MORE ADVENTURES FOR FRIENDS

We have already had a number of interesting adventures this year and are excited to announce that more field trips are planned exclusively for Friends members in the coming months:

May 9, 9 am -12:30 pm - Swallow-tailed Kite Nesting at CREW
Angel Kelley, Environmental Educator at CREW and Vice President of the Ornithology Club at FGCU will lead a trip at CREW’s Cypress Dome trails to look for the acrobatic birds, their nests and maybe even their offspring.

June 22, 10am -11 am, Lee County Emergency Operations Center
Kathy Cahill, Emergency Management Coordinator with Lee County, will give us a behind the scenes look at how Lee County prepares to respond to an emergency.

July Mushroom Walk at Caloosahatchee Regional Park (Date TBD)
David Outerbridge, County Extension Director, will lead us on a mushroom walk. As the wet season approaches, the fungus will be among us!

August Lee County Mosquito Control Headquarters Tour (Date TBD)
We will tour the headquarters to see how Mosquito Control operates to mitigate the problems mosquitos pose to public health. You’ll get to see the aircraft and the equipment used as well as the largest mosquito sculpture in the world.

In addition, we are pleased to announce that you can now register for field trips two weeks in advance on our website. To check out the registration page, click here and press the black button to register and fill out the form. Please note registration is not final until you receive an email from the trip leader.

To view photos from past trips, go to the photo gallery on our website. Here’s to many adventures to come!
Dear Friends,

As we look back on the events over the past four months, it is hard not to feel grateful for all our excellent experiences so far this year. From educational field trips to engaging guest speakers and from a successful photo contest to new photography workshops, the past few months have been quite full of enriching experiences.

In addition, the Slough’s Interpretive Center celebrated its 15th anniversary this month, marking a significant milestone in the Friends journey. Our organization is proud to have served our community for this long and looks forward to many more years of service.

With summer fast approaching, I wish all our members heading up north a safe and enjoyable time. For our full-time residents, we have some pleasant activities planned for the coming months. Plus, for our adventurers, our wet walks will resume in mid-August.

Thank you for your continued support, and I hope to see you on the boardwalk.

Best regards,

Sabine

"I love how summer just wraps its arms around you like a warm blanket." — Kellie Elmore
Fifteen years ago, the doors were opened to the first public LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified building in Lee County, the Interpretive Center at the Six Mile Cypress Slough Preserve. The opening was a celebration of a project that one could say began in the ‘70s by a group of high school students called the Monday Group. This high school group began the push for acquisition of land and preservation of the Slough with an eventual referendum by the citizens to fund the first 500 acres of the Preserve. The Preserve is now over 3,500 acres through various acquisition programs. Lee County Parks and Recreation constructed and opened the boardwalk in 1991. In 2001 a group of Slough volunteer naturalists and other like-minded individuals formed the Friends of the Six Mile Cypress Slough Preserve as a citizens advocacy group and began the campaign to build the learning center. After six years of fundraising and many, many conversations with the Lee County Commissioners, ground was broken, and construction began in 2007. The building was officially opened to the public on April 12, 2008.

The Friends continue to support the Slough and the Parks and Recreation staff in many ways. We are fortunate to have the Friends Corner nature store that generates funds for many small and large projects. This is part of the partnership that our group has with Lee County. We run the store. The Slough gets the profit! There is also a wonderful group of ever-growing members and donors that support the Friends. The boardwalk entrance project that was just completed was funded by the Friends. Friends funded the metal mural on the end of the building. Many of the current information signs along the boardwalk were funded by the Friends. Summer camp extras are also provided by the Friends. You can check our annual reports for further information on our support of the Slough on our website

LEED certification was very important to the Friends and the cost for the certification was specifically funded by the Friends. The building obtained a silver certification in part by the following:
- The building was built on the Penzance Road abandoned roadbed.
- The ceiling is constructed of a rapidly renewable resource, bamboo.
- A cistern collects water for flushing toilets during the rainy season for use during the dry season.
- The floor is made of a product called marmoleum, a non-petroleum, plant-based material.

There are other reasons that can be explained by taking the self-guided Green Building tour. Although it has been 15 years, it seems like yesterday. The learning and teaching about the natural world and preservation of our natural resources continues daily at the Interpretive Center. The Friends continue to preserve, protect, and promote the Slough.
At the core of adventure lie the people who shape our journey. This was no less true on the Friends’ recent kayaking field trip to the Everglades on March 2. Like any field trip you may fondly remember from your youth, ours was meticulously planned and executed to perfection by Sabine Vandenhende and Pete Cangialosi who chose the top-rated river outfitter, Everglades Adventures Kayak and Eco Tours for a gorgeous day in early March. Our journey began at the historic Ivey House Hotel (which serves as base camp for the outfitter) just as the sun was stealing the dew from the sedge in Everglades City. A quick yet thorough orientation on the basics of paddling prepped us for maneuvering our craft, a brief description of the Turner River, the waterway we would be traversing, and a casual what-to-do in case of an unlikely up-close-and-personal with resident alligator and we were ready to go.

