

Unintended Consequences

Are we loving Mother Nature to death?

Story and art by Sigrid Tidmore

If you're reading *Bay Soundings*, chances are you're already trying to be a good steward of our environment. But listen up – because many of the small things we all do unconsciously can cause unintentional, long-term damage to animal populations, particularly those that are already endangered. Just a momentary lapse can disrupt the delicate balance in our favorite preservation areas.

Remember learning about food chains? Today environmental scientists talk in terms of the “food web” – a complex interaction of sunlight, microbes, plants, prey and predators exchanging energy at many different levels simultaneously. We now know that seemingly small changes in one habitat can have dramatic effects on species far upstream on the web.

For instance, we've all seen fishermen navigating their boats through shallow bay waters where their props dredge up the muddy bottom. Short-term, that raises turbidity so less light reaches the sea grasses and they

grow less abundantly. Less grass means less shelter for juvenile grouper, and the next season the fish are fewer.

Longer-term implications are even more severe for fish and the sportsmen seeking them. Richard Sullivan, preserve manager at Cockroach Bay in Hillsborough County, has observed thousands of prop scars that have destroyed whole sections of seagrass beds that likely will never grow back. The tidal action sweeps the prop scars clean, creating a rut that will impact fish populations for years to come. And it all started with just a little careless boating fun.

PARTY ANIMALS

Tampa Bay has a well-earned reputation for having beautiful beaches, but it comes at a price. According to Ft. DeSoto's Park Supervisor Jim Wilson, a three-day holiday weekend can attract as many as 120,000 visitors. They will leave some 600 trash cans brimming with 40 tons of trash. That doesn't

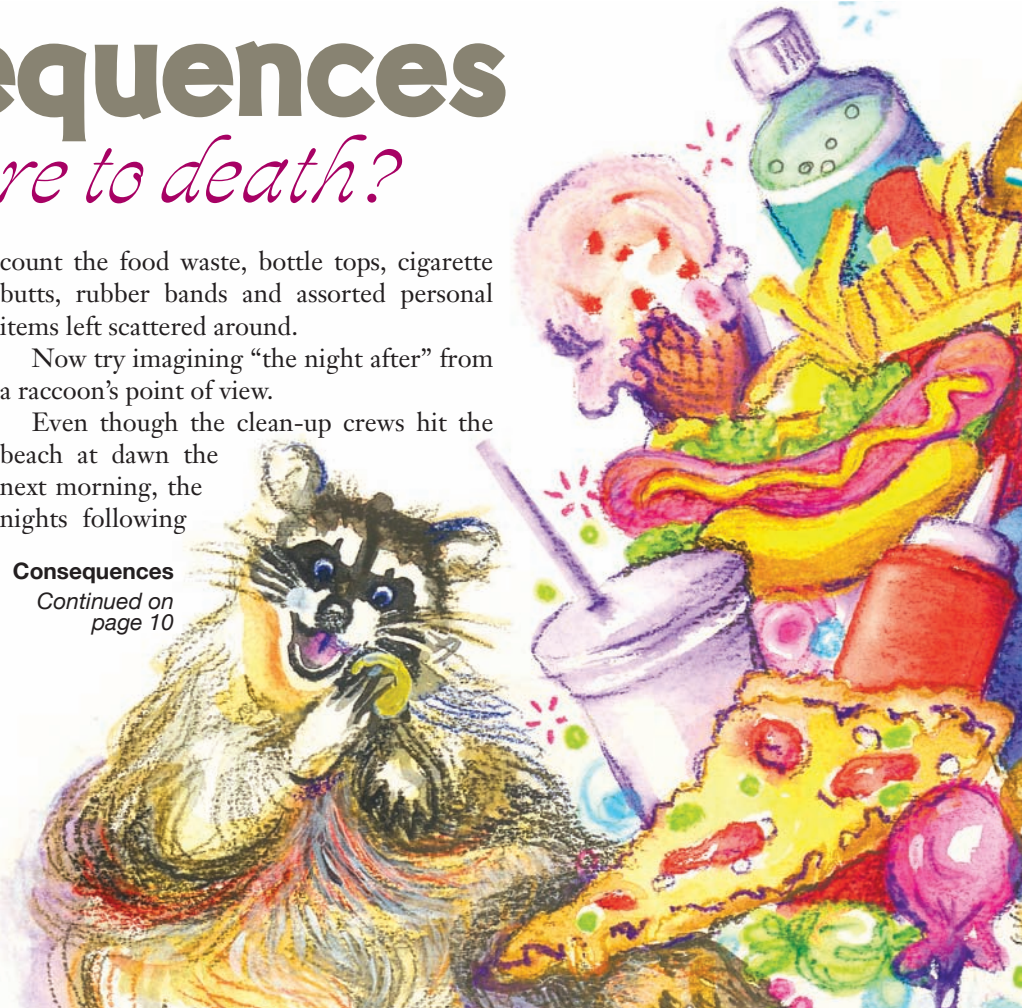
count the food waste, bottle tops, cigarette butts, rubber bands and assorted personal items left scattered around.

Now try imagining “the night after” from a raccoon's point of view.

Even though the clean-up crews hit the beach at dawn the next morning, the nights following

Consequences

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Adopt-A-Pond: Is Opportunity Knocking at Your Front Door?

By Ernie Franke

Most of us, at some point in our lives, have wondered just how much difference we can make in the world. That's what happened with the pond just outside my front door at The Shores of Long Bayou in St. Petersburg.

Although I call it “my pond,” it really is a stormwater retention facility designed to capture contaminants from lawns, roads and parking lots before they enter Long Bayou or sink into the underground aquifer. The pond had been neglected for many years, and required chemical controls to contain invasive bulrush and cattail plants. Condo owners didn't want “raw” nature, preferring something closer to a golf-course setting, but the pond had gravitated more to an “Everglades” look. Yes, we even had an alligator in it!

Adopt-A-Pond

Continued on page 12

Most folks think I have a background in ecology (I'm actually an electrical engineer). After pouring through nature books to identify weeds and waterfowl, you get to know them quite well.

Bay Soundings Looks to the Future: Confirming Current Subscribers, Reaching out to New Readers

Bay Soundings is asking readers to confirm that their address is correct and that they would like to continue receiving a mailed copy. If you're reading a copy of *Bay Soundings* that came in the mail, we need to know it! See page 15 for details.

Yvette Little: Fighting Poo-llution

Yvette Little spends a lot of time explaining the facts of life to pet owners in the Tampa Bay region:

- Doggie doo isn't fertilizer and it doesn't just go away.
- Every little pile counts. Dogs in the Tampa Bay region create about 125 tons of poop every day but only about 60% of it is scooped.
- Even healthy pets have germs in their poop – an average of about three billion fecal coliform bacteria per pile.
- There are no sewage treatment facilities at the end of a stormwater drain so tossing pet waste in the storm drain just means it gets to the nearest lake, river or bay even faster.
- Nutrients in dog waste may contribute up to 20% of the nitrogen that is the single most damaging contaminant in Tampa Bay.

Her work is paying off in Robinson Preserve where she helped develop an innovative program for the Tampa Bay Estuary Program that resulted in 50% fewer piles over a six-month period. The "AmbassaDogs" program enlisted dog owners who regularly use the preserve, along with their canine companions, to talk with other dog walkers about the need to pick up after their pets in the preserve as well as their own yards and neighborhoods.

The volunteers patrol the preserve with educational messages and free pet waste bag dispensers wearing backpacks that match their four-legged companions' vests. "Most people don't know how much damage pet waste causes, but it's become a huge water quality issue," Little said. "People walking their pets have the perfect opportunity to talk to other pet owners – it's the power of positive peer pressure."

Part of the funding for AmbassaDogs came through a \$10,000 fellowship from National Audubon Society and Toyota. One of 40 fellows selected nationwide for the 2009 TogetherGreen program, Little is participating in a five-year initiative designed to build leadership in the environmental community. "It's been a totally awesome experience," Little said.

A native Floridian who grew up in Pinellas County and earned a degree in business administration from the University of South Florida, Little is co-owner of Simply Green Solutions, LLC. "We help not-for-profits use business concepts to meet their goals more effectively," she

**"Most people don't know how much damage pet waste causes, but it's become a huge water quality issue."
–Yvette Little**



Yvette Little coordinates the AmbassaDogs program for the Tampa Bay Estuary Program.



Wearing bright-blue vests that match their owner's backpacks, AmbassaDogs patrol Robinson Preserve sharing the "poo-llution" message.

says. "We also work with corporations to improve their triple bottom line, particularly with environmental issues and corporate social responsibility."

She takes a long-term view with a focus on short-term actions. "What we try to do is to get people and corporations to 'lean toward green.' They may not go as far as we like as fast as we like but every step toward green is a good step. Over time, we hope they realize that even the little things they do can make a big difference."



Explore Tampa Bay's magnificent waterworld and watershed with *Bay Soundings*, a quarterly news journal covering Florida's largest open-water estuary. *Bay Soundings* chronicles the news and issues affecting the bay, while profiling the people, places and creatures that make it so compelling. Thanks to generous community support, *Bay Soundings* is distributed free of charge to local and national subscribers. Interested readers may subscribe online at www.baysoundings.com or send an email to circulation@baysoundings.com. Bulk copies also are available for distribution through area attractions, schools, businesses and civic organizations.

TALK BACK

We welcome letters to the editor on topics covered in *Bay Soundings* as well as articles or story ideas on issues impacting Tampa Bay and the region's natural resources. Send letters to editor@baysoundings.com.

SEND US YOUR NEWS

We're always interested in news about community organizations involved in Tampa Bay, and our calendar page highlights upcoming bay-related events and activities. Send news to editor@baysoundings.com.

HELP YOURSELF

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EPA "Encouraging" on Dual Approach to Nitrogen Levels in Tampa Bay

The Tampa Bay Estuary Program is "quite encouraged" by initial response from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency following a request for dual options as part of the numeric nitrogen criteria under development for Tampa Bay. "We've asked them to consider the work we've already done and they've agreed to consider a dual approach," said Holly Greening, executive director of the TBEP.

The criteria, due in November, are expected to use models developed in other parts of the country to identify appropriate nitrogen levels in Tampa Bay. Those models may not be the best alternative in an estuary which already is responding positively to nitrogen input levels developed on a voluntary basis by the members of the Tampa Bay Nitrogen Management Consortium.

"The DEP (Florida Department of Environmental Protection) is a staunch supporter of what we've already done and the EPA has indicated that the approach we've taken in Tampa Bay will be one of the options they consider," Greening added. Guidance from a committee of EPA's Science Advisory Board created to review the estuarine criteria also supports the TBEP approach to nutrients in estuaries where the science is available.

