



Corkscrew  
Swamp Sanctuary

## Along the Boardwalk

March, 2007

[www.corkscrew.audubon.org](http://www.corkscrew.audubon.org)

### Mark your calendar

Volunteer Recognition Dinner  
in the Blair Center  
Saturday, March 24  
Details in the Bunting House.

## Volunteer fund raising committee forms for Corkscrew projects

We are pleased to announce the formation of the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary Volunteer Fundraising Committee.

The Fundraising Committee's mission is to separately solicit funds for both short term and long term needs of Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary that are not otherwise funded by the National Audubon Society.

Over the last several months, thanks to the efforts of several volunteers and Candace Forsyth, the Corkscrew Volunteer Fundraising Committee (CVFC) was created to carry out Corkscrew fundraising efforts independent of the National and Florida Audubon Societies.

CVFC will ensure that ALL funds donated through CVFC's efforts are used only at Corkscrew.

The inaugural members of the CVFC are Joe Ambrozy, Art Blatt, Kris Gabel, Cliff Kobrin, Diane Kreager, Doug Machesney, Phil Nye and Susan Schumann-Skehan.

These members were selected to ensure broad representation from all volunteer activities at Corkscrew, including representatives from the Boardwalk, from resource management and from adult and youth education. Each member of the committee has an equal vote in the operation of the committee and how funds raised will be used.

We intend to work closely with Corkscrew staff and all other volunteers to ensure that we have all the non-Audubon funded needs and goals of Corkscrew realistically and adequately provided for. While a

whole host of ideas have been discussed already, some of the more significant goals include setting up endowments to better fund the intern and education programs.

Our goals will be lofty, and will take some time to achieve. But, we wanted to announce and celebrate our first step.

We recognize, however, that our ultimate success will depend on each of you. So, we hope that you will assist in our efforts, be generous from your wallets (you saw that coming!), and support us in any other way you possibly can!

If you have any questions or would like to assist in the CVFC's efforts, please contact our Chair, Kris Gabel at [kris.gabel@att.net](mailto:kris.gabel@att.net) or another committee member.

## Young conservationists are now young philanthropists

Kelly Ducham, Corkscrew volunteer and Corkscrew Middle School science teacher, is cultivating a culture of conservation with her students by organizing a small work crew of 6th graders each week to do tasks at the sanctuary that improve our visitor experience.

Recently the group decided to take on the role of young philanthropists by helping us get a "wish list" item. On February 1, students presented Ed and Mary with \$74.61 (all in collected coins) to purchase a new flag for our visitor center. Members of our work crew educated other students about Corkscrew and gathered the donations from friends in the lunch room.

## Quick ID Guide

### Identifying Common Grackles versus Boat-tailed Grackles

There's the field guide, and there's common sense. Use both.

Boat-tailed Grackles are larger by two to four inches and weigh twice as much as Common Grackles. But male Common Grackles are noticeably larger than females and puff up to impress them. Judging by size isn't always accurate. Both species also flair their long tails, so don't judge by those either.

So how does one tell if the bird is silhouetted against the sky on a tall snag or pine tree?



Common Grackle



Boat-tailed Grackle

Listen, and use binoculars to look at the eyes.

In South Florida, the iris of the Common Grackle is white; the iris of the Boat-tailed Grackle is black.

And listen. The Common Grackle call is a short unmusical *kh-shee* or a low dry *kek*. The Boat-tailed call is a long series of high ringing tones.

If the eye isn't visible or you can't hear it, assume it's a Common Grackle; it's more common at Corkscrew. Boat-tailed Grackles are common in Wal-Mart parking lots.

## What left that scat, what's that smell, and what are those berries in it?

Four mammals may leave noticeable scat on the boardwalk: raccoons, otters, bears, and bobcats, and it's relatively easy to tell the difference.

Two mammals are omnivorous and leave scat that contains seeds or berries: raccoon and bear. Raccoon scat may be in small, cylindrical pellets or scattered small piles. Bear scat is one large, massive, humongous pile.

Otters and bobcats are carnivores, so their scat does not contain seeds or berries. Because of differing diets, their scats are unique. Bobcat scat is a solid cylindrical pellet, rounded at one end and pointed at the other, and

it often contains bits of fur and bones. Otter scat is liquid or mushy and may contain bits of shell or fish bone.