As we packed into the passenger tour vans with the kayaks on a trailer behind us, I thought about the fragile ecosystem of Southwest Florida. The Slough with which we are all familiar is just a small section of the wetlands that are the lungs of the Western hemisphere. This essential oxygen station purifies the atmosphere and water for humans, panthers, and all life down to the smallest and least known insect. I breathed deep thinking how this air was essential to all life on this planet.

This particular bit of glade proved to be breathing as we glided in the gentle ebbing and flowing of the Turner River’s serene waters. Sun dappled waters in the Turner River beget a wilderness of seemingly self-aware flora including mangroves, sawgrass, and bald cypress, which shelter a mesmerizing ancient array of fauna. Once the sounds of the Tamiami Trail died out behind us, the river was alive with the sounds of birds and the whispers of sapient trees. Along the way we were spectators as much as we were spectated upon by turtles and alligators of all sizes, unnamed jumping fish, a handsome pair of northern harrier hawks, osprey, whirligig beetles, and a diverse neighborhood of wading birds. Even 70 miles south of the Slough, the familiar mouthy green heron and the statuesque snowy egrets reminded us of the vastness of the great community of animals we so admire. Our trail snaked north on the river’s abridged branch that terminates in a reflective pool with a wonderful secret. Saving the best for last, our naturalist guide revealed a treat in the Turner River’s orchid grotto. In the cave of cypress trees and mangrove tunnels a startling variety of species of orchids cling to limbs including the lackluster dingy star that can be found nowhere else in the world but southern Florida. Our relatively short paddle back was a bittersweet goodbye to a new favorite place in nature.

Back at basecamp, we happy adventurers each celebrated our personal triumphs. A few of us finding ourselves still dry as successful novice kayakers, some of us having the joy of discovery in a previously unseen species, and all of us fulfilled in the pursuit of a great fish fry that we enjoyed together at Triad’s Seafood. At journey’s end, we surprised ourselves. I’ve learned not to set expectations for Friends’ outings as my experience always surpasses my yesterday mind’s invention. I made friends of strangers, was surprised by the shyness in Nature’s fiercest creatures, and gave into pride in belonging to the persistent wild world humanity has claimed to have tamed. You don’t have to be the adventurous type to join us next time we Friends of the Six Mile Slough take a field trip. You don’t have to be outgoing or know how to kayak or have the proper gear. Come with a good attitude, an open mind, and know you are in the company of a humble group of humans with one goal to preserve the beauty of the natural world to which we all belong.
We had another great year of entries for the photo contest. Judging was again a fun process, especially since it was the first year we have a Grand Prize Winner to choose. We had 89 photographers and 263 photos. We received the most photographs in the Birds category. Our Youth winner this year lives in Poland and took his pictures while visiting the Slough. The reception honoring the winners was well attended and most of the winning photographers were present and shared a story about their photos. Enjoy seeing the winners on the following pages.
PHOTO CONTEST RECEPTION

Pat Lonergan describes “The shot of a lifetime”

Damon Bell explains alligator and otter encounter

Winners & Judges

Judge Carol Matthai announces Bird winners

Judge Jason Boeckman announces Animal winners
ANIMALS

1st Place
Thomas Lonergan

2nd Place
Damon Bell

3rd Place
Damon Bell

Honorable Mention
Ron Lindensmith

Honorable Mention
Kristina Mintz

Honorable Mention
Stanislav Milov
1st Place
Clark Johnson

2nd Place
Lawrence Carr

3rd Place
Lawrence Carr

Honorable Mention
Thomas Lonergan

Honorable Mention
Stephen Royal

Honorable Mention
Linda Normoyle
PLANTS & LANDSCAPES

1st Place
Chuck Pavlick

2nd Place
Jim Matiya

3rd Place
Jeremy Greenfield

Honorable Mention
Cheryll Vickers

Honorable Mention
Jeremy Greenfield
YOUTH

1st Place
Filip Zasada

2nd Place
Filip Zasada

3rd Place
Jenna Martin

Honorable Mention
Kaya Hammond

Honorable Mention
Cole Wesner
STAFF

1st Place
Sara Maliva

2nd Place
Sara Maliva

3rd Place
Carolyn Babb

Honorable Mention
Sara Maliva
“Anybody can take a picture,” says Carol Matthai, “but not everybody can capture a moment.”

Matthai, a professional wildlife and nature photographer, has been showing others how to capture moments in a series of photography workshops she’s been leading at Six Mile Cypress Slough Preserve.

Teaching the workshops was a natural progression for Matthai, who lives adjacent to the Slough in the Cross Creek neighborhood and is a frequent visitor. “Whenever I would be on the boardwalk shooting, people would start asking me questions.” Matthai had been leading photography workshops at Lovers Key State Park, where she is the photographer-in-residence. When Hurricane Ian closed the park, she accepted an invitation from the Friends of Six Mile Cypress Slough to lead sessions here. The last workshop this season was April 29.

Matthai also served as one of three judges in this year’s annual Friends Photo Contest, as she did in 2022. Before becoming a professional, Matthai entered the Friends Photo Contest, open only to amateur photographers, and took 1st Prize in the Birds Category in 2020. She said this year’s photos were “awesome, one of the best years I’ve seen. The difference in 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place came down to minute details.”

