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Friends  of Brooker Creek Preserve  
September - October 2023

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The Florida Division of Forestry conducted a practice burn along the entrance road last month, opening up habitat and recycling nutrients back into the soil, and promoting growth of trees and flowering plants. We are always happy to see prescribed burns happening in the Preserve!



## Upcoming Events

- Sep. 11 Keystone Rd. Cleanup with KPB
- Sep. 24 Beekeepers Club
- Sep. 30 Wildflower Garden work day
- Oct. 7 Wildflower & Pollinator Festival
- Oct. 8 Gallery reception: Leslie Neumann: *Wetland Conservation*
- Oct. 14 Return the Preserve work day
- Oct. 16 Keystone Rd. Cleanup with KPB
- Oct. 28 Wildflower Garden work day
- Oct. 28 Owl-Oween
- Oct. 29 Beekeepers Club
- Nov. 20 FOBCP Member's Photography Exhibit, entry due date

Fruit of Walter's viburnum  
(*Viburnum obovatum*)

## Fall Wildflower and Pollinator Festival



The Fall Wildflower Festival is back, with a new name and new leadership. The first Fall Wildflower Festival at Brooker Creek Preserve, in 2010, was the brainchild of then FOBCP Chair, Barb Hoffman, who was looking for ways to bring people to the Preserve in a time of recession and County staff cutbacks. And bring people to the Preserve it did! The Friends organized this popular event annually from 2010-2019. After a few years off due to Covid and boardwalk renovations, the event is back and is now being planned out expertly by the Brooker staff - James, Julia, Victoria and Lara. The Friends are providing financial support and working hand-in-hand with staff in the transition year. This year's event promises to be better than ever!

If you would like to volunteer for this event, please email Julia at [jmyers@pinellas.gov](mailto:jmyers@pinellas.gov)



# Wildflower & Pollinator FESTIVAL

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**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 7**  
**9AM TO 4PM**  
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**BROOKER CREEK PRESERVE**  
3940 KEYSTONE RD  
TARPON SPRINGS, 34688

## **ACTIVITIES:**

- Live Butterfly Encounter
- Native Plant Sale
- Wildflower Quest
- Vendors
- Crafts

*For details visit:*

**<https://wildflowerfestival.eventbrite.com>**



Friends of  
Brooker Creek Preserve

**UF** | IFAS Extension  
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA



Joanna Collins, daughter of front desk volunteers Jim and Marilyn Collins, is in need of a kidney donor. She has shared a short, informative video with the Friends. Please take just a few minutes to watch the video (link below). Then, if you are so inclined, share the link yourself with others in your circle of friends and family. The more people who see Joanna's message, the more likely she is to find that special donor.

<https://youtu.be/gTTlan7W-6M>

## **Chairman's Message** By Cathie Foster

### **Scott Coulter, Preserve Supervisor, Retires!**

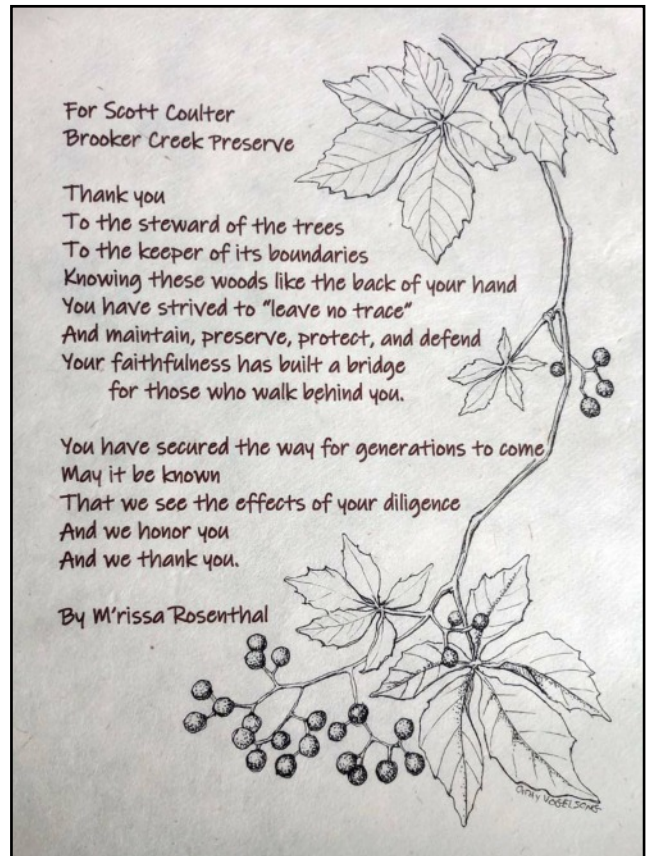
August 31 marked Preserve Supervisor Scott Coulter's last day of a long career at Brooker Creek Preserve. For over two decades Scott has played a huge role in caring for the lands that make up our 9,000-acre Preserve, the operative words being *caring for*. He started his career with Pinellas County in the early 1990's as a craft worker and ranger for the County Parks, just as Brooker Creek Preserve was being "born." In 1999, the then sole Preserve Manager Dr. Craig Huegel was on the lookout for employees to assist him. Scott was one of the first two he hired and we're so glad he did! Scott has grown up with the Preserve and has come to know the land like the back of his hand. He has seen the Preserve grow in size as acreage has been added and has seen the addition of the Environmental Education Center in 2004. In 2006 he was promoted to Preserve Supervisor, overseeing the "beyond the walls" duties not only at Brooker, but also at nearby Chesnut and Philippe Parks.

His relationship with the Friends has been such a valuable one, forged over more than two decades through a shared desire to make sure the lands of BCP are maintained in a way that ensures their integrity. Through his leadership and by his example he has clearly communicated to the Preserve rangers what a designation of Preserve means. Their dedication to and enthusiasm for Brooker Creek Preserve and their understanding of its importance is a reflection of his own. We are so very thankful for that. I speak for so many when I say that we wish Scott the very best in his well-deserved retirement!