Otters mark their territories by leaving the scented scat on the highest ground they can find, which in the swamp is the boardwalk. Otter scat has

a strong "fishy" smell that is detectable from distances, especially downwind. Scat from other mammals is relatively odorless compared to the otter scat.

Berries and seeds in raccoon scat vary with the season. Large almond-shaped seeds in the late summer and fall are from the Saw Palmetto. Fall scat with a purplish hue and small seeds may contain either Beautyberry or Bay. In the winter, small seeds in purplish scat are from Cabbage Palm trees, and less colorful scat contains seeds from Dahoon Holly.



Raccoon scat, far left.  
Otter scat, near left.

## February Sightings



Yellow-crowned Night Heron and Belted Kingfisher rest near the south lake (February 2).



Blue Flag Iris began blooming along the Plume Hunter Spur and wet prairie (February 13).



A Brown-headed Nuthatch clears debris from its nesting hole in a pine snag (February 13).

## Boardwalk Signs

### Staff searching for ways to replace missing and faded interpretive signs

The new, small education signs on the boardwalk are fantastic and an excellent addition. But what about the large signs? The large boardwalk signs are fading and need improvement. Trust us; we know that. We are working towards a reasonable solution.

These signs were originally installed with the new boardwalk back in 2000 at a cost of approximately \$5000 per sign. They are ceramic that is heat coated to withstand weather and other adverse conditions over an extended period of time. The original vendor had

a problem with one color fading, and it repaired two of the signs. After that repair, it went out of business.

National Audubon attorneys in New York have said we have no recourse against the old vendor. We have diligently tried to find another company to recoat them, even for a fee, but we have been unsuccessful. So, we will need to replace all of these signs as soon as we find a new vendor and we have sufficient money to do so.

Because of the high cost, we are researching other types of quality signs

as replacements. We hope a new vendor will replace the signs at a much lower cost. It is unclear whether we will need new artwork or if we can use existing artwork; we may need to start from scratch.

Nevertheless, we are making progress and will either budget for these new signs and/or add them to our wish list for contributions once we select the best options. We ask you to be patient, as this process will take some time. We will keep you apprised of our efforts.

—Ed Carlson

# Alligator

*Alligator mississippiensis*



What do visitors typically want to know about Alligators?

First, visitors want to see an alligator, and when they finally do see one, they are often surprised to see it basking in the sun. Some even ask if it's real. Alligators are primarily nocturnal, so that is when they will be most active.

Visitors also want to know how big an alligator is. A decent approximation of the size is to estimate, in inches, the length from nostrils to eyes. That length in inches is roughly the length of the gator in feet. One half of the gator's length is made up of its tail. Large male gators can reach 1,000 pounds.

Newly hatched gators are between 8-9 inches long and grow 9-10 inches per year until they are about five years old, when growth slows. Gators in the wild grow more slowly than those in captivity. Males are larger than females, which rarely exceed 10 feet in length. The largest gator recorded in Florida was 17'5". *Myth buster:* Gators in the wild do not grow a foot a year.

Wild gators may live to be 30-40 years old. Male and female gators look alike. The only clues to gender are if a gator is more than 10 feet long it is probably a male, and if a gator is guarding young alligators, it is a female.

Visitors also ask about alligator diet and feeding habits. Gators are nocturnal hunters, and feed primarily on fish. They also eat frogs, snails, turtles, snakes, birds, rac-



coons, otters, deer and other alligators. Gators have also been known to eat dead animals (carrion) and to store their catch for weeks before consuming it. Young gators live off the yolk sack for their first 2-3 days of life, and then feed on crayfish, snails and small insects.

Because alligators are cold blooded, they must rely on external temperatures to activate some systems. For example, heat from the sun is

needed to start digestion; when it's too cold, an alligator might starve with a full stomach because the food would rot inside its stomach.

A gator's optimum body temperature is 89° F. All feeding ceases when water temperatures are below 60° F, and they feed most often when temperatures are between 73° and 90°F. A healthy gator can go months without food.

Alligators have 70-80 hollow and conical-shaped, one-inch teeth that are continually replaced as old ones break or wear out. Their jaws are extremely strong with 2,000 pounds per square inch of crushing power, but they have weak opening power and once closed, they can be easily held shut.