In a separate action, EPA opened a door that may allow DEP to develop more appropriate nutrient criteria for Florida's lakes, rivers and streams. In April, DEP petitioned the EPA to rescind its rules, saying the federal government had not taken the strength of the locally developed criteria into account. DEP is currently writing its own numeric nutrient criteria and hopes to have them complete before the EPA rules become effective in March 2012.

Clean Your Plate, Protect Critical Habitat?

A new report from the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) indicates that about one-third of all food produced for human consumption is wasted. With about 36% of the Earth's surface already committed to agriculture, and global food demand expected to double by the year 2050, eliminating food waste could minimize habitat loss.

The FAO recommends a two-pronged strategy to minimize conversion of land to agriculture. In the US, where the average American wastes over 200 pounds of food each year, each household that eliminates food waste could save an acre of habitat. In developing countries, most waste occurs during processing, storage and transport. Improved infrastructure could reduce those losses. Other findings from the report:

- Every year, consumers in rich countries waste almost as much food as the entire net food production of sub-Saharan Africa.

- At the same time, if the percentage of food lost through insufficient infrastructure in sub-Saharan Africa was the same as that wasted in other parts of the world, 53 million acres could be saved from conversion to agriculture.

- The amount of food lost or wasted every year is equivalent to more than half of the world's annual cereals crop.

- Fruits and vegetables, plus roots and tubers have the highest wastage rates of any food.

The full report is available online at www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ags/publications/GFL_web.pdf

A Retro Look at Red Tide Takes Top Award at Mote



Photo courtesy Mote Marine Laboratory

From left, Rebecca Parham, Autumn Fritsch, Brittany Godwin and Christine Kim created the winning video.

A retro look at red tide – complete with '50s-style bathing suits, well-coiffed hair and double entendres – took the top award at the Art of Red Tide Science exhibit at Mote Marine Laboratory. Fourteen art and outreach projects created by students from Ringling College of Art and Design were judged by a panel of experts on scientific accuracy, creativity, originality, artistic approach and effort.

Funded with a grant from the National Science Foundation, the exhibit brings communicators and scientists together to help explain the complex biology, chemistry and physics that result in the noxious outbreaks.

Red tide, caused by high concentrations of harmful algae, has not been a problem in Tampa Bay since the last major event in 2006 which resulted in millions of dead fish and birds. Along with its impact on wildlife, red tide has an estimated economic impact of \$75 million per year, including lost tourism.

Although no one knows for sure how they start, some scientists have linked red tide to high levels of nutrients in offshore waters at the mouth of the Mississippi River. A recent U.S. Geological Survey report indicates nitrogen loads are 35% higher than average because of

flooding this spring.

The winning entry is online at YouTube, www.youtube.com/watch?v=QsjcV5Rke40.

Putting a Price Tag on Nature

Working from the premise that putting a value on natural ecosystems will promote conservation, a team of scientists is building a website that puts a price tag on the services provided by resources ranging from mangroves and seagrasses to urban tree canopies.

Tampa Bay is one of four regions in the U.S. selected to participate in a pilot study developed by the Environmental Protection Agency in a partnership with the Tampa Bay Estuary Program and the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council. "The goal is to elevate ecological decisions to the same level as economic decisions," said research ecologist Jim Harvey when the project started in 2008.

A new website at www.epa.gov/ged/tbes/ details the work completed so far including maps of current land use, and values for flood protection, climate stabilization and biodiversity support as well as potable water and clean air.

The second phase of the project will look at alternative future scenarios specifically relating to the value of ecosystems.

"We should have some kind of valuation of the majority of ecosystems when we're finished but there will still be gaps in the data," notes Marc Russell in a report back to the TBEP's management and policy boards.

The final phase will be a website with relationship browsers that tie together the human benefits of an ecosystem and the specific management actions required to create or maintain that benefit. "We're piecing together trusted models to connect them back to human well-being," Russell said.

Read more about the EPA ecosystems services study in the Fall 2008 issue of *Bay Soundings*.

"Bug Factory" to Help Fight Plant Invaders

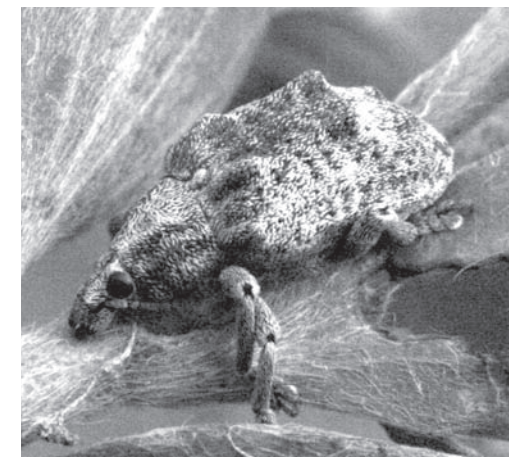


Photo courtesy USDA

Melaleuca weevils have cut seed production on South Florida trees by more than 90%.

Bugs including moths, mites and weevils are proving to be the most effective tool in fighting invasive plants in Florida. A new research laboratory funded through U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers and the South Florida Water Management District is expected to begin producing hundreds of thousands of insects beginning next year in Miami.

The emphasis on bio-controls follows the success of a tiny weevil that has cut seed production on melaleuca by more than 90% in South Florida. The new "bug factory" facility is scheduled to open in September 2012. International research is underway to identify bugs that eat invasive plants but aren't likely to become a problem for native plants or other crops. With melaleuca nearly under control, Brazilian pepper is a top priority. After several trips to Brazil, scientists have identified 12 species that can be used to build lab colonies for testing.

For more information about invasive species in the Tampa Bay region, see the Summer 2010 issue of *Bay Soundings*.

Tampa Bay is Getting Better. YOU CAN HELP.

Buy a Tampa Bay Estuary tag and help keep Tampa Bay on the road to recovery. They're available year-round in your local tax collector's office or request a Tampa Bay Estuary tag with your annual renewal.

The cost is \$27 for the first year and \$17 after that – with \$15 going directly to projects that benefit the estuary, including the publication of *Bay Soundings*.

A message from the Tampa Bay Estuary Program and the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council's Agency on Bay Management. Original artwork by Russ Sirmons.



Summer Reading Recommendations

Pilgrim in the Land of Alligators: More Stories about Real Florida, by Jeff Klinkenberg

Reviewed by Suzanne Cooper, principal planner, Agency on Bay Management

I don't read the forewords and prefaces of books as a rule, but I think I'm going to start. I found myself really enjoying those in this book and they left me anxious to get into the "meat" of this latest Klinkenberg gift to readers.

As in his last book, *Seasons of Real Florida* (2004), which I also reviewed for *Bay Soundings*, this one is filled with great stories drawn, in part, from his award-winning columns in the *St. Petersburg Times*. Thirty-nine stories are in this collection, separated into sections called My Florida, Florida Icons, Working Florida, Dangerous Florida, and Living and Dying. But don't let the section headings get in the way. Once you start reading you won't want to put down this book! Yes, the stories are short, which should enable you to stop and get your chores done, but each is so entertaining and thoughtful that you won't - you'll keep turning the pages and find yourself thoroughly engaged.

We've all heard about nearby landmarks like Giant's Camp, the sponge docks of Tarpon Springs, Ybor City, and Bok Tower, and about famous visitors or residents such as Babe Ruth, Ann Paul and Danilo Fernandez, Sr. But we have seldom heard about these places or people in quite the way Jeff Klinkenberg tells their story. He really loves his work, if you can call it that. I think it's really an obsession to recapture and memorialize the Florida he (and I) experienced growing up - simple, salty people who loved life and made every day interesting; places that make fond memories.

I encourage you to read Klinkenberg's books, and then to take a day trip to the Loop Road, Weeki Wachee Springs, Pass A Grille, Corkscrew Swamp, or the other special places he has written about. Seek out the locals' eateries, dusty souvenir shops and cheesy tourist attractions in small towns where you'll experience Florida like it was decades ago, and where it continues to be insulated from the 21st century.



The Travis McGee series by John D. MacDonald

Reviewed by Victoria Parsons, editor, Bay Soundings

If you're looking for a great beach read, go back to the future and pick up one of John D. MacDonald's Travis McGee novels.

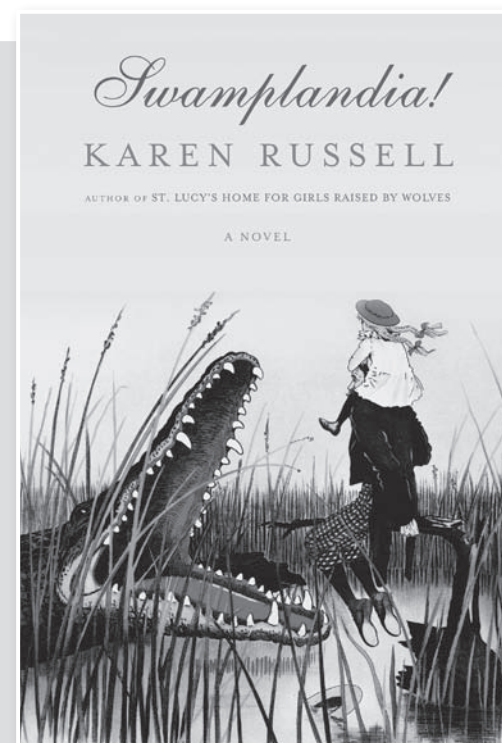
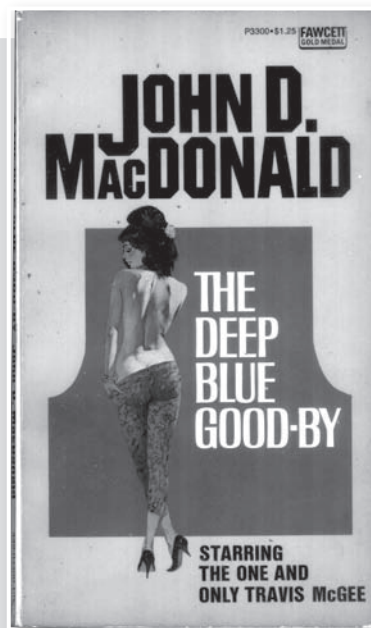
A "knight in tarnished armor" who dominated the bestseller lists between 1964 and 1985, McGee is a timeless hero who never fails to entertain. His fans are legion, from Steven King, Dean Koontz and Robert B. Parker to Florida's current favorites Randy Wayne White and Carl Hiaasen.