She’s lived in Fort Myers for six years, retiring from a marketing position in Maryland. Matthai sells her wildlife and nature photography at local art fairs and on her website, www.matthaiphotography.com

She says she takes “the mystery out of the camera” during her workshops. “My main goal is to get them out of the automatic setting.”

Some basic tips:

- Watch the background
- Keep the subject in light
- Be patient.

And she always offers this caution: “Wildlife is not under contract to perform.”
DO YOU KNOW?

Photo Contest Trivia

By Theresa Roake

**Bobcats** are crepuscular. What does crepuscular mean?
A. Warm-blooded
B. Active at twilight
C. Small feline
D. Golden-eyed

Photo by Pat Lonergan

This flower is a:
A. Morning Glory
B. Sweet Pea
C. Dayflower
D. Pickerelweed

Photo by Chuck Pavlick

Yellow-crowned night herons’ favorite food is:
A. Crustaceans
B. Insects
C. Fish
D. Small birds

Photo by Lawrence Carr

Alligators like to eat:
A. Snakes
B. Turtles
C. Fish
D. Birds
E. All of the above

Answers on page 14
Here’s your summer reading list...

In early April, Slough Bookworms met to discuss the book *Finding the Mother Tree* by Suzanne Simard. We also selected the next three books so that you can plan ahead for your summer reading. June, August and October meetings will be via ZOOM.

On Monday, June 5, we will be discussing New York Times Bestseller *Bone Deep* by Randy Wayne White, a local Sanibel author. *Bone Deep* is an installment in the Doc Ford adventure novel series where the main characters take on relic thieves and the multibillion-dollar phosphate industry in central Florida.

On Monday, August 7, we will delve into *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer. Drawing on her life as an indigenous scientist, and as a woman, Kimmerer shows how other living beings—asters and goldenrod, strawberries and squash, salamanders, algae, and sweetgrass—offer us gifts and lessons, even if we’ve forgotten how to hear their voices.

On Monday, October 2, it’s time for *Where the Crawdads Sing* by Delia Owens. Owens juxtaposes an exquisite ode to the natural world against a profound coming of age story and haunting mystery. Thought-provoking, wise, and deeply moving, Owens’s debut novel reminds us that we are forever shaped by the child within us, while also subject to the beautiful and violent secrets that nature keeps.

**Days to celebrate Nature**

- May 16, Love a Tree Day
- May 19, Endangered Species Day
- May 20, World Bee Day
- June 3, National Trails Day
- June 5, Play Outside Day
- June 15, Nature Photography Day

**Answers to Photo Contest Trivia:**

1. B
2. C
3. A
4. E
Save the Date(s)

Environmental Educator Extraordinaire Bill Hammond will share stories of the Slough and his career in the Amphitheater at Gator Lake from 9:30—11 am on May 13 and May 20.

Puppet Players

Friends members entertained visitors at the Interpretive Center’s 15th Anniversary celebration with a puppet show based on Bill Sanders’ book “The Slough and You.”

Around the Corner...

Head to Friends Corner, our nature store, to check out ideas for gifts and fun activities over the coming months. Don’t forget your member discount!

Go on an adventure with your kid or grandkid
Made from recycled cereal boxes
For when you go on your summer vacation
Renewing Members. Thank you for your continued support.
Katie Baker
Tom Bartholomew
Kris & Steve Bauer
Sue Beavers
Brenda Berg
Bill Black
Jerry Boeckman
Tom Brown
Janet & Bruce Bunch
Charlotte & Gerry Canelli
Geoff Coe
Ian Comly
Susan Crawford
Donna Cressman & George Boyer
Brice Cropper
Carol Cummings & Greg Podczaski
Jodi & Terry Deane
Gayle & Paul Edwards
Lance Ford
Nancy & Michael Frazier
Christine Grannis
Jayne Griffes
Anne Gross
Kati & Steven Heysinger
Terri Krass
Jean Landon
Marty Linnemeyer
Tom Mahoney & Maddy Maxeiner
Adrienne Martin
Richard Martinez
Jim Matiya
Maggie & David Minnick
Nancy & Jeff Montgomery
Toni & Tom Olsen
Nancy Olson & Mike Talbert
Sherry Patterson
Chuck Pavlick
Betty Ann Prevatt
Anne Rapp
Arnie Rosen
Lynn Schaper
Cathy & Walter Sedlacek

Sue Stevens
Claudia & Don Stohler
Bill Toelke
Sabine Vandenheede & Lee Rosenbaum
Linda Varga
Margaret & Fred Walker
Sari Young

Welcome New Members.
Lyn-Ann Bedou
Nicole Carignan & David Raphael
Gina Delano & David Link
Mel Dell
Tiffany Glass
Dave Haar
Gene Kidd
Jean King
Cheryl & Mark Klimek
Becky Lommen
James Mann
Kathy Potter
Michele & James Rohan
Elise & Josh Smith
Mary Ann Strohmeyer
Richard Turner

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