

Scherer Delight Newsletter

Oscar Scherer State Park



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From the President:



Summer's arrival means the end of our fiscal year and the beginning of a whole new season, but before we take a step forward I'd like to reflect on the many accomplishments of our Citizens Support Organization (CSO) here at Oscar Scherer State Park during the past year.

Our Nature Center received a terrific face lift inside and out. Thanks to the efforts and support of many, it is now open every day for the enjoyment and education of all; a place to view informational items about the park, relax in a rocker, and – oh, yes – use our new, free Internet hook-up too. A screened-in room has been added, allowing us to hold instructional classes under the whirl of cooling ceiling fans. The opening of the Legacy Trail brought in hundreds to see *The Real Florida*. We had great youth events that allowed many children, even those physically-challenged, to enjoy the outdoors, fishing, and orienteering. We had our best Scrub-Jay 5K yet, as well as our Second Annual All Trails Hike. We had a successful Earth Day with upwards of 3,000 people coming through the front gate while hundreds more arrived off the Legacy Trail—enough to cause us to run out of hot dogs two hours earlier than in past years.

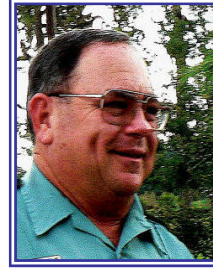
We again received many awards and certificates of recognition. This past year we were recognized as the top CSO group in the state (there are over 100 CSOs supporting all the state parks in Florida). And our Monday/Wednesday work group, "The Old Curmudgeons," was deemed the Best Work Group in the state also. Our bulletin boards throughout the park have received a facelift with some of the best graphics I've ever seen done by some very talented volunteers.

When one looks at all of this one is tempted to wonder ... what next? Well, plenty is planned for this coming year. The talent we have in our volunteers always produces new ideas for improving the park's facilities and providing new ways for our visitors to enjoy themselves with family and friends. Our dreams for the future include improving the trails so that we end up with less sugar sand to hike through, a new visitor center with a tree house classroom, an accessible-for-all fishing pier, and an improved, white sand beach area.

Y'all come and see us when you can—you hear!

Bob Sendry

From the Park Manager:



It's hot and the traffic has slowed down a bit—summer is here, and now is a great time to come and see the park in all its glory: lots of green growth, many outstanding improvements, plus peace and quiet. Please stop in and say hello.

Now that the Legacy Trail is open, first-time visitors—families, walkers, bikers, roller bladers—have come in to see what we have to offer. All your efforts for the park will enhance their visits and maybe bring some new volunteers and supporters into The Friends.

We are preparing for the challenges of another fiscal year with more budget cuts and changes which means that we have to figure out how to get more done with less. We recently completed some exercises on how we can cut spending in many categories including OPS, Expenses, and Outsourcing. What this means is that we may not be able to hire all the usual seasonal help to supplement the staff as we have in the past. Luckily (!) the drought has reduced the need for mowing since the grass has not grown much. We can reduce the mowing contract by having a volunteer on the riding mower if need be. I know there are gardeners out there who love to ride a mower and smell the sweet aroma of fresh cut grass. Let me know if you are interested.

Also, our contracts for janitorial services and landscape mowing may be reduced, which translates into more ranger time spent doing these tasks. Again, we look to you, our volunteers, to help us offset the possible loss of the cleaning contract.

As always, I am counting on The Friends of Oscar Scherer to help get us through these changing times. We would like to hear all your ideas, even the unsuccessful ones. You just may have the answers we are looking for. The contributions made by The Friends organization—which is made up of park staff, volunteers who provide quality public service, and the wonderfully supportive paying members—are greatly appreciated. They reflect the dedication and love of the park that we all share. Together we'll support the park, its inhabitants, and our friends and visitors. I am looking positively on the next fiscal year for the park and another award-winning season for The Friends.

John Roche

BIRD POINTS

by Mark Leggett

On Birds and Birding in Oscar Scherer State Park



#6 EASTERN TOWHEE

Usually it's the song that gives the bird away. Sometimes it's the noisy scratching in leaf litter for food that catches our attention. When we do find our eyes resting on the Eastern Towhee we are

definitely in for a visual treat.

Essentially, they are large and chunky sparrows with somewhat long tails. They are hardly drab, as some sparrows can be. The male has black upperparts (including the tail), white underparts (except for a black breast) and rufous sides. A brilliant combination! Females are similar but brown replaces the black.

A permanent resident of Florida, Eastern Towhees search out undergrowth, brushy edges or wooded areas with abundant leaf litter. I often hear their sweet "tweee" song as I hike on the trails of Oscar Scherer. And invariably, I hear them before I see them.

Eastern Towhees eat mostly insects, seeds and berries. They have been known to eat small snakes and lizards, which seems to me quite an accomplishment.

Nests are on the ground in dense undergrowth although sometimes they lay their eggs in saw palmettos. Usually 3-4 eggs are laid. Both parents feed the nestlings. Young leave the nest about 10-12 days after hatching.

Fairly common in Florida, Eastern Towhees have declined in many parts of the northeast, however.

Sources used include Pranty, Birds of Florida, and Kaufman's Lives of North American Birds.

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

Richard (Dick) F. Janssen, Jr. (1933-2008)

Dick Janssen, one of the founders of The Friends of Oscar Scherer, passed away on Saturday, June 28, 2008.