*Cathie*



Happy Retirement, Scott Coulter, Preserve Supervisor!  
 Scott is holding a special plaque given to him by the Friends. It includes a painting by local artist, M'risa Rosenthal, of a bridge Scott built over a stream leading into Brooker Creek, and a poem written by the artist. It includes an ink drawing of a Virginia Creeper vine winding around the poem's words, drawn by Cathy Vogelsong.



This new bench, near the entrance doors to the Exhibit Hall, was purchased by the Friends as a dedication to Scott's many years at Brooker Creek Preserve.

## Welcome Carol Gray!

Starting this month, BCP Rangers Tony, Randy, John and Kate will continue the wonderful jobs they have been doing, now under the supervision of Scott's replacement, Carol Gray. Carol's most recent job with the Pinellas County Parks was as Chief Ranger for the Pinellas Trail and Taylor Park. We welcome her and look forward to working with her.

# HAPPY Owl-Oween

Saturday, October 28, 2023 • 9:00-3:00  
Brooker Creek Preserve



Live Owls On Display 10:00 - 2:00

Owl Fun Tattoos

Owl Pancake Breakfast (\$5/person) 8:00 - 2:00

Owl Story Time

Owl Scavenger Hunt

Owl Pellet Science (\$5/person)

Owl Nest Box Building (\$25/person)

3940 Keystone Road, Tarpon Springs, 34688

Questions? Call 727-934-2680

Email [info@friendsofbrookercreekpreserve.org](mailto:info@friendsofbrookercreekpreserve.org)

Hosted by

Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve & Tampa Bay Raptor Rescue

Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve

## Volunteers Needed for Owl-Oween!

Owl Scavenger Hunt in the Ed Center

Owl Tattoos (hand them out) in the Ed Center porch

Owl Pellet Science in the classroom

Owl Nest Box Building in the classroom porch

Live Owls in the field by the auditorium

Contact Barb Hoffman if you would like to volunteer: [barbhoff57@icloud.com](mailto:barbhoff57@icloud.com)

Thank you!



# AUDITORIUM GALLERY by Lynn Whitelaw

## Leslie Neumann: *WETLANDS CONSERVATION*

Opening Sept. 9 and on view through Dec. 3

Artist Reception: Oct. 8, 1-3 PM



*Marriage Grotto*, 2020, Oil/Encaustic on Panel, 32 x 98 in.  
(Photo credit: Silver Moon Photography)

*While my artwork does fulfill one of my primary objectives - to create beauty, I also achieve my other objective - do good in the world - by being a citizen activist, focused on land preservation. I'm one of the founding members of a local land trust called The Gulf Coast Conservancy which facilitates the protection of environmentally sensitive lands by placing them into public ownership. Since 1992, we have helped save 15,000 precious coastal acres - the same acres that serve as my artistic inspiration.* - Leslie Neumann



Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve is pleased to present an exhibition of Florida-based artist Leslie Neumann who lives in the small Gulf Coast community of Aripeka in Hernando and Pasco Counties. Neumann has a Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) degree from California College of Arts in Oakland, CA, and a Master of Arts (MA) degree from New York University in Manhattan. She is well-known for the rich surfaces of her paintings done in the medium of encaustic (hot beeswax)



For the *Wetlands Series*, Neumann is presenting paintings, works on paper, and giclee prints characterized by close-up views of the lush tropical environment seen from her studio. Using highly saturated colors, Neumann creates "a hybrid between an abstraction and representation and a dichotomy of seductive beauty coupled with a sense of danger." For the Artist Reception, Neumann will provide a talk on her work both as an artist and her conservation efforts.

Leslie Neumann  
*Endurance*  
Giclee Print, 19 ½ x 14 in.

## UPCOMING EXHIBITION IN THE GALLERY

### Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve 3<sup>rd</sup> ANNUAL MEMBER'S PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION and INVITATIONAL

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual *FoBCP Member's Photography Exhibition and Invitational* will open on December 9, but it is not too early to start thinking about what images you might want to submit for the show.

We are looking for those "captured" images that we as FoBCP volunteers often have that special chance to capture - *show us what you got!* Three selected photographers who have taken images in Brooker Creek are also invited to participate in the annual exhibition.

Below is participation information for FoBCP Members:

- The photographer must be a member of FoBCP.
- Photographs must have been taken within Brooker Creek Preserve.
- Photos must be framed, ready to hang with a horizontal wire on the back.
- Up to 3 photos per photographer may be submitted (with paperwork attached).
- Photographs are to be delivered to the Nature Store by Sunday, Nov. 20.
- All photo techniques are acceptable: color, black & white, manipulated.
- If a photograph is for sale and sold, the Friends request a donation of 10% of the sale price.
- Unsold photographs are to be removed at the end of the reception on Feb. 18, 2024

Further information on deadlines, delivery dates, and paperwork will appear in the Nov/Dec. Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve Newsletter.



# AUDITORIUM GALLERY 2023-2024

## EXHIBITION SCHEDULE

Unless noted, the Auditorium Gallery is open to the public:

Saturdays 9 am -3 pm, Sundays 11 am -3 pm (except for special events in the Auditorium).