First and foremost, MacDonald is an entertainer. As a salvage consultant who recovers lost items for half their value, McGee travels back roads and high roads across Florida, Mexico and the Caribbean, most often in the company of a lonely lady who has been cheated out of something valuable.

But MacDonald also has a deeper side that strikes close to the heart of anyone who loves Florida and his commentary is particularly poignant because it shows how little we've learned over the past 25 years:

"Now, of course, having failed in every attempt to subdue the Glades by frontal attack, we are slowly killing it off by tapping the River of Grass. In the questionable name of progress, the state in its vast wisdom lets every two-bit developer divert the flow into drag-lined canals that give him 'waterfront' lots to sell. As far north as Corkscrew Swamp, virgin stands of ancient bald cypress are dying. All the area north of Copeland had been logged out, and will never come back. As the glades dry, the big fires come with increasing frequency. The ecology is changing with egret colonies dwindling, mullet getting scarce, mangrove dying of new diseases born of dryness."

Any of the Travis McGee tales are perfect beach reading, but wait until after hurricane season to read *Condominium*, MacDonald's story set in a retirement community on the fictional Fiddler Key (with a noted resemblance to Siesta Key.) Graphic descriptions of what happens when a hurricane hits an unprepared barrier island are likely to result in your spending the rest of the summer collecting batteries and canned food so you'll be more likely to survive if a storm comes ashore in Tampa Bay.



Swamplandia! by Karen Russell

Reviewed by Nanette O'Hara, public outreach coordinator, Tampa Bay Estuary Program

The death of Hilola Bigtree, the matriarch of the Bigtree clan and the star of the family's "Swamplandia!" alligator theme park deep in the Everglades, sets her entire family on personal voyages of self-discovery in an attempt to cope with their grief.

Thus, an enchanting novel by talented young writer Karen Russell turns gracefully from a Hiasen-esque farce to a poignant coming-of-age tale, told primarily by the youngest of the Bigtrees, 13-year-old Ava.

Beset by debt, Ava's father, Chief Bigtree, departs on an extended trip to the mainland in search of financial redemption. The need was magnified by the opening of a competing attraction, World of Darkness, which transports visitors, figuratively and in no small measure, literally, to Hell. Ava's older brother, Kiwi, takes a job there to send money back home and complete his education at night school, while Ava's older sister Osceola disappears with her "boyfriend," the long-dead ghost of a "dredgeman" who once worked aboard one of the giant earth-chewing machines that drained the Glades.

Ava's mystical search for her sister and her determination to salvage the future of Swamplandia! make for an unforgettable story of love, loss and salvation. But just as moving is Russell's deft portrait of the Everglades itself, *Swamplandia!* is as much an ode to this rapidly disappearing ecosystem as it is to a disappearing way of life.

Lucky Fifth-Graders get Hands-On Sailing Lessons

By Aaron Dalley

On a warm, calm Saturday morning 11 fifth-graders set sail from Palma Sola Causeway near Bradenton to learn the basics of sailing and explore the aquatic environment. The student sailors from G.D. Rogers Garden Elementary School were the first participants in the Turner Maritime Challenge Program. Developed by Challenge Director Jamie Canfield, the program offers a chance for children to learn about sailing, navigation, and watercraft maintenance. This was their opportunity to test those skills out on the water.

"The whole thing is really trying to indoctrinate kids in a harmonious relationship with the water," Canfield said. "I'm hoping to develop a core of students and members of the museum who can collectively enjoy the water on beautiful, traditional boats."

The program begins with a brief overview of maritime history and traditional boating methods. Classroom instruction continues with lessons about ecology and the environment to give students a better appreciation of the coasts and waterways. Then hands-on learning teaches "hard skills" like sailing and caring for the boats. Finally, Canfield hopes to teach "soft skills" such as self-reliance, trust and teamwork. These less tangible lessons are a challenging part of Canfield's vision.

"One of the things I want to do is quantify those soft skills," he said. "I'm trying to get specific guidelines on how you can actually teach accountability and responsibility instead of just talking about them."

Saturday's sail was the final event of the challenge and a test of the skills the students learned and developed during the program. Canfield traveled to the school for three separate sessions – one classroom and two "dry runs" in the parking lot. In the first dry run, Canfield demonstrated the rigging of a sailboat, hoisting the sail and tying off all of the ropes. On the second run he guided students who did the rigging themselves. Kindergarten teacher Jenny Camacho didn't have any students present but was on-site because she wrote the Splash! grant that allowed students to participate. She described the program as a successful example of the gradual release model of learning.

"The teacher gives classroom instructions and models, then he works together with the kids and eventually he lets them do independent work, actually sailing and using the terminology," Camacho said. "They've built that background knowledge with the vocabulary and working at school with Jamie as well as the outside training. This is the culmination of all that work."

The Splash! grant, awarded by the South-



Photos: Aaron Dalley



Program Director Jamie Canfield gives last-minute instructions before the kids set sail.

west Florida Water Management District, is an annual offering meant to encourage student awareness about the importance of the state's water resources. Camacho said applying for the Splash! grant was an obvious choice because Rogers Elementary is the first "green school" in Manatee County. Along with environmentally friendly building materials and an energy-efficient design, environmental stewardship and "green" habits are emphasized to the students.

"I really want to encourage the kids to be green, recycle, and use what God provides us," Camacho said.

Canfield's impetus for developing the program is his commitment to teaching and preserving traditional boating methods like sailing and rowing. Funding for the Turner Challenge was provided through a bequest

There was just enough of a breeze to get the boats sailing on Palma Sola Bay.

from Jay Turner, a naturalist/folksinger free-spirited eccentric, whose family made their fortune in real estate in New York. "Jay played with many of the great folk singers in the country including Joan Baez, Woodie Guthrie and Pete Seeger," Canfield said. "He had a tremendous love for all types of wildlife."

Turner visualized a youth maritime program which would provide personal growth and self awareness to its participants by exposing them to conditions that call upon and develop their inner strengths, self-reliance, and interdependence with those other participants in the program.

Working in conjunction with the Florida Maritime Museum was a natural partnership. The museum is located just across Palma Sola Bay from the launch site in the village of Cortez and offers a variety of hands-on programs that build and restore historic watercraft as well as classes on Florida's marine ecosystems.

For fifth-grade teacher Luke Grady, seeing his students enjoying the outdoor experience is as important as the knowledge and skills they developed.

"Some of the kids don't have many experiences outside their neighborhoods or outdoors," Grady said. "For me it's just a sense of getting out and doing something different, to broaden their horizons a little bit."

Fifth grader Dasani Wade said her favorite part was the big waves out in the ocean.

"I thought it was going to be scary at first," Dasani said. "But then it turned out pretty fun. I learned that there are more plants in the water than I thought there were."

As the sailing wound down, Canfield and the teachers were already planning how to get more involvement. Camacho is already working on getting sponsors for the summer camp Canfield offers and is hoping to expand enrollment next year. She sees the experience as a great celebration for the kids' last year before middle school.

"Maybe we can put in a grant request for fourth- and fifth-graders next year, to get everybody out and included," Camacho said. "Maybe even have the fifth-graders teach the little kids. They can have a reflection time and say 'this is what you're going to do when you get to fifth grade.'"

Canfield hopes that through programs like this and by being more involved in the community, he will be able to spread his message about living more harmoniously with the environment.

"When you think about the health of the environment," Canfield said, "we are part of the environment too."

Aaron Dalley is pursuing a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of South Florida St. Petersburg. He is a science communication intern working with the U.S. Geological Survey in St. Petersburg, Florida.

Grants Boost Bay Restoration Initiatives

Got a great idea that could help make Tampa Bay better? Now is the time to start working on grant applications for funds available through Tampa Bay Estuary Program and the Southwest Florida Water Management District.

The TBEP Bay Mini-Grants are financed by sales of the Tampa Bay Estuary specialty license plate, also known as the "Tarpon Tag." Grants up to \$5,000 are available for bay improvement projects proposed by citizen groups and organizations in Hillsborough, Manatee and Pinellas counties. Last year, TBEP awarded \$93,000 to 22 community groups for projects that directly involve citizens in restoring and improving Tampa Bay.

Past projects have included invasive plant removal and planting of Florida native plants at local parks, workshops to educate teachers and involve local school communities, and signs to alert boaters and beachgoers about nesting birds. Additional information and examples of past grant winners are available at www.tbep.org/bayminigrants.html.

This year, TBEP will host a free grant-writing workshop on Wed., Aug. 3, from 6 to 7 p.m. at the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council in Pinellas Park. Grant submission deadline is 3 p.m. on Monday, Oct. 3. For more information, contact Misty Cladas at misty@tbep.org or 727-893-2765.

SWFWMD has two separate grant programs, one for citizens and community groups, another for teachers and schools. Programs funded through Community Education

Grants are specifically targeted at adults. The program is intended to motivate people to get involved in protecting their water resources through various educational activities. Projects should involve water issues including water quality, conservation, flood protection, natural systems and watersheds. Examples of past projects include pond restorations (*see story page one*), cleanups, watershed education events, workshops and exhibits.

Grants of up to \$5000 are available. Applications are due Aug. 19 and projects must take place between March 1 and July 31, 2012. To discuss project ideas, please call Robin Grantham at 1-800-423-1476, ext. 4779.

Separate Splash! grants are available to teachers for hands-on water resources projects including funding for classroom projects on water quality, conservation, water supply, flood protection or watersheds. The \$3000 grants are available to educators in public, private, charter and home school groups. Teachers may apply individually or as a group.

Last year the district funded 204 projects reaching an estimated 200,000 students. Past school grant projects include student monitoring of local water quality, field trips and outreach campaigns designed to promote awareness of water-conserving practices. See page 5 or visit www.swfwmd.state.fl.us/education/schoolgrants/projects.php to learn more about how Splash! grants can be used.

2011 Legislative Update

If life was a baseball game and the Agency on Bay Management was the hometown team, the score from the 2011 Florida Legislature might look like five wins and three losses.

In the loss column:

AGRICULTURE EXEMPTIONS TO WATER MANAGEMENT REQUIREMENTS

This legislation essentially allows uncontrolled impacts to wetlands within lands that are or have been used for agriculture over the past seven years, retroactive to 1984. It will result in wetland destruction in preparation for conversion of agricultural operations to more intense development. It also creates conflict between the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and the water management districts that now oversee wetland management.

GROWTH MANAGEMENT

ABM opposed this legislation because it preempts many planning and management activities of local governments, including those which the community implements to meet the needs and desires of its citizens. The legislation reorganized several government agencies and changed the state's role in growth management and local plan reviews.

