, a small deciduous tree, is native to Florida and much of the southeastern U.S. Blooms are followed by one inch long purple fruit beloved by wildlife and humans. They're good eating so you better be quick to pick. People have been using them to make jams and jellies. Combine with a sweeter fruit like apples in tarts and pies.

Prunus umbellata trees



PHOTO BY FRAN PALMERI

On the Conservation Front

SWFWMD Surplus Lands: You Have the power to Save Our Precious Lands!

—Dave Feagles, President Serenoa Chapter FNPS

As you know, the South West Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) has been asked to prioritize the importance of their lands with an eye on “surplussing” parcels that do not meet the original purpose for their acquisition, or do not provide water resource benefits, such as flood control, recharge, preservation of wetlands, streams and lakes or the like. TRANSLATION: Which conservation lands can we get rid of and save a few bucks? VERY BAD IDEA! THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS “SURPLUS CONSERVATION LANDS”!

On January 11, 2012 SWFWMD held a public meeting to discuss the surplus lands process. I am pleased to say that the Serenoa Chapter of FNPS was very well represented at that hearing which was filled to overflowing with people as outraged as we are. When asked how many in the room were against the surplus of public lands, every hand went up! SWFWMD heard us loud and clear. They modified their plan so they could incorporate more public input. Your participation made a big difference. Please visit the website at <http://www.swfwmd.state.fl.us/projects/surplus-lands/> to view a map of SWFWMD lands and to get more information on the rationale, criteria and timeline of the surplus lands process.

No time to celebrate yet! To accommodate a larger group they have moved the next public hearing to Downtown Commissioners Chambers at 1660 Ringling Blvd., Sarasota, but set the hearing for 10AM on March 7th, making it hard for you who work to attend. While to all appearances, the efforts being made by SWFWMD are well intentioned, the story doesn't end there. Please take a look at this *Tampa Bay Times* article: <http://www.tampabay.com/news/environment/wildlife/article1215048.ece>. This article relates to hunting but it is the same Water Management District that is saying one thing and then is pressured to do another. We must remain vigilant through this entire process.

Due to your efforts we have their ears. Now they have to know that they also have our eyes. I'll be there on March 7, 2012 to let them know we are watching. I hope you can join me. We need a large showing to keep the pressure on. You've been a lot of support in helping to keep them on track. Thank you, THANK YOU, THANK YOU!

Announcements

- In fall 2011, elections were held for Serenoa chapter officers. There were no changes in the current officers following elections. For a list of officers, see sidebar on page two of this newsletter. Congratulations to all our fantastic and hardworking officers!
- The chapter by-laws have been updated to state that the chapter president may only serve three consecutive terms of one year each. Our current president, Dave Feagles, was grandfathered in for a fourth year as the by-law change was made just after the last election. Phew! We are very glad to have Dave for one more year!

The Pythons are coming! – Er, no, They're here!

–Rosalind Rowe

The purpose of the Native Plant Society is to promote the preservation, conservation and restoration of the native plants and native plant communities of Florida.

Please be sure to regularly visit the website at www.FNPS.org for current information about statewide projects, grants and issues that may need your support to address. There are also numerous ways to stay involved and further the message and the mission of the Native Plant Society

Cheryl Millett, with The Nature Conservancy and coordinator for The Python Patrol in central Florida, gave a presentation about these snakes at the February 8 general meeting for the Suncoast Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (Suncoast CISMA). The focus of the discussion was the Burmese Python and how we can work together to address their threat.

A female python carries a clutch of 10-50 eggs every other year, on the average, and they can live up to 25 years. That's a lot of snakes! In fact, recent studies of their origins in Florida tie the current problem populations back to a small release of about 10 snakes well before the advent of Hurricane Andrew; the first reported capture of a Burmese Python was in 1979. Millett's presentation included a slide showing how much one snake needs to eat as it grows up. I'll just say this: it was a lot! Including four small alligators, a number of sandhill cranes and herons, a lot of raccoons, an infinite number of mice, and a few other critters. There is beginning evidence that their presence may be significantly depleting small-mammal populations in the Everglades, though more study is needed.