### 2023

Sept. 9 - Dec. 3 **Leslie Neumann: *Wetlands Conservation*:**

Opening Reception & Artist Talk: Sunday, Oct. 8, 1-3 pm

Dec 9, 2023 - Feb 18, 2024

**FoBCP 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Member's Photography Exhibition & Invitational**

Closing Reception: Sunday, Feb. 18, 1-3 PM

### 2024

Feb. 23-24 **Brooker Creek Preserve Plein-Air Weekend** (Registration Required)

March 2-17 **2024 BCP Plein-Air Exhibition**

Reception, Sale & Awards Program: Sunday, Mar. 17, 1-3 pm

Mar. 23 - May 26

**Elizabeth Coachman: *Brooker Creek Preserved: In Paintings and Prints.***

Reception & Artist's Talk: Sunday, March 24, 1-3 pm

*\*Note change of date.*

June 2 - Aug. 25 **FOBCP Permanent Collection**

(no planned reception at this time; gallery open upon request)

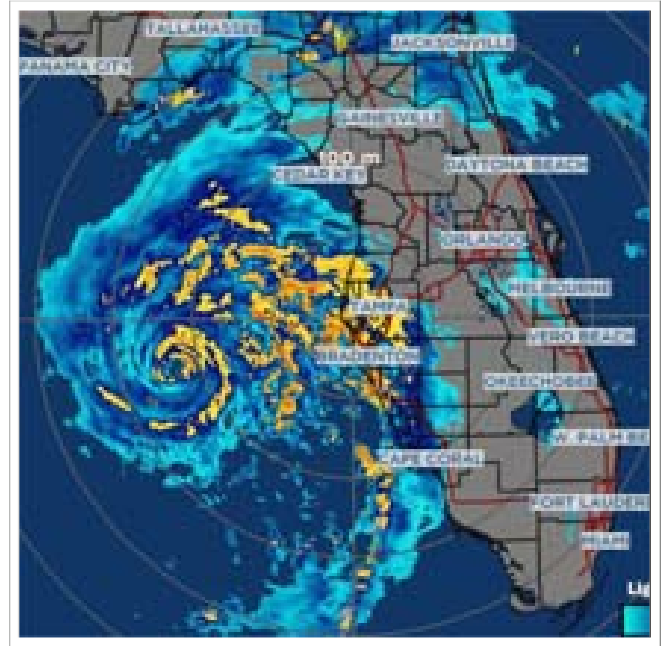
For more information on the Auditorium Gallery exhibitions contact:

Lynn Whitelaw, Gallery Curator

[rlwhitelaw7@msn.com](mailto:rlwhitelaw7@msn.com), 813-784-4225 (cell)

## Keystone Events by Craig Huegel

Hurricane Idalia just passed us this morning and left our landscape intact. Not the same for areas near Cedar Key and the Big Bend area of Florida which were hammered by 100+ mph winds and devastating high tides. Large swaths of Florida were recently submerged in saltwater and likely will remain so for at least several days. As most plants are not at all adapted to saltwater inundation, a great many landscape plants and vegetation in natural areas will perish.



News reports often refer to such events as catastrophic ones, yet it is these very events that determine the ecology of an area. Wildfires, severe freezes, avalanches, and hurricanes are vital to the nature of plant communities everywhere. They may be uncommon, but that doesn't diminish their importance. They are so-called "keystone" events. What we take as "normal" plant communities are their result.

Florida is a unique example, at least for North America. We are shaped like an open sock. Plants (and animals) work their way down from the north and move south to the "toe." Plants (and animals) also wend their way across the Caribbean and find a foot hold in the Keys and extreme South Florida. All the while these two disparate communities of plants meet and fight for dominance somewhere in the middle. What keeps them in their place are catastrophic events.

Many of my favorite north Florida plants do quite well in my landscape. I've planted many of my favorites - species such as silverbells and native azaleas, in every one of my landscapes over the 36 years I've lived here in the Tampa/St. Petersburg area. There is really no reason that they remain north of me naturally except for the fact that they don't reproduce without significant cold stratification. Without cold temperatures, their seed does not germinate. If that wasn't the case, you'd have species like serviceberry and southern crabapple all across the state.

The same is true for many of the south Florida species naturally restricted to the lower 2-3 tiers of Florida counties, or that hug the coastline a bit further north. When I first designed the native plant landscape 30+ years ago at the Pinellas County Cooperative Extension office in Largo, I had a bit of space left over that I had no plans for on paper. I decided to plant it with south Florida natives with the idea that I could show folks what these plants looked like until we had a killing frost. There was little in the literature at the time to tell me how they'd respond when temperatures dipped below freezing and I assumed it would kill most as none of them existed this far north naturally. What I found over the course of all these years is that nearly every one of them is untouched by temperatures in the mid-20's F. Temperatures that killed several native plants found here naturally caused no damage to plants not found naturally anywhere 100 miles



south of me. The question then is why are these all restricted to extreme south Florida. My answer is that this is the result of catastrophes - temperatures like I saw in 1989 when it reached 19 degrees F for 3 consecutive nights. I'm betting that this would have killed them all, and will someday in the future.

Rare catastrophic events are what cleans the slate of unadapted plants. Saltwater and devastating high winds like we just experienced in the Big Bend area of Florida are rare, but reoccurring events. They maintain the "purity" of a plant community by eliminating the species not adapted to it. They are critical abiotic "disturbances," not something we should hope to eliminate if only we could. When we look out over a landscape following a natural catastrophe, we need to see it not as a disaster but as something rejuvenating even if that is difficult to do at the time. Catastrophes are devastating to private/personal property, but they are critical to the health of natural systems.

## Nature Store

A recent addition to our Nature Store is a selection of hand-crafted leather goods fashioned and made by our own talented store volunteer, Phil Kesel!



Purses, keychains, barrettes, wrist cuffs, bottle holders and more. The selection varies from month to month, so please stop in and see what's new!

## Friends Outreach, by Julie Wade

The Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve outreach and partnerships continue with a new project! We are again joining Keep Pinellas Beautiful (KPB) by literally de-littering the stretch of Keystone roadside from Lora Lane to the northern turn of the bicycle trail.

On the second Monday of each month Friends and friends of Friends will meet at 9 am in the parking lot of the Greater LIFE Christian Church at 3770 Old Keystone Road. They have graciously agreed to let us park in their lot and to use their dumpster - another partnership! It only takes about an hour to complete our tasks. All equipment, including gloves, visibility vests, and "picker-upper" tools are provided. Just show up, get some exercise, and make an important contribution by beautifying the approach to Brooker. If you have any questions, call the Friends number 727-934-3480 and Julie Wade will get back with you. Our first cleanup will be on Monday, Sept. 11, at 9 am. We'd love to have you join us!

