

Scherer Delight Newsletter

Oscar Scherer State Park



Published by The Friends of Oscar Scherer Park, Inc.

Spring 2008 - Volume 14, Issue 2

From the President:



The tempo in the park is now starting to change as we leave the season behind and enter into the warmer months. Our Friends camping in the park performing host duties, together with our campground volunteers and our winter resident members in the community, are finishing up projects and programs.

They all do so much within the campgrounds and around the Nature Center—keeping it open on a daily basis, putting on ice cream socials, music programs, and pancake breakfasts, as well as leading guided bird walks. For all of this, we thank them. Their departures will leave a void that those of us who are here year-round must fill.

This is where you—any and all of you, men, women, high school or college students—can help in one of the many areas suited to your interests because the work goes on. The Nature Center needs to stay open for visitors, the trails need maintenance, summer events need people willing to donate a few hours to helping kids fish, for traffic control and many other one-time duties, or working with our regular Monday/Wednesday mornings work group. Ahead of us, we have a large project in the Lake Osprey area to make the lake accessible to all, especially kids and the physically challenged: beach enhancement, a fishing pier, an ADA trail around the lake, fencing, and a littoral area need to be added.

At this time, the full scope of how the Legacy Trail will affect the needs of the park is still unknown.

We do not have enough volunteers to make all this happen. If you can help, even for a few hours, e-mail me at robertsendrey@verizon.net or give me a call at 941-426-7306. You will personally reap great satisfaction—guaranteed. Regardless of your talents or interests, we will be able to use you.

All that being said, I encourage you to come with family, friends or visitors and enjoy the many activities the park has to offer; activities such as family picnics, canoeing, hiking, access to the Legacy Trail, other biking challenges, playgrounds, fishing, swimming, learning activities, or just finding a shady spot to relax. These are all waiting for you. Come join us, and use your time enjoying one of the area's best outdoor experiences.

Bob Sendrey

From the Park Manager:



It's time to relax and take a breath; the season is past and spring is here. We will miss our friends who are heading back to the north for the hot summer, even if only for a short while. Have a safe trip, and drive carefully. We look forward to seeing you—no; we *expect* to see you in the fall.

We must say goodbye to our Volunteer Coordinator, **Sigrid Scherber**, who has been promoted to Administrative Assistant at Myakka River State Park. **Cristy Disbrow**, our Administrative Assistant who is here Monday–Friday, will assume the duties of the Volunteer Coordinator. Stop in and say hello to Cristy, and visit with Sigrid when you get to Myakka River State Park.

I think our summer will be busy. With the economy in flux, more people are visiting closer to home, and around here that means Oscar Scherer State Park. Our connection to the Legacy Trail is shaping up to make a great impression on all the new visitors who will be using this resource, and current estimates predict that 150,000 people will use this trail in the first year.

The Friends of Oscar Scherer Park, Inc. have made the Lake Osprey Picnic Area more beautiful with all the improvements and other good things accomplished this past season. Because of your donations of funds, time and energy for repairs, replacements, scholarships, as well as routinely maintaining the park facilities, painting the restrooms, making the displays, and even entertaining and feeding our guests, everything comes together to make the park experience one that many people write about and return for. The most important aspect of your contributions is that you guys and gals make our jobs enjoyable and give us time to work on our big priority: *Prescribed Burning*. The contributions all of you make are noticed and appreciated. They truly reflect the dedication to and love of the park that we all share.

I am so proud of the awards you received as part of the *Friends of Florida State Parks, Inc., CSO 2007 Volunteer Recognition*. I will not list them here—they are a separate handout in this newsletter. I just want to acknowledge all you have done and will continue to do for Oscar Scherer State Park. Thank you!

John Roche

Scrub-Jay Way

by Jon Thaxton

“Territory Sentries.” Walk into a Florida scrub-jay territory and the first bird you will probably see is the “sentry.” Perched high atop the tallest pine or oak tree, this bird is taking advantage of the low and open scrub habitat to watch for predators. If, for instance, the sentry spots a hawk, he (or she) gives a specific call that warns the other jays in the territory of the impending danger, and they immediately head for cover. Should the threat be a predatory snake, the sentry will give the warning call for “snake” and all the members of the family—and possibly jays from neighboring families—will join in and mob the snake as a gang. This is quite a sight to be seen and heard: ten or more angry, extremely vocal Florida scrub-jays attacking a five-foot coachwhip snake from 360 degrees! The sentry will not, for instance, give the warning call for an Osprey or a green snake, as neither is a potential Florida scrub-jay predator.