FUNDING FOR FLORIDA FOREVER

Gov. Scott vetoed funding for what is generally considered to be the nation's premier environmental lands purchasing program. The legislature had allowed expenditures of up to \$308.6 million to be funded through the sale of surplus state-owned lands. Although the state had identified lands with a potential value of about \$50 million, officials predicted that only about \$6 million worth could actually be sold in the current economic climate.

The five wins include:

SEPTIC TANKS

ABM opposed this measure because it would have removed the requirement that septic tanks be inspected every five years to ensure that they are properly maintained to protect the environment and public health.

NUMERIC NUTRIENT QUALITY CRITERIA

ABM appreciated the intent of the legislation but opposed it for a number of technical reasons, specifically the concern that not implementing federal law might make it difficult for local governments to obtain necessary stormwater permits.

ENVIRONMENTAL PERMITTING

ABM opposed this legislation because it would reduce the time for agency processing of permit applications and increase the use of general permits for wetland projects as well as other technical problems that would make it easier for development to impact water quality and natural resources.

SURFACE WATER IMPROVEMENT & MANAGEMENT

ABM opposed this measure that would have prevented local governments from requiring that developers retrofit chaotic drainage structures in redevelopment areas.

LOCAL FERTILIZER REGULATIONS

Although the legislature did pass a fertilizer bill that restricts local governments from preventing summer bans on fertilizer sales, it does include amendments that partially reflect ABM's position. Local ordinances passed before July 1, 2011 are grandfathered in, so both Manatee County and the City of Tampa passed new ordinances in advance of that deadline. It also allows for local governments to pass ordinances that may be stronger than the state's model ordinance in the future.



Photo courtesy Audubon of Florida

Giant reef balls – each weighing about 1300 pounds – have been placed along the shores of the Richard T. Paul Alafia Bank Bird Sanctuary to help stop erosion of Bird Island. Created during the 1920s with dredged materials from the shipping channel, the islands are now among the most important bird habitats in the state and host up to 10,000 pairs of birds during the winter nesting season. The reef ball installation will create a protected lagoon between the island and open water of the bay to minimize the impact of waves. It's the first of several erosion control projects planned for the islands, according to Ann Paul, regional coordinator for Audubon of Florida.

Natural Oasis Recreated at Edge of Urban Neighborhoods

At the edge of Florida's most densely populated county, wedged along the borders of Gulfport and St. Petersburg, ecologists and engineers are recreating a natural oasis.

Once an open-water estuary leading to Boca Ciega Bay, Clam Bayou had become the stormwater dump for 2,400 acres of highly urbanized neighborhoods. Sediment and trash clogged the narrow tidal channel that flowed past Osgood Point and pollutants from yards and parking lots were degrading water quality.

"The neighborhoods were built before state regulations required any kind of treatment for stormwater, so it was flowing into Clam Bayou basically untreated," said Brandt Henningsen, chief environmental scientist for the Southwest Florida Water Management District.

Restoring Clam Bayou with a series of interconnected water features and upland habitat has been a labor of love for the scientist who usually works on wide-open spaces like Cockroach Bay in southeastern Hillsborough County. "It's been challenging, but it's wonderful to see this kind of natural oasis in the midst of an urban area," he said.

It's also been a long-term project for Henningsen and the district's SWIM (Surface Water Improvement and Management) program. "We started in 1995 with the restoration of 10 acres in a partnership with the City of Gulfport and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection," he said.

That first section became the Clam Bayou Nature Park, which features an open-water lagoon rimmed by marshes and coves as well as



Photos by Victoria Parsons

Mature mangroves line the shore in the first phase of the Clam Bayou restoration, completed nearly 15 years ago. Inset: Protected waters sheltered by restored uplands are a popular spot for kayakers.

coastal uplands that offer habitat for a wide variety of birds, fish and crabs. Marshes that line the shore were among the first ever planted by volunteers from Tampa Bay Watch. Tiny oak trees planted nearly 15 years ago now offer a shady refuge for visitors and gazebos overlook the lagoon that's become a favorite spot for kayakers paddling its protected waters.

"When we finished it, a local resident approached us and asked why we couldn't do more," Henningsen said. Looking for suitable land and the funding to purchase it took a few years, but construction began on a second 10-acre parcel in 1999 in a partnership with the City of St. Petersburg.

Once planned for development as a second phase of the West Shore Village condominium at the end of 34th Avenue South, the land had been cleared and utilities installed. As it sat empty, invasive plants including Brazilian peppers, Australian pines and lead trees quickly became an impenetrable forest destroying whatever wildlife habitat might have been left. Drainage from nearby neighborhoods was washing through the property before it was dumped into Clam Bayou.

Rather than focusing on recreational opportunities, the second phase emphasizes stormwater treatment with innovative channels and weirs that capture stormwater and force it through a series of lagoons and chan-

nels to capture trash and contaminants before it overflows into the bayou.

The third and final phase, scheduled for completion later this year, is the largest and most challenging. Seven distinct sites include 20 acres of water treatment areas and 24 acres of upland habitat. "The lagoons are all linked by overflow weirs with skimmers that catch trash," said Janie Hagberg, the stormwater engineer who has been working on the Clam Bayou project since 2003. "The goal is to catch 90% of the trash before it enters the bayou."

The retrofit also will capture about 80% of suspended solids and about 60% of the nitrogen currently entering Clam Bayou, she adds. "It doesn't quite meet the 80% goal (for nutrients) but given the available land and the size of the basin area, it's the best we can do."

Like the earlier phases, water will be captured from current drainage systems that include lined canals designed to move water into the bayou as quickly as possible. Moving water more slowly, from a series of deep sumps and shallow ponds, then over weirs and through meandering streams allows sediments to settle and native plants to absorb excess nutrients.

While some residents question levels of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) found in Clam Bayou sediments, removing them would be prohibitively expensive and probably have more environmental impact

than leaving them in place, Henningsen said. "They'll disperse over time, as we are able to treat stormwater before it enters the bayou."

New research from the U.S. Geological Survey indicates that coal tar-based pavement sealant is the largest source of PAHs in urban lakes, he adds. "Clam Bayou has a large watershed with a number of parking lots that appear to be resealed on a regular basis," he said.

The recreational elements in the final phase will include opportunities for walkers and cyclists as well as kayakers and fishers. An extension of the Pinellas Trail will wind through the restored wetlands, including a "string of pearls" recreated in a mangrove forest that had been bisected by mosquito ditches.

"The goal is to create as much shoreline as possible because it's the most productive habitat," Henningsen said. Capturing stormwater for treatment also helps create low-salinity habitats that are necessary for the juvenile stage of nearly all commercially important fish, including snook and tarpon. Once construction on the lagoons is complete, sediments will be removed from a narrow channel to facilitate tidal flows into the bayou.

Construction at Clam Bayou will continue through this summer with a grand opening scheduled for the fall, Henningsen said. "It's the culmination of many years of work and a shining example of how urban estuaries can be restored."

Final Phase Underway at Cockroach Bay

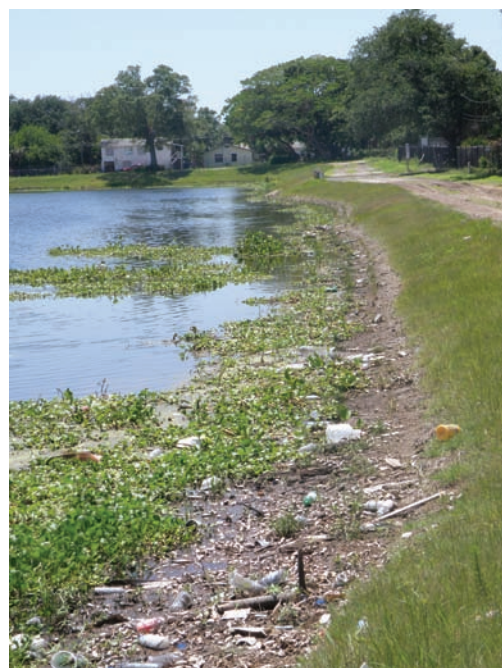
The Leisey Shell Pits near Ruskin — most well-known as a treasure trove of Ice Age fossils — will be restored as the final phase of construction at the Cockroach Bay Aquatic Preserve.

Once mined for shell used to build roads across the region and then slated for development, the land was purchased by the Hillsborough County's Environmental Lands Acquisition and Protection Program in 1991. But like Clam Bayou, restoration of Cockroach Bay has been a "pay as you go project," Henningsen quips.

The last phase of Cockroach Bay restoration will be performed by the Tampa Port Authority as mitigation for two new projects at the Port of Tampa. "They're mitigating for about 12 acres and we're getting 75 acres restored," he said.

Construction began in May and is expected to take about 10 months to complete.

Cockroach Bay is the centerpiece of a 20-mile corridor of nature and aquatic preserves bordering the eastern edge of Tampa Bay. The lands were largely purchased with ELAPP funding and restored through the water management district's SWIM program.



Trash from a 2400-acre watershed collects in Clam Bayou but the new stormwater treatment system will pre-treat about 90% of it.

Stewards Protect Beach-Nesting Birds

By Victoria Parsons

It's not much more than a line in the sand.

On one side, thousands of beachgoers romp on beautiful white sand beaches. Inside a roped-off sanctuary, hundreds of endangered birds are laying eggs, raising chicks or resting from their long migrations, just as they have for centuries.

In the middle, park rangers and volunteer stewards patrol the rope to protect the vulnerable habitat.

"The birds are running out of beach," says Saskia Janes, volunteer coordinator for the Suncoast Shorebird Partnership. "Even birds that are not officially listed as endangered have an uncertain future if their habitat has gone away."

Beach-nesting birds – including terns, willets, plovers, black skimmers and oystercatchers – don't build nests in the traditional sense. Instead, they dig shallow scrapes in the sand and depend upon camouflage for

protection from predators. That worked well before people discovered Florida's beaches but their nearly invisible nests are easy to destroy unintentionally.

And even if the nests are not disturbed, intrusions by people or pets may cause the birds to fly off, leaving eggs or chicks in the blazing hot sun with no protection from predators. Too much turmoil and the birds will abandon their nests.

Volunteer stewards on beaches from Naples north to Honeymoon Island patrol the edges of roped-off sanctuaries every weekend and holidays during the summer. "A lot of what we do is education," adds Marianne Korosy, important bird area coordinator for Audubon of Florida. "We tell them about nesting birds and explain why that part of the beach is closed – most people think it's really neat once they understand that the birds need this little bit of beach to survive."



Photo by Lorraine Margeson
A Wilson's plover sits on two eggs at Fort DeSoto Park. It's easy to see how well the eggs are camouflaged.