We (BCP Friends outreach) are also participating in the Tarpon Springs Back to School Splash and Ecofest. It is free, eco-friendly, close by, and they give away trees (and free food)!





# Return The Preserve Work Day by Evan Earle Jr.


Our next Return The Preserve Work Day will be Saturday, 10/14/23. Thanks to the volunteers who participate at our RTP Work Days, we have been doing a number on invasives such as Caesarweed and Boston fern. Both of these plants are extremely aggressive and prolific. So it is important that we continue to remove them and help to return the Preserve to its natural beauty. We will see you in October (hopefully we will have some cooler weather by then).



Boston fern  
(*Nephrolepis exaltata*)




Caesarweed  
(*Urena lobata*)

Friends  of Brooker Creek Preserve

## RETURN THE PRESERVE WORK DAY

The Return The Preserve Work Days focus on areas of the preserve where exotic invasive vegetation and unnatural overgrowth exists. It is our goal to help *return the preserve* to its natural beauty. Working with FOBCP leadership and Preserve staff, volunteers provide the much needed hands-on support necessary to remove nuisance plants providing a more healthy environment for native wildlife.

# OCTOBER 14



We will meet in the parking lot at 7:45, start at 8:00, and work until 11:00. Long sleeve shirts, long pants, a hat, and sunscreen are recommended; closed shoes are required. Bring yard tools if you have them.

**Registration is required, this event caps at 25 volunteers.**  
**Register at: [returnthepreserveworkday23.eventbrite.com](https://returnthepreserveworkday23.eventbrite.com)**  
For questions, contact the project leader: Evan Earle at [earlejr@gmail.com](mailto:earlejr@gmail.com)

# A Ranger's-Eye View of the Florida Gopher Tortoise

by Randy Goggin

*Gopherus polyphemus* is the only native, North American tortoise to inhabit land east of the Mississippi River - its territory stretching from the Florida peninsula north into South Carolina. It's one of six gopher tortoise species (Genus *Gopherus*) found on the continent, all descendants of an ancestral species that arose about 60 million years before present - with *G. polyphemus* inhabiting these lands for the last two million years. Florida gopher tortoises average about 12 to 16 inches in length. They have smooth shells and scaled bodies that are tan, gray, or brownish in color, with gruff faces that can appear grumpy, determined, or jaded. They're equipped with powerful forelimbs and clawed feet used for digging. Squat-tailed. Toothless. Dispersers of seed. Arguably charismatic in their boxy, reptilian bodies. With front limbs covered in thick, armor-like scales, they're shielded from threats when their heads are pulled in. Their fortified bodies help keep them relatively safe from most predators as adults - with coyotes and bobcats their only significant, non-human threat. They live about 40 to 60 years in the wild.



Florida gopher tortoises live on a diet of grasses and other herbaceous plants, consuming mostly leaves and vegetative parts but also seed-bearing fruit: blackberries, wild grapes, prickly pear cactus. They eat feces on occasion and paw paw fruit too - with over 400 species of plants collectively included in their diets (FWC 2007). *G. polyphemus* have been characterized as generalist foragers with a strong preference for grasses. They're found in upland habitats with little canopy cover and dry, sandy soil, pine flatwoods, dry meadows, scrub, coastal dunes, and in the last of our remnant sandhill habitats too. In the Preserve gopher tortoises are found most often within pine flatwoods and adjacent disturbed clearings - preferring to feed in the grassiest patches of land. They eat turf grass on the shoulders of Brooker Creek's two-mile loop of road, with native grasses and other edible plants crowding to the edges of the mow-lines. The grassier the area, the more likely you'll see them feeding; the more diverse the understory, the more the same rule applies. Gopher tortoises can be found in dense scrub at times too, and sometimes even in hardwood hammocks, but at much lower densities per square acre - the thicker the tree growth and canopy cover, the understory thinning and disappearing, the more shaded a habitat gets. With a watchful eye, you can spot abandoned and overgrown burrows in such places, sometimes with roots creating a barricade across what's left of an entrance.

Gopher tortoises have always been associated with pines, sand, and fire. Historically, sandhill habitats supported much of their population in the state, with well-drained, deep, sandy soil for their burrows, as well as high frequencies of low intensity fires to maintain complex understories.



Sandhills provided gopher tortoises with a utopia of food items on which to forage. Now, only two percent of the sandhills that gopher tortoises once thrived in remain (FNAI 2010), and lost with them, the wondrous longleaf pines that once grew there.

Gopher tortoises obtain most of their water through their herbaceous diets, but they'll seek out direct water sources in drier times and in seasons of drought - the cells of heat stressed plants providing less hydration. Like other reptiles, gopher tortoises have ectothermic constraints; they're forced to regulate their internal temperatures through external means. In effect, gopher tortoises must cope with the extreme heat of Florida summers, a feat accomplished by keeping safe within the cooler microclimates of their burrows. A gopher tortoise's life is a mostly subterranean existence, with about 85 percent of its time spent below ground (Lazzari 2017). We see them feeding most often in late afternoons and early evenings, foraging in lower temperatures, the sun descending in the west.

Gopher tortoises live a mostly solitary existence, forgoing sociality until times of courtship and mating. However, male gopher tortoises will sometimes engage in territorial disputes, what could be described as battles akin to sumo wrestling or reverse tug of war. When battling, males slam their armored forms into their opponents, each shoving with all the displayed strength they can muster. Although often ending in hasty retreats, the victor sometimes flips its opponent onto its back - the loser remaining plastron-to-the-sky, and if not able to right itself, dying a miserable death. Those of us with empathetic hearts will flip them back over, changing the course of history, giving them a chance at new life.