Dick's efforts on behalf of Oscar Scherer and The Friends were invaluable. He was deeply involved with virtually every major effort to improve the park, two of his most impressive projects being the creation of the Lester Finley Trail and the renovation of the Nature Center. Dick served an extensive period as secretary of The Friends as well as being editor of this newsletter. In all, he volunteered more than 4,000 hours, a remarkable contribution.

To Dick's wife, Helen, who is treasurer of The Friends, and his family, we extend our deepest sympathy. We will all miss him.

Parent-Child Compass and Orienteering Returns to Oscar Scherer

Father's Day saw a repeat performance of last year's highly successful program that attracted children with their parents to learn the ropes of using a compass and orienteering. This was the 2nd Annual Father's Day Map & Compass Treasure Hunt in association with VERB™ Sarasota.

50 children pre-registered for the event which started out with a relay race followed by map and compass basics. Two courses were available this year: an intermediate and an advanced course. There were hidden treasures along the course and at the end of the event all the children pulled out a treasure from a large bag of goodies. The Friends of Oscar Scherer made this educational family event possible by providing funding. **Publix** also donated a \$20 gift certificate towards a healthy lunch of deli sandwiches, fruit, and juice. *Lynn Crossfield*, one of the park's AMERICORPS members, again put together a program of education, prizes, and food—a wining combination anytime—that attracted a large crowd of eager kids and their parents. The Friends funded the effort, supplemented volunteers, and Lynn added the expertise. Well done to all!



Nature Center Operations. Wow! Reflect on this a minute: for the past nine months the Nature Center has been open from 8:00-3:00 seven days a week, totally staffed with volunteer members of The Friends. A weekly Kamper Koffee has provided coffee, juice, donuts, bagels and pastries to campers and park visitors alike. During the season, programs offered aerobics, Old Tyme music, ice cream socials, game nights, pancake breakfasts, and much more. Most importantly, it is the hub where you can obtain information about the park (trails, wildlife, bicycling, etc) as well as menus for local restaurants and attractions. If you haven't been inside the Nature Center lately, make the effort; you won't be disappointed! Better yet—become a part of the process as a volunteer.

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 have been updated. Following is the next in the series.

Almost 90% of the Florida scrub-jay habitat in Sarasota County has been lost to suburban development. With the exception of Oscar Scherer State Park, the distribution of remnant scrub in Sarasota now occurs in small scattered islands surrounded by hostile developed environs. In order for wildlife populations to thrive, generic variations must be maintained. This variation, also known as *heterozygosity*, is typically maintained by individuals moving, or dispersing, from one population or family to another.

Half (approximately 20) of the Florida scrub-jay territories in the study area are located within housing developments where the native scrub has been replaced by homes, roads and K-Marts. These will be designated as "suburban" territories. Conversely, those territories located within the refuges of Oscar Scherer will be called "preserve" territories. Dispersals were documented over a five year period from 1989 to 1994.

The average dispersal distance of Florida scrub-jays dispersing out of preserve territories was about a quarter of a mile. The average dispersal distance from suburban territories was almost four miles, quite a difference! Another way to measure dispersal distance is to count the number of territories the jay crosses during the dispersal. On the average, four territories were traversed by dispersals originating from both preserve and suburban territories. It appears that the determining factor to dispersal distance is the closeness, or density, of Florida scrub-jay territories. In Oscar Scherer, a dispersing jay can find four territories within a few hundred feet; however, from a suburban territory, it must travel several thousand feet or even miles to locate four territories.

On the surface this may seem like good news, but unfortunately, increased dispersal distances have not prevented the extirpation of Florida scrub-jays in areas where scrub habitat has been destroyed. Traveling greater distances simply increases the mortality rate of dispersing jays and adds to the continued decline of Florida scrub-jays on the west coast of Florida.

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What Do Our Members Want?

The leadership of The Friends spends a lot of time trying to figure out how to attract new members and how to provide our membership with what they want and expect. Here is your chance to tell us. We realize you have a lot of organizations that you can support and often have to make a choice. What would cause you to renew your membership and to encourage a friend to join? Tell us or email us at russdel@aol.com. We really do care and want to know. Please do it today.

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We are wired!! Thanks to The Friends of Oscar Scherer, the park now offers free, unlimited satellite Internet just like your local Starbucks. Bring your laptop into the Nature Center, hook up, and in two clicks there you are! Check your emails, find information about other parks, research a question about a flower you just saw, or a thousand other things. Often you will find the coffee pot on as well! This is the Number One service our campers have asked for (that is, after the washers and dryers, which were installed last year).

Coming Events

Ever wonder what the scrub-jays are doing while you are reading this newsletter? Here is their calendar for July through September:

- July:** Fledglings keep a low profile as adults continue to feed them
- August:** Young become more visible and less dependent
- September:** Young feed themselves and now look like adults.

Stop in at the Nature Center and our volunteers will help point you to locations that give you the best chance of finding scrub-jays.



Guided Canoe Rides: Wednesdays at 8:30 AM

Coffee and Donuts: Saturdays 8:00 – 10:00 AM at Nature Center



You can never appreciate the shade of a tree unless you sweat in the sun.-- Author Unknown



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.

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