Photo by Saskia Janes

Native vegetation is rebounding at Fort DeSoto where the sanctuary is roped off year-round. Even on a beach, some birds, like the willet and chick shown above, prefer low-growing cover.



Photo by Lorraine Margeson

Black skimmers (above) and red knots share the shoreline at Fort DeSoto. About 75 pairs of skimmers are nesting at the park this year, but even small disturbances may cause their nests to fail. The red knots stopped to rest on their annual trip from the southern tip of South America north to breeding sites in the Arctic.



Thousands of beachgoers frolic at Fort DeSoto Park. Bird stewards are needed to help protect the adjacent sanctuary shown in inset.

Photos by Victoria Parsons

You can help!

Volunteer stewards are needed on beaches to work weekends and holidays from May through October, depending upon the birds' nesting schedules. No special training is necessary, but pre-registration is required.

Please contact the following coordinators:

- **Egmont Key:** Joyce Galiardo at galibird@tampabay.rr.com or 727-397-5305
- **Shell Key, Indian Shores and Fort DeSoto:** Saskia Janes at icegull@netzero.com or 727-481-7839

- **Honeymoon Island:** Karen Malo at Karen.Malo@dep.state.fl.us
- **North Pinellas County Beaches, Pasco and Manatee counties:** Marianne Korosy at mkorosy@audubon.org or 727-742-1683.

To sign up as a chick-checker for least terns nesting on rooftops through mid-July, contact Dave Kandz at conservation@stpeteaudubon.org or Beth Forsys at forysea@eckerd.edu.



Photo by Marianne Korosy

Two royal tern chicks, just days old, are barely visible under the adults at the left. About 350 pairs of royal terns are nesting at Three Rooker Bar, near Honeymoon Island.

Terns Turn to Rooftops

Least terns are taking the high road – nesting on flat white rooftops across Pinellas County instead of on its crowded beaches. Small but feisty birds usually found in colonies of 100 or more, the least terns have been nesting in an office park off Ulmerton Road for several years. This year, they're also nesting at a condominium in Shore Acres as well as the Lockheed-Martin and FedEx buildings in the Gateway Business Center.

While humans aren't usually a problem on rooftops, they're still not safe places for birds that typically nest on the ground. Five shifts of volunteers from St. Petersburg Audubon monitor the sites off Ulmerton Road daily looking for birds that fall off the roof or down drain pipes. If they're large enough, they're banded to indicate when and where they were hatched. They're placed back on the roof with a "chick-a-boom" that deposits baby birds without upsetting the colony.

The Gateway buildings are too high for the chick-a-boom, so engineers from Lockheed-Martin helped to design drain guards that prevent the birds from falling. Property Manager Kim Circello worked with Audubon to organize access so guards could be installed on all 81 drain pipes.

Volunteers spotted a very special bird among the estimated 100 nests at the Gateway site – a tern banded in 2009 just two miles away. "The banding project is giving us astounding least tern nesting data," said Audubon volunteer Lorraine Margeson. It's also thrilling for volunteers to see the long-term impact of their action. "The birds we banded had no chance of survival if we hadn't been there to save them," adds Margeson.



A bird banded near Ulmerton Road in 2009 was spotted on a rooftop at Gateway Business Park earlier this summer.



Photo by Victoria Parsons

A spotting scope at the edge of the sanctuary allows beachgoers a glimpse of the nesting birds without disturbing them.

Consequences

Continued from page 1

big holiday parties must feel like a Las Vegas buffet to the local wildlife opportunists. This junk food fest used to be easier to manage when the park had 68 workers, but with budget cuts, everything is now done by a crew of 28, which makes clean-up a slower process.

At the same time, raccoons are being forced into parks and preserves as their home ranges are being reduced. As anyone who has ever lived near a raccoon will attest, they leave trails of destruction wherever they go. People are not tolerant of these food bandits living in their neighborhoods, so they end up congregating in our nature preserves.

Raccoons are notoriously omnivorous scavengers with an excellent sense of smell. Studies that compare the density of opportunistic species show greatly increased populations in picnic areas versus pristine natural areas. What are they eating? You guessed it. Raccoon autopsies reveal that human junk food accounts for a significant portion of their diet. Think about that next time you see a fat raccoon.



Photo Courtesy
Christina Evans, ChromaGraphics Studios
A Ft. DeSoto raccoon drops into his favorite fast food restaurant.

While the state's total population of raccoons has not increased, their density has grown significantly in these parkland "ghettos," where continued population growth is limited only by the availability of food. In addition to picnic refuse, these ravenous creatures supplement their natural diet of crabs and shellfish with the eggs of turtles and ground-nesting seabirds.

Our wasteful food habits are changing the food web in other ways as well. Common house mice and the black rat are among histo-

ry's most notorious human companions. They compete aggressively with the naturally occurring Sanibel rice rats – a gentle, little creature that creates softball-sized nests among the marsh reeds. Additionally, a booming population of invasive rodents attracts red and grey foxes and the common coyote.

The absence of natural apex predators such as panthers and red wolves has contributed to the marked increase in coyotes throughout Florida. As early as 1998, studies showed coyote populations were up to 13% more dense near beach areas. Coyotes are found in every Florida county from the northern border to the southern mangroves where fiddler crabs hide among the mangrove roots. Coyotes eat fiddler crabs, but they also love mice and rats, and will cheerfully attack a bag of ripe, abandoned garbage.

Coyotes snuck into Pinellas County about 20 years ago, but it wasn't until recently that sightings were documented in Ft. DeSoto Park. Unlike humans, coyotes seldom overpopulate their home area. When food gets scarce females produce smaller litters. However, judging by the increase in coyote sightings, there's been plenty of opportunity to grow their litters on the junk food habit.

Scientists note that the primary reason for the growing number of scavengers is our own careless house-keeping. Simply tossing a half-eaten chicken bone into a bush is an open invitation to a rat, raccoon or hungry coyote.

And that's before taking into account what happens when we carelessly dispose of other trash. Innocuous small pieces of plastic like balloons, empty bags or hair bands can constrict the digestive systems of animals that accidentally consume them, or toxic refuse like chocolate and cigarette butts may be poisoning them.

I DON'T CARE HOW CUTE THEY ARE— DON'T FEED THE ANIMALS!

Visit any boat ramp where the anglers clean their catch, and you'll see a congregation of begging birds. Pelicans, herons and gulls – it seems so harmless to toss them the miscellaneous fish parts.

But Cameron Guenther, a research scientist for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute, warns that an innocent fish skeleton causes both long- and short-term problems.

"While the impulse to feed these funny creatures is strong, the result is that grown birds

Community Guidelines for Discouraging Coyotes & Raccoons

- 1 Avoid feeding pets outside. If outside feeding is necessary, remove food and water bowls as soon as your pet has finished eating.
- 2 Keep bird feeders high and out of reach. Remove the fruit falling from your trees on a daily basis.
- 3 You may need to dispose of meat and fish scraps in closed bins.
- 4 Keep all trash in high-quality containers with tightly closing lids. Freeze particularly fragrant refuse until your trash pick-up day.
- 5 Keep your dogs, particularly small ones, on a leash and do not allow them to free-roam. They could end up as coyote fast food.

It's important to note that raccoons, coyotes, skunks, foxes and other carnivorous mammals are susceptible to rabies. Be sure to report any suspicious behavior to animal control authorities.



FAST FOOD WEB – what parties leave behind on the beach is changing the diets of animals in our native food web.

Artwork: Sigrid Tidmore
www.SigridTidmore.com

become inefficient and lazy predators. Weak birds aren't eliminated from the gene pool and most troubling, the birds become overly socialized towards humans. They'll swallow any catch anywhere -- hook, line and sinker."

It's not uncommon to find a "pet" blue heron roaming around local beaches or motel pools begging for hot dogs. Many people enjoy feeding wildlife because it allows them to have close contact with the animals, or they feel they are helping them survive. But experience shows that it almost always leads to problems for both the animals and humans.

Most conscientious fishermen know not to feed the wild dolphins. However, in an odd twist of unintended consequences, there is now some anecdotal evidence that dolphins follow sport fishermen as they play deep sea fish to the point of submission. When the fishermen release their exhausted prey, the tired fish becomes an easy catch for the clever dolphins. Unfortunately, it's another example of how our play may be penalizing an important animal species.

OUR PET PREDATORS

Sometimes it is actually the animal lovers that inadvertently cause wild animals distress. Our domesticated pets belong in our homes and under our control. When they are allowed to roam in the wild, they quickly follow their natural instincts and become destructive.

"House cats are the greatest threat to small mammals along our beaches," says Melissa Tucker, a specialist in species conservation planning with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. "One feral cat can wipe out fauna in an entire dune system, including ground-nesting birds, mice and even the plentiful Eastern cottontail rabbit."

Studies done in northwest Florida showed that beach mice populations were severely impacted in dune habitats located near residential areas. Tracks of house cats correlated with the total elimination of the mice in seven of the 21 areas being monitored over a year's time.

The American Bird Conservancy estimates that millions of shorebirds are killed annually by cats and they are running a campaign to educate pet owners to make their kitties inside pets. Ironically, many of us who love birds put out feeders to attract them, never realizing we are placing them in danger of our free-roaming housecat.

The primary challenge for dog lovers is keeping their pets under control in estuary and beach areas. Nearly every preserve manager has seen the inadvertent damage created by frolicking dogs who were allowed to run off-leash in bird-nesting areas.

"They just don't see what they're stepping on," says Richard Sullivan of Cockroach Bay. "I know what oystercatcher nests look like, and even I have a problem stepping carefully over them." (See nest photo)

Reasons to NOT Feed the Wildlife

- 1 When young wild animals are taught to depend on a human-provided food source, they may not fully develop essential foraging skills.**
- 2 Wild animals that are used to being fed by humans commonly lose their fear of people – an important survival trait. They may be harmed when their begging is misunderstood, harassed by dogs, or hit by cars.**
- 3 The food humans usually feed to wild animals is not nutritionally complete, and it can cause serious health**
- 4 A constant, human-provided food source may attract many more wild animals to the area than would normally be found there. Disease can spread much more quickly among animals when they gather artificially for food.**
- 5 Reproduction rates may also be affected when an unnatural food source is readily available. Animals may produce too many young than what the area can support.**

Camouflaged eggs are barely visible in this oystercatcher ground nest.



Even if the dog avoids stepping on the nest, being disturbed is a traumatic event for a shorebird. When parents are chased off their nests, eggs may bake in the summer's heat and the chicks may die of exposure or become a meal for other predatory birds. Many times, the birds that a dog playfully chases down the beach are resting after very long flights – perhaps thousands of miles. When boaters innocently take their pets with them to isolated barrier islands or rookery areas, they create havoc among the flock that will last long after they've gone home.