Gopher tortoises are one of Florida's keystone species, the extensive burrows they dig help hundreds of other species to survive. They dig their burrows about six feet down into the earth, with the main chamber extending 15 to 20 feet long, though some burrows measure as much as 40 feet in length. In effect, gopher tortoises create habitat that would not have been otherwise established, with over 360 species utilizing their facilitated space, seeking shelter from the elements or from predatory threats. Burrows function as sanctuaries during wildfires and extreme temperature events too, providing safety for ectotherm and endotherm alike. Historic fire cycles in Florida have long necessitated that animals have a means of escape, by either running, flying, or seeking shelter underground. How many millions of animals have used their burrows to escape deadly flames and toxic smoke? Take gopher tortoises away, and the keystone of the arch is pulled loose; how many species, past and present, collapse without that system of support?

Indigo snakes, burrowing owls, and diamondback rattlers. Pine snakes, gopher frogs, and nine-banded armadillos. One could make a game of naming all their favorite burrow-based commensal symbioses, the communities of species, the hidden lives we'll never see. Grasshoppers, spiders, racerunners, skinks. The gopher tortoise scarab beetle (*Alloblackburneus troglodytes*) represents one of the few burrow-based, mutualistic symbioses we know of. Whereas the burrow provides habitat and shelter for this industrious beetle, it in turn keeps the burrow clean by consuming

Gopher tortoise, two photos by Allyn Childress.



gopher tortoise feces, thereby helping to reduce the spread of disease (Watkinson 2017). Another symbiosis worth mentioning is that of the gopher tortoise and the Florida mouse (*Podomys floridans*), the latter endemic to Florida and deemed a species of concern. The Florida mouse is a small, charismatic rodent with enlarged ears, eyes, and hind feet. Its species has a long history of living alongside its reptilian host - a cohabiting relationship which has stayed strong for the last one million years (2017). Considered an obligate symbiont, the Florida mouse is dependent upon its

home burrow. It digs networks of tunnels off the sides of the main chamber, some leading to nesting sites and others functioning as escape chimneys to the surface (2017). The gopher tortoise's homes are and have been the Florida mouse's homes too.

Female gopher tortoises become sexually mature pretty late in the reptilian game, between the ages of nine years and 21 years old (FWC 2007). During courtship, a male gopher tortoise will rapidly bob its bald head, either in the presence of a female or outside the entrance of

her burrow. If approached with reciprocated interest, the male will bite at her shell, her gular projection, nibbling at her stubby legs too - this circus act of behaviors eventually ending in predictable ways. Female gopher tortoises lay clutches of eggs in the sandy aprons outside their burrows, with nesting taking place in April through July. Hatchlings emerge in late August and early November (so now's a great time to keep an even closer eye on the road). Soon yellow-shelled miniature tortoises will emerge from the earth, marching off on little legs into a very hostile world. With no parental care to rely on, they strike out on their own, encountering a gauntlet of predators ready to make them into meals - birds of prey, coyotes, bobcats, and raccoons, snakes, fire ants, crows, armadillos, and many others. Most hatchling shells will never experience even one ring of yearly growth. According to FWC, 80-90 percent of nests are lost to predation, and 90 percent of hatchlings are subsequently killed too (FWC 2007). Saving even one is a very big deal, especially when considering both the above and their historic decline in population - with 80 percent of gopher tortoises lost in one hundred years (Nature Conservancy 2022).

Habitat loss is the main cause of *G. polyphemus*' decline. Endless development, industrial parks, and urbanization. Highways, strip malls, bulldozed flatwoods and meadows. Widespread pollution and vast tracts of agricultural land. These plant-eating reptiles have watched the world around them transformed, with humans reshaping and redefining the world in our image. With habitat

fragmentation and vehicle-congested highways, gopher tortoises now have to contend with the dangers of deadly traffic too. The shoulders of Keystone Road are littered with the shattered remnants of their shells. But the babies are more likely to be killed on the roads within the Preserve. Since working here, I've seen about two or three baby gopher tortoises killed on average every year - easily confused with cupped leaves from a distance. To keep from hitting them, drivers have to preemptively watch the road far up ahead, assuming any disruptive features could be creatures that can be killed.

Invasive plants pose a significant threat to gopher tortoise habitats too, with the most successful invasives displacing native plants that gopher tortoises would feed on. Cogon grass and Brazilian pepper are two of Florida's most notorious invasives. In fact, cogon grass is considered one of the worst invasive grasses in the world. If left unchecked, it will dominate the other plants in the understory. Brazilian peppers crowd out edible native plants too. When growing tall enough and dense enough, they can shade out the understory altogether. In Brooker Creek Preserve, land management targets cogon grass, Brazilian pepper, and other invasive species - one of numerous, endless battles waged in the war for conservation.

Gopher tortoises have state protection in Florida and federal protection in other southeastern states where it's needed. In Florida, property owners are required to obtain permits to relocate any gopher tortoises found on the properties of their businesses or homes (and there are fines for those not complying). People can become bitter over this arguably charismatic species, overlooking the benefits of having gopher tortoise burrows on their land - the increased presence of wildlife and more complex habitat space. They overlook the privilege of aiding in the recovery of a threatened keystone species. Entire ecosystems could be created a few yards at a time, corridors of green space and carbon-based life. A shift in perspective is often all that is needed, a break from the routine and from adopted ways of thinking. Current gopher tortoise recovery efforts focus mainly on habitat protection, a win-win for wildlife and for anyone who enjoys our last wild places, our sanctuaries against the endless billboards, parking lots, roads, trash, and traffic.

We see them chewing with beaked jaws and scaled, bulbous heads, breaking plant matter down into pulpy conglomerations. With wrinkled necks lifted to the sky upon swallowing, their black, stoic eyes watch our passing vehicles, bikes, and bipedal frames. Scutes cover their architecture of ribs, spine, and bone - pentagonal and hexagon-shaped plates of armor that delight us. We see their shells tilted forward, tugging at water-filled grasses, these reptilian spectacles of plant-devouring motions. We watch them running back to burrows using well-worn, sandy trails, climbing aprons and disappearing in their downward escapes.

