

# Scherer Delight Newsletter

## Oscar Scherer State Park



Published by The Friends of Oscar Scherer Park, Inc.

Winter 2009 - Volume 15, Issue 1

### From the Outgoing President:



This is my last column as president of The Friends of Oscar Scherer Park, Inc. At our January board meeting we will select a new president and other officers from those who were voted onto the board at the December meeting.

As this time, I'd like to take a look back at the accomplishments of our many winter friends and year-round volunteers.

In 2008, we saw an outstanding face lift in the nature center, the restrooms, and the surrounding picnic area. We also saw the completion of a large storage facility, affectionately dubbed the *Crusty Old Curmudgeons Clubhouse*. We were able to help the park purchase much-needed maintenance equipment to fill the void created by severe budget cuts. Last year's very successful **All Trails Hike** and **Scrub Jay 5K** have given us a "hard to beat" target for 2009 but it appears that we will raise the bar yet again. New programs for our youth, such as the very well-attended **Fish Painting**, were added to the ongoing **Fishing Has No Boundaries** and **Father Son/Daughter Orienteering**, both very successful programs as well.

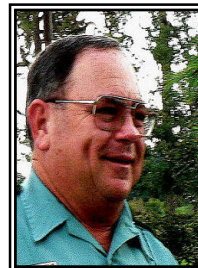
Outreach to the community has been very successful. We set up booths for two events: Family Day in a local residential community and a Nature Festival in south Sarasota County and Port Charlotte. We also took part in the Venice Christmas Parade with a float created by some of our park volunteers. All of these events provided an opportunity to introduce our park to local residents which we hope will lead to an increase in membership and volunteers. Outreach opportunities like this abound, and the enthusiasm of all our volunteers will ensure that we take full advantage of every one of them.

Working with the great volunteers in our Citizen Support Organization (CSO) over the past several years has provided me with not only a lot of personal satisfaction, but has also allowed me to form friendships that will last a lifetime—even if the mind fades the pictures will not! And I would be remiss if I didn't mention all the great park personnel who have taught me so much about the environment and shared their in-depth knowledge of how to get the job done, always doing so in a very friendly way.

I wouldn't trade a moment of it, and I am enthusiastic about continuing to work with the board in 2009. This coming year promises to be a great one, and I urge all of you to take an active part in our organization and in the park. A very worthwhile endeavor and good times one will never regret.

*Bob Sendrey*

### From the Park Manager:



Happy New Year and welcome to 2009! It gives me a warm feeling that after such a tenuous year the park looks better than ever thanks to your efforts and support. Therefore, here's to a bright future for the coming year. Cheers!

The Annual Membership Meeting/Holiday Pot Luck celebration was wonderful. There was so much good food that no-one had a reason to leave hungry.

The party gave me another chance to show my gratitude the best way I know how: by cooking!

My culinary gifts included a very special cake which, when it was cut, disappeared in a flash – and that is what's supposed to happen with a gift shared.

What was in that cake? I was asked. Here's what made it, and the Friends it was for, so special:

- orange and some lemon (nothing says Florida like citrus);
- ginger and spices (for the holiday theme);
- a couple of bananas (available year-round and a source of instant energy);
- some Greek yogurt and Italian ricotta cheese (diversity adds richness); and of course
- lots of butter (so that the sweetness will linger long after the cake is gone.)

Combine all this with the basic ingredients and you have a mix worthy of serving. The warmth of energy expended causes the combination to rise to the occasion and emerge as a solid foundation ready for anything.

Then came the frosting on the cake (great teamwork) which was decorated with the fruits of our labors (the real stars of the night, our volunteers), and the hearts of the many who came together to share a common cause—the Park.

Why am I comparing the cake to the Friends? You, the members of the Friends, are the foundation and the frosting on our cake; and this was my way of saying thanks to all of you. I really cannot thank you enough for all you do.

*John Roche*

## Happy New Year to All...

*Cheers to another new year, and another chance for us to get it right. ...*

*... Oprah Winfrey*

## FRIENDS ANNUAL MEETING AND HOLIDAY PARTY

The 2008 Annual Membership Meeting and Holiday Party was held at the nature center on Monday, December 15th with more than 100 members and their families enjoying the socializing and pot luck dinner. This has become a holiday event not to be missed. Following dinner, President Bob Sendrey chaired the annual meeting. He expressed his appreciation to the board members, volunteers, and park staff for assisting him in making 2008 such a successful year. He also thanked departing board members **Fran Palmeri** and **Sue Downing** for their service. The new slate of directors for the Friends of Oscar Scherer was introduced and elected by consensus (names listed elsewhere in this newsletter). Park manager, John Roche, thanked the Friends for all their support especially in view of recent state budget reductions. Joe Bernier, the talented park mechanic, passed out personal certificates of appreciation to members of the *Crusty Old Curmudgeons* for their year-round support. Treasurer **Helen Janssen** gave an abbreviated report (we are solvent), and the meeting concluded in a record 17 minutes.