Bird populations are under stress from so many directions: habitat destruction, predation and disease. To further stress these greatly diminished species with our pets' play may be all it takes to push them out of the food web and into extinction.

(To read more about beach bird conservation efforts, see pages 8 and 9 in this issue.)

THE TRUTH ABOUT NIGHT LIGHTS

Light pollution is a hard concept to tackle because most people believe that light is benign. After all, what difference does one light make outside by the pool? As it turns out – LOTS!

The introduction of artificial light into wildlife habitats represents a profound encroachment, particularly in coastal areas. There has been a great deal of attention focused on the altered behavior of sea turtles during nesting and hatchling dispersal – and most areas now require less invasive low pres-

sure sodium vapor lights where turtles are likely to nest.

However, there are less publicized, but equally disruptive effects of night lighting on beach communities. Many small species experience a disruption of foraging behavior due to their increased fear of predation. In the humble beach mouse, for instance, scientists have shown that lighting disrupts their circadian clock, changes hormone production and renders them less able to hunt for food. Many small animals feed less during full moons to avoid being seen by predators. When we light up our beaches, it's likely that a wide variety of prey species will become chronically underfed.

Other animals may become disoriented by artificial light because their eyes have rudimentary cone systems that do not adjust to glare. This is why so many creatures freeze in car headlights and become roadkill. Lighting can affect the navigation systems of migratory birds and even bats, causing them to fly widely off course.

Moving lower down the food web, studies now suggest that light pollution around lakes and shores prevent zooplankton from eating surface algae, potentially boosting the algal blooms that kill off fish and lower water quality.

It has been documented that nighttime lights interfere with the ability of moths and

other nocturnal insects to navigate. Many night-blooming flowers depend on these insects to pollinate them. In my own backyard, I have noticed that my night-blooming cactus no longer produce fruit after the flower falls off. This type of species decline in plants can change an area's fundamental long-term ecology – and all because we wanted another light for our patio.

TURN IT DOWN

No article about our beach playtime would be complete without mentioning music – or some might say -- loud noise. Jet skis, motor boats, boom boxes and motorcycles – the racket we create in the name of fun has left many beach species disoriented and distressed.

Brandt Henningsen, chief environmental scientist at Southwest Florida Water Management District, tells a story that highlights the competing issues between our desire to play in nature and give nature back its independence.

Recently, 2500 acres of abandoned mines became the largest coastal restoration area to be planned in Tampa Bay. Known as the "Rock Ponds" it is being designed with both intertidal and coastal uplands – perfect for a productive bird rookery. You can imagine the preserve managers' surprise when a public user group petitioned the county commission to use the property as an airfield for flying model airplanes. The noisy engine sounds would have undone years of careful habitat restoration. Fortunately, in this case, another, more appropriate site was found, but this is exemplary of the kind of choice we are being asked to make more often: The right to use our green spaces versus leaving them in natural isolation.

WE HAVE MET THE ENEMY – COULD IT BE US?

As the old adage goes, too much of a good thing can turn bad. In some notable places, the onslaught of nature-loving visitors is steadily eroding the very ecosystems that ecotourism intends to protect. Visitors are trampling, polluting and gobbling up scarce resources in fragile habitats.

In a time when we find predators eating our junk food and native field mice unable to eat at all, we need to take a closer look at our activities. In the name of play and relaxation, we are over-using and under-appreciating what we have. The paradox is that only by publicizing the precious nature of our natural resources can we raise a wider awareness that could prevent its destruction.

We have a difficult dilemma: Learning to enjoy nature without interfering with it.

Bay Sounding readers – you are the ones who must set the example, spread the word, and herald in a more conscious play relationship with our precious natural environment. Share your thoughts and examples with us online by emailing editor@baysoundings.com.



Photo: Sigrid Tidmore

Light pollution can ward off the insects that pollinate night-blooming plants.

Adopt-A-Pond

Continued from page 1

Now that I'm retired, I had the time and energy to devote to a project such as getting the pond back to its natural state. Make no mistake, it was a lot of work, but like everything else in life – “Isn't anything of value a result of passionate work?”

Community Involvement Works Both Ways

The first step in restoring our pond was to get the backing of our homeowners association, its wetlands advisory committee, and the regional water management district. Because it was going to beautify the neighborhood and increase property values, management was all for it – as long as we didn't want much money. We did discover that condo folks are more than happy to buy plants, because it contributes to the morale of the development as well as increasing property values.

People feel a part of a project when they know what's going on and why. Because transforming a pond is a long-term affair, it's important to transfer your vision of how the pond will look in the future. I publish a quarterly report that's posted on the board of each building. It lists the accomplishments of the last quarter, but more importantly, outlines planned activities for the future.

The report is in a bullet format so it's easy to read and it explains why I do certain things. For instance, we built some islands by scooping up the muck from the bottom. Some folks thought this was a lot of work, but the islands serve several purposes -- a place to raise plants without the threat of invasive weeds as well as serving as a nesting place for waterfowl, unreachable by humans and other predators.

It should also address who has oversight over the project and emphasize the importance of rules, such as the requirement for

using Florida native plants. Because the pond is part of the greater multi-county watershed and we live in an ecosystem where exotic plants and animals take over, we are only allowed to plant native, non-invasive plants.

Native plants are not always showy. They come with descriptive names though, such as mexicana (yellow) and fragrant (white) water lily, pickerelweed (the pretty purple-spiked flower), spatterdock (the lily with yellow flowers), duck potato (with white flowers on stalks) and southern blue flag, a native species of the well-known iris.

At first we were a receptor of plants, but now we serve as a source for other ponds, supplying plants chosen for pollution-filtering characteristics and contributions to wildlife. We've supplied water lilies, pickerelweed and canna plants for four other ponds in our complex and I'm working with another building to develop a plan to rejuvenate their pond. We also have plenty of yellow lilies and horse-tail reed available to anyone who can use them in their pond.

The Delights of "Owning" Your Own Pond

Along with looking good for the people who live nearby, a top priority for our pond is providing a haven for waterfowl. Across Florida, there has been significant habitat lost to development. I have taken what's called an "adaptive management strategy" to restoring the pond, a practice common in conservation projects. Small changes are introduced and then monitored for effect, allowing the plan to evolve based on the success or failure of different aspects.

When I visit my doctor, he always asks "How much do you exercise each week?" He's shocked when I say about 10 hours, but it's my hobby. Anything worthwhile comes with challenges. Make no mistake, restoring a pond is hard work, more at the start, then



Have I shown you my baby moorhens? Imagine the joy of watching your baby ducklings hatch. You guard and enjoy them as only a grandparent could. Just as you would enjoy a vegetable garden, a pond can yield hours of delight as you see your pond come alive. And – the animals are a joy rather than a nuisance!

less on maintenance. It's an all-over work-out too -- bending, digging, weeding, walking. I would have to pay a monthly fee to receive the same work-out that I get for free at my "pond gymnasium."

It's also exercise with a purpose, an outcome that helps maintain my health, enhances my neighborhood and provides critical wildlife habitat. Working in the pond gives you a great chance to meet neighbors who know you as the "pond guy." You also get to watch the animals around you, especially during mating season. When baby black fluffballs follow their mama moorhen across the pond, you'll find yourself proudly sharing photos of your "pond grandkids."

The Mechanics of Pond Balance

Adopting a pond causes you to "really" look at other ponds more closely. What are the qualities you want in your pond? You imagine what some ponds could look like if they were adopted. It is a commitment. It's also a two-edged sword. If it doesn't succeed, it is evident to everyone. If it succeeds, it is a treasure.

I've discovered several secrets that have helped:

- Forming islands helps to provide a barrier to weeds while allowing me to devote each island to specific plants. It's a matter of balance to achieve the right amount of plants and animals to sustain a mini-ecosphere.
- Be patient as it simply takes time. It will take several years to manually "undo" what has been chemically "done" for so many years. You can't turn a neglected eyesore around in a few months.
- It also takes scheduling. It's a waste to stock fish until cover has been provided. Water lilies have proven to be great, offering cover for fish hiding from herons and egrets, as well as a nursery area for the fish. They also filter sunlight and lower water temperature to decrease algae growth.
- Similarly you can't expect birds to nest until you provide vegetated islands they need



with food and protection from predators.

- Once you hit the "turning point," you'll see that everything builds onto something else. For example, large populations of snails eat algae to help keep the pond water clear and also serve as a food source for water fowl and turtles.

Hope Springs Eternal

Those of you who have had gardens know how it feels as Spring approaches. You eye the seed catalogues, dreaming of what your garden will look like. For the pond, you find yourself looking forward to spring blossoms, seeking out new plants, weeding, dividing plants and, of course, controlling algae. Just as it was with your garden, all your efforts won't be successful. Some plants will fail, others will succeed. With summer comes algae growth. But just when it seems unbearable, temperatures drop and the algae growth subsides. It's time to rest and plan for the next year.

Ernie Franke is an electrical engineer who retired from Raytheon in St. Petersburg and began working on "his pond" in October 2009. He's been so successful at The Shores that he has extra plants available for residents of other communities. Contact him via email at efranke@tampabay.rr.com or call 727-393-8639.

Learn more!

Pinellas County Watershed Management: call 727-464-4425 or visit www.pinellascounty.org/environment/watershed/adopt-pond.htm.

Hillsborough County: call 813-635-5400 or visit www.hillsboroughcounty.org/publicworks/engineering/stormwater/adoptapond.cfm.

Pasco County: call 813-929-0114 or visit www.adoptapondpasco.org.

Funding for community ponds also is available through the Southwest Florida Water Management District's Community Education Grants. See related story on page 6.



Native plants ring the pond, providing habitat for fish, birds and turtles.

Backbay Adventures

Continued from page 16

If you have a boat, or want to make a day of snorkeling, visit Egmont Key, the historic island at the mouth of Tampa Bay. Healthy seagrass beds off the island's eastern shore are home to an amazing variety of wildlife, from dolphins and manatees to small fish and crabs as well as more-exotic sea anemone and colorful sponges and an occasional shark.

Off the western shore, where erosion has wiped out nearly a third of the island's land-mass, ruins of historic Fort Dade rise from the bottom of the sea. The stone buildings, originally built to defend the region during the Spanish-American War, resemble even more ancient structures from an underwater vantage. The vertical walls in deeper water attract different kinds of wildlife, including mackerel and barracuda feeding on forage fish that dart past in giant schools.