What do gopher tortoises dream of when they're down beneath the earth? Peaceful fields filled with grasses, wildflowers, prickly pear cactus? Soft, sandy ground sinking beneath elephantine feet? What will humans dream of as we push on into the future? What visions will compel us to seek out hope amidst the ashes? In "The Brutal Legacy of the Longleaf Pine," Lacy Johnson writes



the following in reference to the lost wildlife and biodiversity of the now near-extinct longleaf pine forests: "These are the casualties of the single most violent and destructive force in history - the lie that the only value life has is the wealth that can be forcefully extracted from it" (2022). May we break from the lie, from society's push for dominion, choosing instead to protect what's left of the life on this Earth.

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## Beekeepers Club News

by Bob Burkhardt

July and August are an interesting time for beekeepers in our area of Florida. Our FOBCP beehives are strong and healthy. But there are not a lot of flowers blooming nearby for them to bring in nectar and pollen to consume or to turn into honey.

So, our current "mission" is to ensure that our bees stay healthy, and that they have enough stored food to feed both the adult bees and the developing baby bees (larvae) to prosper until the fall flowers start blooming.

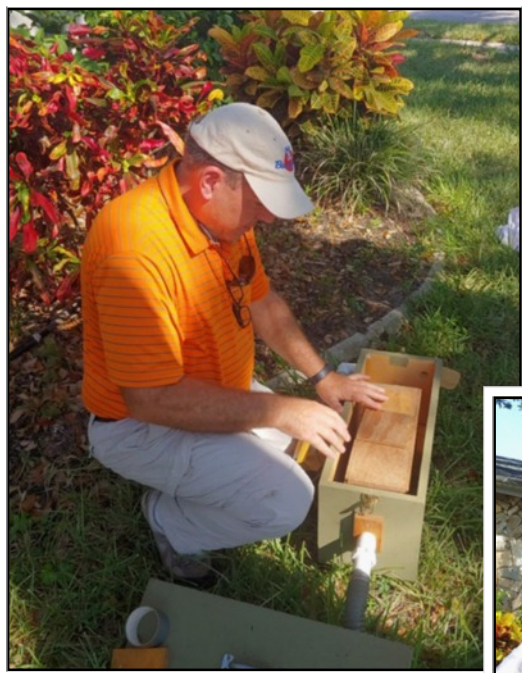
For those not familiar with honeybees; a beehive consists of one queen (the mother), between 20,000 and 60,000 workers (her daughters), and a few drones (the sons). The workers harvest nectar and pollen from blooming flowers and store this in the hive. Excess nectar is turned into honey and stored for the times of year when flowers are not blooming. Pollen is mixed with nectar or honey and fed to the developing larvae. Simply put, adult bees eat nectar or stored honey and larva eat pollen.



Jan, Bob, Barry and Jim at our Apiary.

While most people in the heat of our Florida summers enjoy their inside AC, each month our FOBCP beekeepers put on protective clothing and visit our sunny apiary (bee yard) to take care of our bees.

This last month, we also were contacted by a homeowner who asked us to remove a hive of bees that had taken up residence in an outside wall of his home.



Bob demonstrating our FOBCP's Bee Vacuum which we used to gently remove the bees from the wall.



Stefan working to rescue the bees without "destroying" too much of the house.



Stefan showing the rescued bees to the satisfied homeowner (Brian).

Our FOBCP Beekeepers Club meets on the last Sunday of each month and we invite you to join us and participate in this fascinating hobby. For more information check out our FOBCP Website:

<https://www.friendsofbrookercreekpreserve.org/>



## News from the Wildflower Garden By Pam Brown

The garden is growing very nicely now that we have had some rain. Lots of blooms and insects are evident. One thing that I have noticed is that the late summer/early fall blooming flowers seem to be blooming earlier than normal. A little research shows that warmer than normal temperatures can affect flowering time causing earlier flowers. We have certainly had warmer than normal temperatures this year. Water stress can also be a factor and drought has also been a problem this year. It is probably too soon to tell if this will be a new climate normal for our area.

We are always looking for new volunteers to help maintain the Wildflower Garden. If you would like to help, we meet on the last Saturday of each month for a couple of hours. Our next work days will be September 30 and October 28, with our summer work hours of 8:00 to 10:00 am. If you would like to join us, please register by emailing Pam at [pamperedgardeners@gmail.com](mailto:pamperedgardeners@gmail.com). Due to the fragility of the plants in the garden, we limit the number to five volunteers, including any children 10 or more years old. Bring your gardening tools, gloves, hat, and bug repellent, and wear closed-toed shoes. We will provide a light snack.

### Pam's Thoughts

I have noticed lately that the native cycad "coontie" (*Zamia floridana*) has become more popular in landscapes. These plants are ancient in origin and actually form cones similar to pines and other conifer trees except that the male and female cones form on separate plants. They are currently producing cones and seeds. This is a great drought-tolerant plant, but one caution - the seeds from the female cones are extremely poisonous to dogs and cats, and toxic to humans. I have coontie in my yard and I remove both the male and female cones once they appear so that seeds do not form. One or two seeds ingested by dogs or cats can be fatal, so be cautious when you see these plants, especially if the red-orange seeds are present (see pictures). Please note that the seeds of the non-native king and also queen sago are just as poisonous.



Coontie, female cone, seeds are bright orange (right), male cones (below). Photos from UF.