It seems as though other bird species have learned to take advantage of the Florida scrub-jay’s effective sentry system. It is not unusual to see towhees, thrashers, and mocking birds head for cover when the scrub-jay sentry gives the warning call for an incoming hawk. Equally amusing is the presence of many bird species as spectators, watching the scrub-jays mob snakes. At one snake mobbing event (a six foot indigo), I counted 12 Florida scrub-jays, 4 cardinals, 2 thrashers, and 6 towhees at the scene.

Florida scrub-jays begin sentry duty before they are one year of age but do not seem to earn the confidence of their peers until they are about a year and a half old. The sentry designation is not determined by age, sex, or social status (helper versus breeder). All adults in the family take a turn as sentry while the others forage under its guard. It may be because of the Florida scrub-jay’s dependence on the sentry’s early predator warning strategy that the birds quickly abandon overgrown, unburned scrub.

In 1993, Jon Thaxton began a series of articles on the Florida scrub jay that appeared in the Friends newsletter. With his permission and assistance, the articles are being updated and reprinted in the Scherer Delight Newsletter. Above is the fourth in that series.

Seasonal Activities at the Park.

It seems that everyone is saying this has been our best season ever at the park! The Nature Center has been open every day from 8:00-3:00, thanks to a dedicated cadre of volunteers. Visitors have been lining up at the weekly pancake breakfasts, and the music and ice cream programs have drawn great crowds. At the weekly coffees, the campers are constantly saying how much they appreciate all the programs going on, and commenting on how the volunteers seem to enjoy doing them. With bird walks, canoe trips, scrub walks, aerobics, coffees, just to name a few, it certainly has been a spectacular season.

Delightful day for All-Trails Hike

by Dora Walters, The Sarasota Observer

With a gentle breeze and a slightly overcast sky obscuring the sun, it was a hiker’s dream January 12th at the annual All-Trails Hike at Oscar Scherer State Park. More than 200 people registered for the event, choosing to hike just one trail or all of them—12 miles in all. Rest stops were set up every two miles with adult volunteers assisted by



members of Cub Scout Pack 46, and hikers were treated to a lunch of hot dogs and chips. As if a beautiful day in the park wasn’t enough, the Friends of Oscar Scherer added the incentive of all-you-can-eat ice cream for those that completed a hike. It was a great introduction to the park for many members of the community.



The All-Trails Hike—It’s a Walk in the Park.

* * * * *

8th Annual Scrub-Jay 5K.

Under almost perfect running conditions, more than 400 runners participated in the 8th Annual Scrub-Jay 5K on February 16th, while an additional 100 joined in for the One Mile Fun Run, making this the most successful scrub-jay race



ever. Underwritten by a grant from the **Lee Wetherington Foundation**, a Supporting Organization of

the Community Foundation of Sarasota County, Inc, the race generated \$8,000 from entrance fees, all of which will directly benefit Oscar Scherer State Park. After the awards ceremony many of the participants stayed to enjoy hot dogs and soft drinks, and to explore the park. Next year’s race is in need of a leader or co-leaders. It is our largest annual fund-raiser and this is your chance to make a significant contribution to our organization.

The Scherer Delight newsletter may be distributed or reprinted for non-profit use. Why not give this issue to a friend?

BIRD POINTS

by Mark Leggett

On Birds and Birding in Oscar Scherer State Park

#5 Green Heron

Small, stocky and solitary are words that can be used to describe this wading bird. Common throughout Florida, the Green Heron is a wary inhabitant of Oscar Scherer's few lakes. Often we notice it as the bird flushes unexpectedly from the water's edge with an explosive "skeow" call.



Dark and crow-sized, this heron has a black crown, a dark gray-green or gray-blue back and wings and a chestnut-colored neck. The bill is long and dark, and the legs appear yellowish orange. It frequently has a hunkered-down appearance, ready to spring.

The Green Heron is particularly unique in that it is one of the few tool-using birds. It often employs leaves, feathers, worms and such things as fishing lures. In addition to fish, the heron's diet consists of insects, spiders, snails, frogs and crustaceans.