The southern tip of Egmont is a year-round bird sanctuary. Beach-nesting birds line the shoreline during summer months. Migratory birds, including the distinctive roseate spoon-bills and white pelicans, fly in for the winter. They can be seen from a boat offshore but access is strictly prohibited. (Learn more about beach-nesting birds on pages 8 and 9.)

Other favorite places for snorkeling in Tampa Bay include:

- Fort De Soto Park, particularly the seagrass beds off the less crowded south beach area.
- The Pinellas Point area of St. Petersburg where three waterfront parks allow easy access almost any time. Onshore, history buffs will want to visit the Pinellas Point Temple Mound built by prehistoric Indians about 600 A.D.
- Cockroach Bay Aquatic Preserve features deep grass flats.
- Weedon Island wraps around several protected coves with healthy seagrass beds.
- Bishop Harbor at Terra Ceia Preserve State Park just south of the Manatee County line now includes a paved parking area with boat access for smaller boats and kayaks.
- Fred Howard Park in Tarpon Springs where you can just wade out to grass flats from the beach area.
- Caladesi Island, accessible only by boat but regular ferry service is available, has several designated swimming areas.

If your favorite location isn't included, please email us at editor@baysoundings.com. We'll include your comments on the *Bay Soundings* webpage.

Stay Safe While Snorkeling

Boaters in Tampa Bay generally are not used to seeing people submerged in the water outside of designated swimming areas at bay-front parks. And it's often difficult for boaters to see snorkelers. Make sure you're visible!

- State law requires a dive flag (red, with a white diagonal stripe) to be displayed aboard any boat used by snorkelers. The flag must be 20 x 24 inches and displayed on wire or other stiffener to hold it fully unfurled and extended in the absence of a wind or breeze.
- A personal dive flag is a great idea. These are smaller versions of the standard "divers-down" flag that are attached to a float

and can be towed behind a snorkeler while in the water. Divers-down flags for boats and individuals can be purchased at any dive shop.

- Don't stray too far from the boat. Stick your head up frequently to see where boats are, and how far you are from shore or your own boat. Stay out of marked navigation channels.
- Weather can change quickly in Florida. Be aware of approaching storms and get off the water before they arrive.
- If you're in an area with a strong current, be sure to have a safety line from you to your boat or snorkel up-current from the boat.

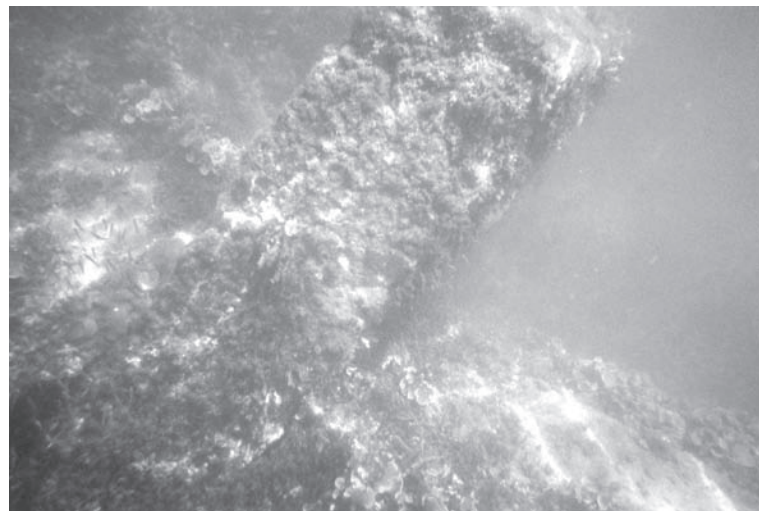


Photo by Dylan Ammons
Barnacle-encrusted ruins off Egmont Key look far older than they really are. Structures on the island were built to defend the region during the Spanish-American War. Erosion on the west side of the island has left some of the historic buildings underwater.



Photo by Victoria Parsons

The ruins of an historic fort are a popular site for divers in Tampa Bay. Although the western shoreline is eroding away, other structures on the island are in remarkably good shape considering their age. Egmont Key Alliance hosts "Discover the Island" on the second weekend of November, with costumed volunteers sharing stories of how buildings on the island were used. The lower levels of the lighthouse also will be open.



Save the Date

Continued from page 16

the Tampa Bay Estuary Program to monitor scallop populations.

Once plentiful in Tampa Bay, scallops are extremely sensitive to water quality and practically disappeared for many years. As water quality improved, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute began restocking Tampa Bay. The number of scallops discovered during the search rebounded from 75 in 1996 to a record-setting 674 in 2009.

Last year only 32 scallops were found as part of the search, but scientists are hopeful that weather conditions caused the problem and the scallops will return to their 2009 levels. "We had a lot of rain right before last year's search and the run-off really made the visibility drop," notes Kevin Misiewicz, TBW environmental scientist. "We had some people saying they couldn't see much more than a foot in front of them."

The rain may also have caused water temperature in the bay to drop temporarily which could have pushed the scallops into spawning early, Misiewicz said. Like salmon, scallops die after they spawn.

It's difficult to predict what searchers will discover this year, he adds. "We've seen some small scallops already – hopefully there are a lot more out there just hiding until they've grown up some."

Scallops are bivalves in the same family as oysters and clams. They spend their



Photo by istockphoto.com

Most people recognize scallops as a tasty treat, but their filter-feeding ability also makes them important to underwater ecosystems. An adult scallop can filter about 15 quarts of water per hour, improving water quality in the seagrass beds that shelter them.

short lives – about 12 to 18 months – living, feeding and growing in seagrass beds. While they're only about three inches across at maturity, a line of about 60 bright-blue eyes lining their mantle makes them easy to distinguish.

Participation in the Great Bay Scallop Search is limited to 35 boats and 150-200 swimmers with registration open on a first-come, first-served basis beginning about the middle of July. Fifty meter transect lines are laid across seagrass beds and snorkelers count the scallops they sight within one meter of each side of the line. A limited number of kayaks may participate, and snorkelers without boats may be matched with open space on registered boats. To register, or to be notified when registration opens, visit www.tampabaywatch.org.

QUARTERLY CALENDAR

The quarterly calendar lists some of our favorite events and top trips but there are dozens more events listed online at www.baysoundings.com where you will also find more complete information on each of these events. The calendar is compiled far in advance so we strongly suggest that you contact the sponsoring organization prior to the event. Some events may have fees for participation.

july

July 15, 6:30-9:30pm, Evening Paddle to Tarpon Key and Whale Island with Sweetwater Kayaks. Register at 727-403-7046 or <http://BigDsKayaking.com/Register%20Online.html>.

July 16, 7-9pm, Batty for Bats presentation at Little Manatee River State Park near Sun City Center. Reservations suggested, call 813-671-5005.

July 16, 9am-noon, Combination compost and rain barrel workshops at Manatee County Extension in Palmetto. Registration required, call 941-722-4524.

July 16, 9:30-11am, Backyard Composting Workshop, Pinellas Extension Service, Largo. Registration required, visit www.pinellascountyextension.org or call 727-582-2100.

July 16, 11:15am-12:15pm, Rain Harvesting, Pinellas County Extension. Registration required, visit www.pinellascountyextension.org or call 727-582-2100.

July 16, Noon-3pm, Discover Our Coastal Classroom – Nature and Culture with Your Child, Weedon Island Preserve. For more information, call 727-453-6500.

July 17, 7am, Tour Coquina Beach near Bradenton with Tampa Audubon Society. Registration required, call 813-935-6115 or email keithma1@juno.com.

July 19, 6-8:30pm, Low Down on Lawn Irrigation, Manatee County Extension. Registration required, call 941-722-4524.

July 19, 6-7:30pm, SciCafé, Japan Tsunami: The Science Behind Tsunamis and its Aftermath, The Hangar Restaurant and Flight Lounge, St. Petersburg. RSVP: www.pieraquarium.org/tsunamiscicafe or estehle@pieraquarium.org.

July 20, 9-11:30am, Bucket Brigade: Container Gardening, Manatee County Extension. Registration required, 941-722-4524.

July 23, 8-10am, Photography Hike, Weedon Island Preserve. Registration required, www.pinellascountyextension.org or 727-453-6500.

July 23, 10am-noon, Going Coastal: What's in the Water?, Weedon Island Preserve. Registration required, www.pinellascountyextension.org or 727-582-2100.



Safe Boating classes are offered year-round by the Coast Guard Auxiliary at convenient locations across the Tampa Bay region. Several of the courses run continuously so boaters can select a course and a location that fits their schedule. The courses meet state rules that require boaters born after Jan. 1, 1988 to complete an approved safe boating program. For more information, visit www.baysoundings.com/Quarterly-Calendar.asp.

Ongoing Events

Through Nov. 30, Tampa Bay: 20/20. Traveling photo exhibit featuring 20 images by local photographers celebrates the 20th anniversary of Tampa Bay Estuary Program. July 25-Aug. 26 at Mosaic Co. in Riverview, Sept. 1-30 at South Shore Regional Library in Ruskin and Oct. 10-Nov. 30 at Florida Aquarium in Tampa. Contact 727-893-2765 or www.tbep.org.

Most Saturdays, 9-11am, Guided Hikes at Brooker Creek Preserve in Tarpon Springs and Weedon Island Preserve in St. Petersburg. Registration required, www.pinellascountyextension.org or call 727-582-2100 for Brooker Creek, 727-453-6500 for Weedon Island.

July 25 to 29, Wildlife Ecology Day Camp at Brooker Creek Preserve. One-week field camp for children ages seven to 11. Contact George@heinrichecologicalservices.com or 727-865-6255.

July 27, 10am-noon, Fall Gardening, Manatee County Extension office. Registration required, 94-722-4524.

July 30, 2-3pm, The Owl Cast Café, Weedon Island Preserve, Registration required, www.pinellascountyextension.org or 727-582-2100.

august

Aug. 3, 6-7pm, Grant writing workshop for Tampa Bay Estuary Program Mini-Grant program, Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council. Contact misty@tbep.org or 727-893-2765.

Aug. 3, 10:00am-noon, Rain Barrel Workshop at Manatee County Extension. Registration required, 941-722-4524.

Aug. 5 & 6, 8th Annual Heart's Breath Flute Extravaganza, Children's Storytelling, Drumming and Flute Workshops with an indigenous sounds concert Friday evening. Weedon Island Preserve, call 727-453-6500 or visit www.weedonislandpreserve.org.

First Saturdays, 8-11am, Bird Walk with St. Petersburg Audubon Society at Boyd Hill Nature Preserve, St. Petersburg. Contact 727-526-3725 or focus997@verizon.net. Or tour Moccasin Lake Nature Park with Clearwater Audubon Society. Visit www.clearwateraudubon.org or call 727-518-6241.