## Volunteer News

Education Center Updates  
September/October 2023

By Julia Myers, Education Support  
Specialist, Brooker Creek Preserve



**Wildflower & Pollinator Festival:** Save the date for Saturday, October 7! We are gearing up for a wonderful festival and are so excited. This year's festival will also have a strong focus on pollinators, as Pinellas County was recently designated as a 'Bee City USA' site, and supporting pollinator-friendly practices is one of our key commitments. A native plant sale will feature vendors from our area with plants that are beautiful, pollinator-friendly, and best suited for our climate. Kid's crafts will focus on make-and-take projects to support pollinators in our own yards and neighborhoods. Of course, we'll also have the much-loved butterfly tent. Various organizations will be available to answer questions about growing wildflowers, attracting pollinators, and being a good friend to Nature in Pinellas County. We still need all hands on deck to make this event happen and rely heavily on our dedicated and incredible volunteer team! If you would like to volunteer for this event, please email Julia at [jmyers@pinellas.gov](mailto:jmyers@pinellas.gov)

**Pinellas County Bee City USA:** Pinellas County has been designated as a Bee City USA site in cooperation with Pinellas County Parks & Conservation Resources and UF/IFAS Extension Pinellas County. Bee City USA provides a framework for communities to come together to conserve native pollinators by providing them with healthy habitat that is rich in a variety of native plants, provides nest sites, and is protected from pesticides. Pinellas County is proud to be designated and is committed to the principles defined by the Bee City USA designation. Our James Stevenson has been the County lead on this project. Learn more about Bee City USA and see some of our upcoming pollinator events (including a BioBlitz at Eagle Lake Park) here: <https://pinellas.gov/pinellas-county-bee-city-usa/>

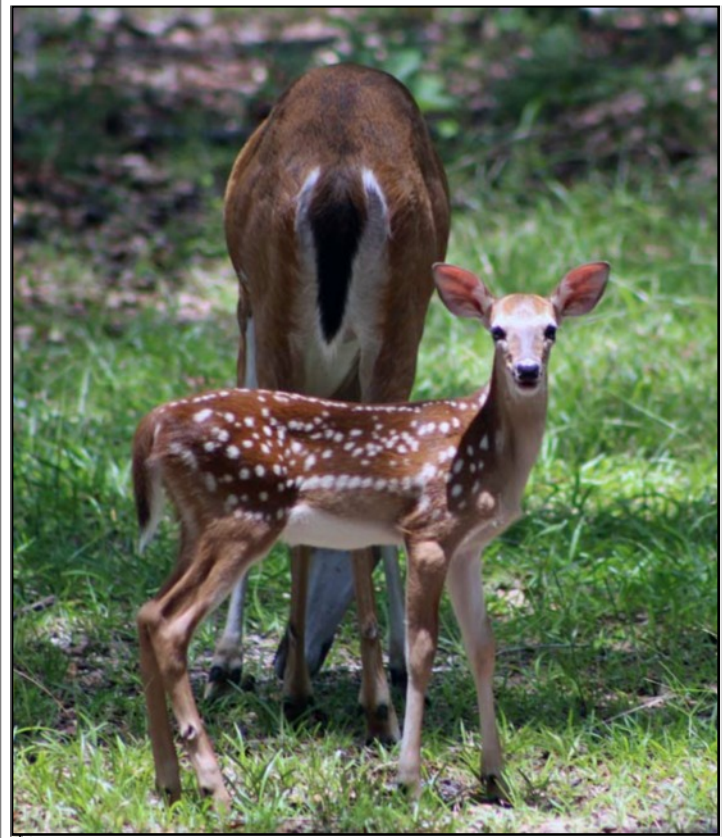


Whitemouth dayflower  
(*Commelina erecta*)  
and native sweat bee.


**Where are the Snakes?** We have all noticed a dramatic decline in sightings over the past few years, especially pygmy rattlesnakes. Lara has been reaching out to experts and has discovered that in Florida the decline in pygmy rattlesnakes is assumed to be traced to an invasive pentastomid (crustacean) worm *Raillietiella orientalis* that infects the snakes' lungs. The parasite is believed to have hopped off the invasive Burmese pythons. This invasive parasite is not yet documented in Pinellas, and Lara will be working with researchers to collect samples in our area. If you see a dead snake at the Preserve (roadkill) please let a staff member know so that we can collect it for research. If you are interested in learning more, this one-page fact sheet explains the invasive snake lungworm: [here](#).

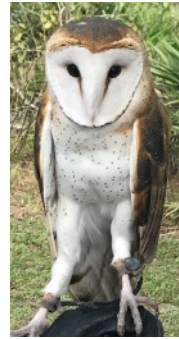
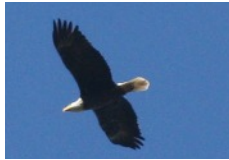


**Outreach Volunteers:** We are invited to table at various events in the community and are looking for another outreach volunteer to help us attend more of these events. Outreach events that we attend have an environmental focus, and volunteer responsibilities at these events include set-up and take-down of the table and materials, and talking to and engaging the public to help spread the word on all we have to offer at Brooker Creek. If interested, contact Julia.



White-tailed deer, photos by Julia Myers, taken through the Ed Center windows. "They have been visiting every day this week. It's very distracting!"

  
**Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve**  
**ADOPT AN ANIMAL - \$35/adoption**



*A program to enhance restoration and land management programs to help provide improved habitat for wildlife in **Brooker Creek Preserve***

The **ADOPT AN ANIMAL** program was established by the Friends in 2020 to give individuals the opportunity to help keep intact the ecological integrity of the Preserve. Funding will be used for:

- Removing exotic and invasive plants
- Restoring natural water flow
- Fire management
- Restoring natural plant communities

Animal adoptions make perfect gifts for birthdays, anniversaries, memorials, and more!

Upon receipt of your donation, the honoree will be sent by mail an adoption package with an adoption certificate, a fact sheet about the adopted animal, and a cuddly plush animal chosen for adoption. The donor will receive a thank you letter that can be used for tax purposes.