## Scrub-Jay Way

by Jon Thaxton

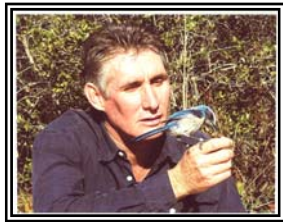
### WHAT TO EAT?

The Florida scrub-jay is a specialist in many regards. It resides in a single habitat, it nests in a particular archetype of shrub, and it adheres to a social hierarchy as strict as any orthodox religion. But when it comes to food, all bets are off. To be scientifically correct, we must classify the Florida scrub-jay as an *omnivore*; however, there is nothing to prohibit us from elaborating on the dietary extremes of this fascinating species.

By definition, an omnivore is an animal that eats both plant and animal matter. The vegetable portion of the Florida scrub-jay diet is comprised almost entirely of acorns. In the fall, acorns are picked from the scrub oaks and cached in the sandy soil within the protection of the family's territory. The jay uses its beak to tap the acorn an inch or two deep, and then will occasionally place a twig or a leaf over the spot where the acorn was buried. Although the twig or leaf will certainly blow away, this final step may assist the bird in recalling the specific area of the granary later in the year. On average, a Florida scrub-jay will cache 8,000 acorns during the brief one-month harvest.

The meat portion of a Florida scrub-jay diet is quite a bit more diverse, ranging from snakes to butterflies. Butterflies and moths are particularly interesting because all three metamorphic stages—caterpillar, pupa, and moth—are consumed. Green tree frogs are a menu item of particular importance to the scrub-jay. It has been well documented that nestling production is higher in wetter years but only recently has research linked the availability of tree frogs, which prefer wetter years, to the success of nest-bound scrub-jay chicks. Unlike their omnivorous parents, Florida scrub-jay nestlings are strict carnivores, being fed only strained meats by their guardians.

Another entrée favored by the Florida scrub-jays are grasshoppers, crickets, mantises, etc. which are traditionally shucked tableside. Lacking Ginsu steak knives, scrub-jays rely on their formidable beaks for dressing and dismembering their trophy catches. I once witnessed a jay catch, kill, and subdivide



a two foot rat snake with remarkably little effort! When the meat market is plentiful, Florida scrub-jays cache leftovers in the wedge of a branch or in a ball moss, kind of like eating cold pizza. Bon appétit!

*In 1993, Jon Thaxton (pictured) 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 and reprinted in the 'Scherer Delight Newsletter.' This is the next in the series.*

## Election of 2009 Board Members

The following members were elected to serve as directors of the Friends of Oscar Scherer Park, Inc. during 2009:

Nancy Bloomquist	Jim Breidster
Joyce Crawl	Russ Delaney
Sherry Hanson	Helen Janssen
George Karnedy	John Mongelli
Bob Sendrey	Bruce Snyder
Cindy Steinmann	Val Temple
George Ulrich	Dan Nelson*

\*will serve the Board as assistant treasurer.

The new board will select the four officers (president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer) at the January 2009 board meeting. Our next newsletter will announce those selections.

**It's Here!** **Our Website**  
[www.friendsofoscarscherer.com](http://www.friendsofoscarscherer.com)

We are excited to announce that we now have our very own Website. You can find everything you wanted to know about the Friends and what is going on in the park—all of our events, entry forms, weekly and seasonal programs, our newsletters, photos, videos, a virtual memorial to deceased members (who would be on anyone's list of Who's Who), and much more. The site is being constantly updated.

OK, I know we are biased but... if you haven't checked it out yet, do so now! This is your Website so let us know what else you want to see there.

The Website was created by Ontraxweb Design, owned by Ed Burns who is an active member of the Friends.

## MY SUMMER AT OSCAR SCHERER STATE PARK by Dan Nelson, Volunteer

I hooked up with the Friends of Oscar Scherer on Earth Day this year, when I helped with parking and reiterated my interest in joining the Friends. Although I've lived in Florida since 1974 and in Nokomis for the last 20-odd years, I visited the park only sporadically. It wasn't until I adopted Rodi, a 2-year-old female greyhound, that I started to take regular walks in the park. At that time, I considered the annual Florida state park pass money well spent...

I was contacted by Russ Delaney to help staff the nature center on Tuesday and Friday mornings. As I live near Laurel Road the Legacy Trail gives me a great access to the park. I figured I would be able to utilize my time at the nature center studying and reading, but it has become much more.

The plan was to keep the nature center open all through the summer for the first time, and I began my duties in June, along with my fellow volunteers. As the months passed, the visitor traffic steadily increased and now I've met folk—children, retirees, and visitors—from all over the state, the country, and the world. I even had the good fortune to be on duty during a photo shoot for outdoor gear, which I'm still being kidded about.