Nests made of sticks are loosely thrown together in bushes or trees near water. Green Herons nest in mixed colonies or alone. A typical clutch consists of 4 or 5 pale green or greenish-blue eggs. Incubation takes about 20 days; the young are independent of their parents when they are 30 to 35 days old.

The conservation status of the Green Heron is very positive, much due to the bird's adaptability.

Sources used include Websites of Florida's Breeding Atlas, eNature, and Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Mark Leggett is on the board of the Sarasota Audubon Society, and is a member of the Friends of Oscar Scherer. He leads bird trips at Oscar Scherer State Park every Thursday, January through April, departing from the Nature Center at 8:00 AM. He can be reached at bluegrosbeak2@yahoo.com

LEGACY TRAIL NOW OPEN

With lots of fanfare, the Legacy Trail was officially opened last weekend with Oscar Scherer being the focal point of the festivities. The 12-mile paved path that runs from the historic train depot in Venice almost to Clark Road in Sarasota is now open for bicyclists, walkers, runners, and skateboarders. There are many trailheads along the route but the one in the park is just about halfway along the trail. There are still two major bridges to construct but detours have been developed to accommodate users. Come on out and have a look for yourself. You won't be disappointed!

Coming Events

Earth Day. April 20th will see the 19th celebration of Earth Day at Oscar Scherer State Park. This event always draws a big crowd and is known for its family-oriented activities and fun. High on the list will be the annual photo contest for hundreds of nature-related photos taken by amateur photographers in the community. There's still time to get your entries submitted; see the enclosed flyer for details. There will be a silent auction for a wide variety of gifts donated by the community to benefit the Friends of Oscar Scherer. Kids' games, live music, food, and many booths set up by local environmental groups are on the agenda. Circle your calendar now to make a day of it at the park.



Tree Planting In the Park

* * * * *

Wanted!

Please read this carefully. We need your help. The Scrub-Jay 5K Race is our most successful fund raiser for the year. We need one of our full-time residents to chair this event for next year. There are a host of volunteers willing to support you and there is a very complete after action or "how to" report ready to go. We need a leader for this event to step forward now as some information needs to be submitted soon. Please consider it and call Bob Sendrey (941-426-7306) or Russ Delaney (941-685-7454) if you are willing to help or want more information.

* * * * *

Each day comes bearing its own gifts. Untie the ribbons. ~Ruth Ann Schabacker



Friends of Oscar Scherer Park, Inc.
 1843 S. Tamiami Trail
 Osprey, Florida 34229

Great people having fun doing good things for the environment and Florida at Oscar Scherer State Park. To learn about volunteer opportunities at the park, join us at one of our monthly meetings with no commitment. Meetings are held at 6:00 pm on the second Monday of each month in the Nature Center. If you'd like more information, call the park at (941) 483-5956.

Use this form to join The Friends of Oscar Scherer and/or adopt a scrub jay.

Send form with check to:
 Friends of Oscar Scherer Park, Inc.
 1843 South Tamiami Trail
 Osprey, Florida 34229

Name(s) _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Annual Dues

- Youth \$10
- Individual \$20
- Household \$25
- ____ Number in household
- Business Friend \$100
- Corporate Sponsor \$500
- Other donation \$ _____
- Scrub Jay Adoption(s) @ \$25

A copy of the official registration (SC-00263) and financial information may be obtained from the Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services by calling toll-free 1-800-435-7352 within the state. Registration does not imply endorsement, approval or recommendation by the state. We are a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization under the Internal Revenue Code, so your dues and donations may be deductible. Percent of each contribution retained by any professional solicitor: Zero. Percent of each contribution retained by our organization: 100.

Scherer Delight is published quarterly by the Friends of Oscar Scherer Park, Inc., 1843 S. Tamiami Trail, Osprey, Florida 34229, to provide its members and the public with information about Oscar Scherer State Park in Osprey, Florida and the importance of its natural environment in Southwest Florida. Content is by Friends' members and park staff, unless otherwise specified.

Florida State Parks are in various stages of accessibility and are working to improve access to services and facilities. Should you require assistance, please contact the individual park office as soon as possible. Sometimes as many as ten working days may be necessary to schedule a particular accommodation. Service animals for visitors with disabilities are welcome in all areas of state parks.

Editor: Russ Delaney, russdel@aol.com

Friends of Oscar Scherer
 Officers

President:
 Bob Sendrey

Vice President:
 George Karnedy

Treasurer:
 Helen Janssen

Secretary:
 Sue Downing