The purpose of the Suncoast CISMA is to help all of us in Hillsborough, Pinellas, Manatee, and Sarasota counties work together to address plant and animal invasions that threaten our native and endemic species and habitats. This group invites anyone who has an interest to join in the effort (see www.Florida Invasives.org, and click on Sarasota area on the map).

For now, here are two easy and interesting websites you can check out to learn about the pythons: www.IveGot1.org, and <http://ufwildlife.ifas.ufl.edu/reddy.shtml>, where you can take the REDDY course. As that site says, "REDDY-trained observers play a key role in a much larger management program by helping to detect and document the spread of established species and sightings of new species. Anyone who spends time driving, working outdoors, or enjoying the outdoors will benefit from this training, as will anyone who lives in southern or central Florida."

Learn to identify these reptile invaders and how to report any you happen to see while you are out enjoying Florida's natural areas. We don't want them here!

Things To Do This Spring /Upcoming Events

Sarasota Bay and Estuary Program Bay Wise Kayaking Trips— Free to the public, registration required

March 17th—Blind Pass: Turtle Beach around Bird Keys to Little Sarasota Bay & return.

April 7th—Lyons and Blackburn Bay: North jetty at Venice Inlet to Lyons and Blackburn bays and return.

April 21st—Lyons and Blackburn Bay: North jetty at Venice Inlet to Lyons and Blackburn bays and return.

Visit website for information and registration, [http://library.constantcontact.com/download/get/file/1101250662607307/Bay+Wise+dates+2011-12+\(5\)+Final.pdf](http://library.constantcontact.com/download/get/file/1101250662607307/Bay+Wise+dates+2011-12+(5)+Final.pdf).

Low Impact Development Expo March 23, 10am-4pm, Twin Lakes Park, Sarasota-A trade show to showcase and promote the latest low impact development methods and products. Examples include green roofs, vertical walls, planter vaults, pervious pavement, native plants, specialty soil products, and water cisterns. For more information call 955-8085 or email info@sarasotabay.org.

Sarasota Folk Festival March 24 & 25, Oscar Scherer State Park, Osprey. Come enjoy folk music from around the state, food and vendors at this 9th annual event. Visit <http://www.floridastateparks.org/oscarscherer/events.cfm?view-event=7752#7752> or www.sarasotafolkfestival.com for more info.

Birding Diversity March 31, 7:30 am to 12 pm, Carlton Preserve, Sarasota County. Join volunteer Charlie Sample for a walking/driving birding adventure. Reservations required. Visit http://www.scgov.net/calendar/view_event.asp?CalendarID=18009 for more info.

Nature Days April 7, Felts Audubon Preserve, Manatee County. Come enjoy a fun day of guided walks, educational exhibits and don't forget the native plants.

Earth Day April 22, 10am-5pm, Oscar Scherer State Park, Osprey. Free admission. Come enjoy music, environmentally friendly vendors, and activities for the whole family. FNPS will be there so put in a few volunteer hours in between enjoying all the fun! For more info visit <http://www.floridastateparks.org/oscarscherer/events.cfm?viewevent=7754#7754>.

Discover Duette Wagon Tour April 28, 9 am-1 pm, Duette Preserve, Manatee County. Free event. Take a ride through Duette Preserve and learn about the natural communities and cultural history of the beautiful site. Reservations required. Call 941-792-8314 or visit <http://www.mymanatee.org/home/government/departments/natural-resources/nrd-headlines/edu-program.html> for more info.

Audubon Society Trips Don't forget all the great birding trips offered this time of year by our local Audubon chapters. Be sure to visit their websites for the fieldtrip calendars. <http://www.sarasotaaudubon.org/>, <http://www.manateeaudubon.org/>, <http://www.peaceriveraudubon.org/>.