In the beginning I did have time to study my Florida Master Naturalist Program (FMNP) manuals but my study time has steadily decreased as I've become more aware of things to be done and to learn. I'm pretty much up to speed now with exhibit inhabitants, park restoration, trails, and of course the scrub jay. I've learned to use the fine collection of research materials available to look up just about anything. More than once, I've sat with a kid to look up a particular lizard or snake then had a discussion with him about what we found. (I now know the difference between an indigo and a black racer snake. Stop in and I'll tell you).

I can identify more butterflies now. I've witnessed a butterfly emerging from its chrysalis in the butterfly cages, and then being released. It's really something to see the wonderment of a child watching the live action.

Outside, I've seen gopher tortoises, bobcats, ospreys, hawks, and an otter. One morning, I saw a couple of black bellied whistling ducks highlighted in the rising sun. I was so mesmerized by the colors that I almost fell off my bike.

I'm learning to appreciate the park and the time and effort required to maintain it. I try to help out with mowing, and have started to get more involved in the Friends. Rodi (she's 5 ½ years old now) and I spent numerous evenings walking. You can't miss her, she's the skinny black dog who loves people and will knock you over leaning on you. Rodi likes the yellow trail and the scrub jays seem to tolerate us but not without some protest.

For those of you who miss the Florida summers, the warm quiet mornings are relaxing. After an invigorating ride to the park and opening up the nature center, I can't describe how nice it is to sit in one of the rocking chairs listening to the birds. The solitude and beauty of the park are priceless.

The summer has come to an end, the ride is brisker now, and activity at the nature center is increasing exponentially. Yes, summers are hot, but it just heightens the appreciation of some shade, a little breeze, and a rocking chair.

So, thanks to the Friends of Oscar Scherer, the park and, most importantly, Mother Nature for an excellent summer.

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## BIRD POINTS

by Mark Leggett

A Column on Birds and Birding in Oscar Scherer State Park



### #7 PALM WARBLER

You've seen many of these chestnut-capped, sparrow-size birds with yellow under parts. They are the ones that bob their tails incessantly. (One wonders the Darwinian reason behind this

exhausting behavior.) Note as well the chestnut streaking on both sides of the breast.

Not all wood warblers can be said to warble. The song of the Palm Warbler is best described as a rapid, buzzy trill.

All wood warblers, sometimes known as "the butterflies of the bird world," migrate. Palms leave early in the spring to breed, primarily in Canada, and return late in the fall to the southeastern United States, particularly Florida and points further south. Wise birds!

Palms, when in Florida, are birds of thickets and open areas and are often seen low to the ground walking and hopping amongst palms, but not necessarily in them. They feed mostly on small insects such as beetles, mosquitoes, spiders and ants, as well as berries and seeds. Sometimes they catch their prey in flight.

Nests are begun in early May. They are placed on or near the ground of a small spruce tree. Four or five eggs, creamy white with brown marks, are laid. The young leave the nest at about 12 days! Watch for these somewhat common birds around numerous areas of the park.

*Information sources used were: Alsop, Birds of Florida, National Geographic, Field Guide to the Birds of North America and Kaufman, Lives of North American Birds.*

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## Coming Events

~ **3RD ANNUAL ALL TRAILS HIKE** will be held on **Saturday, January 10th** at the park. This fun event has swiftly become the premier hiking opportunity in our area.

All the park trails have been linked together to create a 12-mile continuous hike. There are several opportunities to terminate the hike before that to create your own distance if preferred.

Hikers may begin anytime between 7:00 AM and 9:00 AM. Rest stops will be set up every two miles on the prescribed route and will offer water, juice, bagels, oranges, and cookies. Lunch will be served at the six-mile mark.

At the completion of the hike, all are invited to celebrate with ice cream sundaes! Certificates will be given to those completing the hike. Cost is \$10, which includes entrance to the park, lunch, snacks, and the sundaes.

**This is not a race.** Hikers are encouraged to hike at their own pace and enjoy the beauty of the park. Over 50 volunteers will be out there providing you with support. **Don't miss this one!**

### ~ 9TH ANNUAL SCRUB JAY 5K

**Saturday February 7th** starting at **8:00 AM**. A one mile fun run/walk will begin at **8:10 AM**. What's left to be said about this great event?

-It is one of the best running events in the area, attracting over 500 runners each year.

-It is our biggest fund raiser of the year thanks to the generosity of the Lee Wetherington Foundation that once again is underwriting the major costs of the race. (Many other local merchants also contribute support to the runners as well.) This means that 100% of the race fees paid by the runners go directly to the Friends of Oscar Scherer to support the park's needs and goals. It doesn't get any better than that!

-We are proud of the fact that we promote youth running by allowing all kids under 16 to run free and treat them the same as any other runner (race bag, T-shirt, prizes, food, etc). Even if you're not a runner, pass the word around. This is a super family-oriented event.



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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