Donor Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

in honor of      in memory of      for myself

Honoree Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Send packet to this address. This is the donor or honoree address (circle one):

\_\_\_\_\_

I wish to adopt (\$35 each):

- |  |                                    |                                  |                                |                                 |                                    |                              |
|--|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gopher Tortoise | <input type="checkbox"/> Deer Buck | <input type="checkbox"/> Raccoon | <input type="checkbox"/> Eagle | <input type="checkbox"/> Otter  | <input type="checkbox"/> Alligator | <input type="checkbox"/> Owl |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gray Squirrel   | <input type="checkbox"/> Deer Fawn | <input type="checkbox"/> Opossum | <input type="checkbox"/> Bat   | <input type="checkbox"/> Coyote | <input type="checkbox"/> Bobcat    | <input type="checkbox"/> Fox |

Total Due: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Questions? [info@FriendsOfBrookerCreekPreserve.org](mailto:info@FriendsOfBrookerCreekPreserve.org), 727-934-2680

Check endorsed to: **FOBCP**. Mail to: FOBCP, 3940 Keystone Road, Tarpon Springs, FL 34688

FEID #59-3302182 tax-exempt, non-profit corporation

A COPY OF THE OFFICIAL REGISTRATION AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION MAY BE OBTAINED FROM THE DIVISION OF CONSUMER SERVICES BY CALLING TOLL-FREE (1-800-435-7352) WITHIN THE STATE. REGISTRATION DOES NOT IMPLY ENDORSMENT, APPROVAL, OR RECOMMENDATION BY THE STATE. REGISTRATION NUMBER CH. 16077



Friends  of  
Brooker Creek Preserve

## ADOPT AN ACRE



*A program to enhance restoration  
and land management programs in  
**Brooker Creek Preserve***

The **ADOPT AN ACRE** program was established by the Friends in 2016 to give individuals the opportunity to help keep intact the ecological integrity of the Preserve.

100% of funding will be used for:

- Removing exotic and invasive plants
- Restoring the natural flow of water
- Fire management
- Restoring natural plant communities

Acres make great gifts for birthdays, anniversaries, memorials and more!

Upon receipt of the donation, the donor or honoree's name will be placed on the **ADOPT AN ACRE** display inside the Environmental Education Center for one year. A certificate will be sent to the honoree acknowledging the adoption.

Donor  
Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_in honor of \_\_\_in memory of \_\_\_for myself

Honoree  
Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

I wish to adopt \_\_\_\_\_ acres @ \$100/acre

Total Due: \_\_\_\_\_

Make check payable to: FOBCP

Mail to: 3940 Keystone Road  
Tarpon Springs, FL 34688

[info@FriendsOfBrookerCreekPreserve.org](mailto:info@FriendsOfBrookerCreekPreserve.org)

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**Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve - Mission Statement:** The mission of the Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve is to provide public support for the Preserve through fund raising, volunteer programs, and education to ensure that the Preserve remains a natural wilderness for future generations.

**Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve - Land Use Position Statement:** The Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve support land uses within the boundaries of Brooker Creek Preserve which have a main purpose that furthers the preservation, conservation, restoration or protection of the land and resources of the Brooker Creek Preserve.

**Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve:**  
[www.FriendsOfBrookerCreekPreserve.org](http://www.FriendsOfBrookerCreekPreserve.org)  
Email:  
[info@FriendsOfBrookerCreekPreserve.org](mailto:info@FriendsOfBrookerCreekPreserve.org)  
Voicemail: (727) 934-2680

**Brooker Creek Preserve:**  
Phone: (727) 453-6900  
Website: [www.brookercreekpreserve.org](http://www.brookercreekpreserve.org)  
**Brooker Creek Preserve Environmental Education Center** is located at 3940 Keystone Road, Tarpon Springs, Florida, 34688. Phone: (727) 453-6800  
Hours: Thurs. - Sat. 9am - 4pm, Sun., 11am - 4pm.

**Friends Nature Store** is located in the Education Center. Hours: Thurs. - Sat. 9am - 4pm, Sun., 11am - 4pm.

**Preserve Hiking Trails** open 7 days a week, 7:00am to 30 minutes before sunset. Closed the day after Thanksgiving and Dec. 25.

**Horse Trails** open 7 days a week, all year, sunrise to sunset.

**This newsletter is published every other month.** Please submit articles to Newsletter Editor Dr. Craig Huegel (727) 422-6583 or email [Huegelc55@aol.com](mailto:Huegelc55@aol.com)

**Pinellas County PCR Mission statement:** The mission of the Parks and Conservation Resources Department is to maintain and protect the inherent value of the County's natural, cultural and recreational resources through sustainable access, education, and stewardship that enhance quality of life for our community and future generations.

## FOBCP Leadership 2023

### Board of Directors

#### Officers

Chair: Cathie Foster  
Vice Chair: Robert Burkard  
Secretary: Allyn Childress  
Treasurer: Ed Helvenston  
Business Director: Barb Hoffman

#### Directors:

Pam Brown: Wildflower Garden  
Robert Burkard: Beekeeping  
Allyn Childress: Grants  
Evan Earle, Jr.: Return the Preserve Work Days  
Cathie Foster: Nature Store Manager  
Barbara Hoffman: Membership/  
Owl-O-Ween  
Walt Hoskins: Guiding Documents  
Dr. Craig Huegel: Land Use/Newsletter  
Editor/Off-the-Beaten-Path Hikes  
Chuck Parsons: 4th Grade Coordination  
Ray Poynor: Craftsman, Night Hikes  
Barbara Schultz: Publicity  
Cathy Vogelsong: Newsletter Publisher  
Julie Wade: Communications/Outreach

#### Further Leadership

Alexa DeJoannis: Readers Club  
Mona Gardner & Dixie Mills: Nature Store  
Bookkeepers  
Cathy Ordiway: Website Master  
Lynn Whitelaw: Art Gallery Curator

Registration Info: FEID #59-3302182 tax-exempt, non-profit corporation

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