Volunteer!

March 17, 8 am-noon, Give A Day for the Bay, invasive plant removal at Sawgrass Lake in Pinellas County. Contact 727-893-2765 or Colleen@tbep.org.

April 7 Nature Days, Felts Audubon Preserve, Manatee County. FNPS needs your help for this event. There will be plant sales, guided walks and fun, nature based activities for the whole family.

April 22 -Earth Day, 10 am-5 pm, Oscar Scherer State Park. FNPS needs your help for this event. There will be plant sales, guided walks and other activities. Stay the day and enjoy the entire event.

FNPS Membership Enrollment

Serenoa Chapter Newsletter

Name _____ E-mail _____ Phone (day) _____
 Street _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 Membership number, if renewing _____ **Dues:** Life: \$1,000 Donor: \$250 Business or corporate: \$125
 Supporting: \$100 Contributing: \$75 Not-for-profit organization: \$50 Family or household: \$50
 Individual: \$35 Full-time student: \$15 Library subscription: \$100
 Payment: Check/MO Visa MC Discover
 Check/Money Order # _____ Please do not mail cash. Make Checks payable to FNPS
 Credit Card # _____ - _____ - _____ - _____ Exp. Date _____ 3-digit CV code on back _____
 Name on card _____
 Billing address and zip code if different from above _____

Credit card payments can be faxed to (815) 361-9166; or mail this form to: FNPS, PO Box 278, Melbourne, FL 32902-0278

Florida Native Plant Society Membership benefits: *Serenoa Notes* newsletter, Member discounts at events, subscription to the quarterly magazine *Palmetto*, Bi-monthly newsletter *Sabal Minor*

Join Now! Come to the meetings and field trips—learn about conservation, and native habitat

Events Calendar

Monthly general meetings at Selby Gardens: Every third Monday, Sept. through May at 7:00 p.m.; speaker begins at 7:30. Selby Botanical Gardens Activity Center, 811 South Palm Avenue, Sarasota. Everyone welcome!

Carpool Meeting Points: BRADENTON: Twelve Oaks Plaza, Bank of America building, on SR 70, 1/4 mile west of I-75.
SARASOTA: DaRuMa in Sarasota Crossings shopping center (5459 Fruitville Road).

Mar. 19 GENERAL MEETING—CREATING A CONSERVATION EASEMENT. Environmentalist Allan Horton, a 3rd generation Floridian, outlines the steps in creating the conservation easement at his Myakka Valley Ranch and discusses the importance of emphasizing native habitat preservation on a working ranch.

24 FIELD TRIP, 9 A.M. HORTON RANCH, MANATEE COUNTY. Martha and Allan Horton will lead us on a riding/walking tour to see how this 50-year-old working ranch is integrated into uplands, marshes, & a rare peat bog.

April 7 FELTS AUDUBON PRESERVE, MANATEE COUNTY. Nature Days

15 OSCAR SCHERER STATE PARK OSPREY Earth Day Celebrations. Plant sales, exhibits, guided walks, food, music.

16 GENERAL MEETING—ECO-GARDENING. Laurel Schiller, Co-Owner Florida Native Plants, will explain how our gardening choices affect everything around us. We'll learn how to create a wildlife-friendly yard that is connected to our neighborhood, county, state and the planet.

May 12 FIELD TRIP: ECOGARDENS IN SARASOTA AND MANATEE COUNTIES. Led by Laurel Schiller we'll see different approaches including an award-winning native landscape with a mimosa driveway & green rooftop garden on Siesta Key.

14 GENERAL MEETING—AMPHIBIANS IN TROUBLE. Jason Rohr, Assistant Professor of Biology, USF will talk about how parasites, pollution and climate change create a dangerous brew for frogs, toads and other amphibians and their aquatic communities.

17-20 FLORIDA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY CONFERENCE, PLANT CITY, FLORIDA.



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of the Florida Native
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