Alligators can stay underwater for several hours if not actively swimming (then only for 20 minutes), and they cruise through the water at just over 1 m.p.h. In pursuit of prey, they can swim much faster for short distances. They also can leap out

of the water, but only where the water is deep enough for them to gain enough power and speed with their tail.

On land, an alligator can lumber dragging its tail, walk on its toes with the heels of hind feet and most of tail off the ground, pull itself through a muddy gator slide, and rapidly "sprint" in a straight line for short distances.

Despite their prehistoric ancestry, the alligator does communicate with

other alligators in often complex manners. Gators can hiss (a defensive warning), grunt, cough, growl and bellow. They also communicate using complex body postures and movements. *Myth buster:* Bellowing is not used exclusively in mating. It usually occurs in the spring, but it can happen any time. Gators may even bellow in response to sonic booms and thunder.

## Gator Love Notes

- Gators begin breeding at about 8 to 10 years of age.
- Courting activities include snout touching, bellowing, coughing, back rubbing, circling, bubble blowing, and swimming together.



- Females make the nest of vegetation, sticks, leaves, and mud (a compost pile) in a sheltered spot near the water but above the high water mark.
- A female lays from 20 to 40 eggs that are incubated for 65 days. Heat for incubation comes from the rotting vegetation in the nest.
- On average, about half of the eggs hatch and only half of those young gators survive the first year. Only about one out of every 20 survives to become a breeding adult.
- Females guard the nest and then the young for up to two years.
- Sex of the young is determined by the temperature inside the nest: >90° becomes male, 85°< becomes female, 85°-90° can be either sex.
- Hatching occurs from mid August to early September.
- Young make chirping noises from inside the egg which prompts the female to dig open the nest so the young can get to water.

# March Calendar

For more informaton, including times, go to [www.corkscrew.audubon.org/calendar/03\\_Mar.html](http://www.corkscrew.audubon.org/calendar/03_Mar.html)

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
<b>Blair Center Art Exhibit</b> Rod Wiley photography <i>all month</i>			1 DC-Day Walk  <i>Training: New volunteers</i>  <i>BT</i>	2 DC-Day Walk  <b>Volunteer field trip– Fakahatchee</b>  <i>BT</i>	3       <i>BT</i>	4
			5	6 DC-Early Bird Walk    <i>BT</i>	7 DC-Early Birds  <b>Volunteer field trip– Panther Island M.B.</b>  <i>BT</i>	8 DC-Day Walk    <i>BT</i>
12	13       <i>BT</i>	14 DC-Night Walk	15 DC-Day Walk    <i>BT</i>	16 DC-Deep Sky	17       <i>BT</i>	18
19	20 DC-Early Birds  *CCAS program      <i>BT</i>	21 DC-Sunset Walk	22 DC-Day Walk       <i>BT</i>	23       <i>Ed's Bird-a-thon (see below)</i>	24       <b>VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION DINNER</b>	25
26  <b>Volunteer field trip– Wildflower Walk at Corkscrew</b>	27 DC-Spring Birding	28 DC-Night Walk	29 DC=Day Walk    <i>Vol. training: guide for Wild FL Adventure</i>    <i>BT</i>	30	31 DC-Wildflowers       DC-Florida Fossils	

\* Collier County Audubon Society program: Pond Gannys & Snake Birds with Ted Below. Information at [www.collieraudubon.org](http://www.collieraudubon.org)

DC = Discover Corkscrew program.

BT = adult or school boardwalk tour

## Ed's Annual Bird-a-Thon

It's a spring thing! Ed and friends celebrate spring by counting as many species of winged creatures as they can find. This year's the marathon birding event will be conducted on March 23.

Ed's group starts at Corkscrew at daylight, roars through Lake Trafford with Ski Olesky mid day, and finishes

up at sunset at Rookery Bay with the legendary Ted Below. Other sharp-eyed participants are volunteers Susan Schumann-Skehan and Phil Nye. The group never leaves Collier County.

All proceeds from the bird-a-thon fund-raising event go to general maintenance at Corkscrew.

Sponsors can live dangerously and make a per species pledge, or they can make a safe lump sum pledge. The total count for the day is usually around 100 species.

A letter will be sent to friends of the sanctuary shortly, but anyone is welcome to make a pledge.