Second Saturdays, program for beginning birders at Lettuce Lake Park through Tampa Audubon Society. Visit www.tampaaudubon.org.

Second and fourth Thursdays, Book Time at Brooker Creek Preserve, Weedon Island Preserve. Visit www.pinellascountyextension.org or call 727-582-2100 for Brooker Creek,

727-453-6500 for Weedon Island.

2nd Thursdays, Agency on Bay Management meeting, Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council, Pinellas Park. Call 727-570-5151 ext. 32 or email suzanne@tbrpc.org.

2nd and 4th Saturday of each month, Get your gardening questions answered with Manatee Master Gardeners at the Rocky Bluff Branch Library in Ellenton.

July 17 – Aug. 31, guided kayak trips to some of the region's most spectacular sites with naturalists from the American Littoral Society. Visit www.sealitsoc.org for dates and locations or call John Sarkozy at 941-966-7308 for reservations.

at the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council. Visit www.tbep.org.

Aug. 13, 2-3pm, Florida's Wildlife Predators...and Their Prey, Weedon Island Preserve. Registration required, visit www.pinellascountyextension.org or 727-582-2100.

Aug. 17, 10am-noon, Much About Mulch at Manatee County Extension. Registration required, call 941-722-4524.

Aug. 19, 7:00pm, Tampa Audubon Society presents Frolicking with Frogs at Little Manatee River State Park. Registration required, call 813-205-1851 or email webmaster@tampaaudubon.org.

Aug. 23, 1:30-4:30pm, Landscaping on Reduced Water Use. Manatee County Extension. Registration required, call 941-722-4524.

Aug. 24, 9-11:30am, Bucket Brigade: Container Gardening. Manatee County Extension. Registration required, call 941-722-4524.

Aug. 27, 8-10am, Photography Hike, Weedon Island Preserve. Registration required, www.pinellascountyextension.org or 727-453-6500.

september

Sept. 3, 10:30am-noon, Book Nook by the Bay, The Pier Aquarium. Visit www.pieraquarium.org.

Sept. 9-11, Tampa Boat Show. For more information, visit TampaBoatShow.com or call 954-441-3227.

Sept. 13, 7:30pm, Propagating plants, presentation at the monthly meeting of Pasco chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society, St. Mark's Presbyterian Church. Visit www.pasconativeplants.org.

Sept. 17, 8:30am-12:30pm; Paddle Sport Seminar for kayakers and canoeists, both beginners and experienced at the Coast Guard Auxiliary building near the Gandy boat ramp. Program includes information on local "hot spots" as well as safety techniques. Register auxpaddlecourse@yahoo.com or 813-835-4118.

Sept. 18, North American Migration Count. To volunteer in Pinellas County, contact 727-527-0227 x253.

Sept. 25, 8am, Count migrating birds with St. Petersburg Audubon at Fort DeSoto Park.

Sept. 28, 3-5pm, Tampa Bay Estuary Program Community Advisory Committee, Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council. Contact 727-893-2765 or www.tbep.org.

october

Oct. 8, 8am, John Chesnut County Park Birdwatching Walk, Clearwater Audubon Society. Visit www.clearwateraudubon.org.

Oct. 8, 6-10pm, 18th Annual Fish Head Ball: FISH-A-Palooza RockStar at the Don CeSar on St. Petersburg Beach to benefit The Pier Aquarium. Email 2011fhhb@pieraquarium.org.

Oct. 11, 7:30pm, "Native Plant Landscaping for Florida Wildlife," presentation by Craig Huegel (see Bay Soundings, Spring 2011) at the Pasco Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society, www.pasconativeplants.org.

Oct. 12, 6pm, Evening Tide Talk, Florida Aquarium, "Restoring Tampa Bay," with Holly Greening, executive director of the Tampa Bay Estuary Program. Call 813-273-4015 or visit www.flaquarium.org.

Oct. 15, 9am, Big Birds for Beginners at McGough Nature Park in Largo, Clearwater Audubon Society. Visit www.clearwateraudubon.com or call 727-596-8822.

Oct. 15, 8am-noon, Give A Day for the Bay, invasive plant removal at Perico Park in Manatee County. Registration required, 727-893-2765 or Colleen@tbep.org.

Bay Soundings Looks to the Future: Confirming Current Subscribers, Reaching out to New Readers

This issue marks the ninth anniversary of *Bay Soundings*, a milestone that's nearly matched by our growth in circulation over those years.

As we look toward the future in a challenging economic climate, we realized we need to back up and make sure that everyone on our mailing lists still wants to be here. *Bay Soundings* is printed and mailed as inexpensively as possible so we use bulk rate mailing. The downside of bulk mail is that we aren't automatically notified when someone moves or changes their job address.

- We're also finalizing plans for three new initiatives:
- First we'd like to expand print distribution beyond our current locations. Check www.baysoundings.com for a list of current distribution sites, and then let us know if you have any ideas about where we should be delivering bulk copies. The possibilities are endless – auto mechanics, dentists, restaurants, schools or civic organizations. The goal is to find “champions” who make sure *Bay Soundings* is displayed and let us know when copies are running low.
 - To make it easier to share our stories, we're adding Facebook and Twitter buttons to the website as well as

posting PDFs that allow you to print stories on standard office paper to share with friends who prefer paper.

- We'll also make our website more interactive and provide more hyperlinks for in-depth information. We're already getting about 200,000 hits per month and several surveys show that many people prefer to receive publications on-line instead of in the mail. We're still working out the details on exactly how those changes will occur – please let us know what you think.

Over the next six months, we're asking that everyone who receives a print edition of *Bay Soundings* by mail contact us to confirm that their address is correct and that they would like to continue receiving a mailed copy. To sign up online, visit www.tbrpc.org/baysoundings or complete the subscription form below.

Send the completed form to:
Suzanne Cooper, *Bay Soundings* Manager
Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council
4000 Gateway Centre Blvd., #100
Pinellas Park, FL 33782
Fax - 727-570-5118
Call 727-570-5151 x 32 with questions

Letters to the Editor

Re: Marine Debris: Local Solutions to a Global Problem

For an excellent view of the problem on a national and global scale I would call your attention to an excellent, new book - "Moby-Duck" written by Donovan Hohn. He uses the loss of a ship's container full of plastic toys in the Pacific Ocean (and the later recovery of individual items) as a guide to his understanding of the flotsam and jetsam problem.

Art Eggers

Re: The Real Cost of Fertilizer

I was disappointed in your recent article "The Real Cost of Fertilizer." While we all can agree on the need for clean water, the article lacked the objectivity and balance I have come to expect from *Bay Soundings*. Although my company is a fertilizer manufacturer (and the turf grass market is not our normal market), there was minimal discussion about the successful efforts to manage nutrients by the Tampa Bay Estuary Program and the successful implementation of public-private partnerships. There was no discussion of IFAS studies regarding the unintended consequences of fertilizer bans. There was no discussion of increases in seagrass populations in the Tampa and Sarasota estuaries, improvements which happened well before the implementation of fertilizer ordinances being touted. Nutrient levels in Tampa Bay have been going down, not up, when you look at historical trends of more than one year. In the interest of fairness, I would hope you would consider giving equal coverage to these issues in some future issue. In the final analysis, clean water and sound management of turf grass and fertilizer are both achievable and we hope future coverage will reflect that.

Richard Ghent
Director of Community Affairs, CF Industries

We respond:

Thank you for commenting on our fertilizer story. As you correctly point out, *Bay Soundings* consistently focuses on the successful efforts to manage nutrients that have made Tampa Bay one of few urban estuaries in the world where water quality is improving – including the significant contributions made by the phosphate industry. We also pointed out that water quality is improving in Tampa Bay in this story, and included a list of nutrient sources that makes it clear that fertilizer is not the only issue.

Some of those articles include a Spring 2008 story on the nitrogen management consortium, (<http://baysoundings.com/Spring08/Stories/NitrogenConsortium.asp>) and an article on the consortium's landmark agreement with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (<http://www.bay-soundings.com/winter2011/Stories/TampaBay-Consortium-Reaches-Landmark-Agreement.asp>) in our last issue.

The point of the story on fertilizer was to make people think through the impact of their actions. And despite all the reductions in nitrogen loadings in Tampa Bay, nitrogen remains the bay's most harmful and pervasive pollutant. The agreement with state and federal regulators and the Tampa Bay Nitrogen Management Consortium acknowledges that Tampa Bay is at capacity for nitrogen. Any new nitrogen loads must be offset by reductions in existing loads. There is no room for growth without reducing current nitrogen loads. That is a major reason local governments support residential fertilizer ordinances. They can prevent nitrogen from entering waterways or they can clean it up on the back end at considerable expense to taxpayers.

We'll look forward to covering more stories on the successes of Tampa Bay. I know we share the same commitment to a beautiful bay surrounded by eco-friendly landscapes.

Let us know how you want to read Bay Soundings!

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A BIG THANKS

to the following sponsors for making *Bay Soundings* possible with our deepest appreciation for your commitment to celebrating and preserving Florida's largest open-water estuary.

**Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council
Tampa Bay Estuary Program**

**The Southwest Florida Water Management District and its Alafia River,
Hillsborough River, Pinellas-Anclote River and Manasota Basin Boards**

Florida Department of Transportation, District 7

If you or your company would like information on becoming a sponsor of *Bay Soundings*, please contact Suzanne Cooper at the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council, 727-570-5151, ext. 32, or email suzanne@tbrpc.org

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BACKBAY
Adventures

Photo by Victoria Parsons

Like many long-time residents, Dylan (above) and Kane Ammons had never been diving in Tampa Bay. The ruins off Egmont Key were a great place to introduce good swimmers to the wonders of the bay.

Tampa Bay may not rank with the Florida Keys or the Cayman Islands as an international dive destination, but improvements in water quality over the last 20 years have made the bay in our backyard a great place to spend a day.

With an average depth of just 12 feet, Tampa Bay is an easy dive for almost anyone. Even if you're not an expert swimmer, you can see an abundance of marine life just hanging on to a noodle float and drifting over seagrass beds with a facemask and snorkel.

But while the diving is easy, photography is far more challenging. For one thing, the really cool-looking fish seem to be the fastest-moving. For another, the water keeps moving too so even if you manage to frame the fish you want, it may not be in focus.

For an in-depth – and in focus -- look at the fascinating animals that live in Tampa Bay, revisit Jimmy White's amazing collection of undersea life in the Winter 2011 issue of *Bay Soundings*.

If you're looking for sealife, avoid the white sand beaches bordering the Gulf of Mexico and focus more on the calmer inshore waters of the bay. You can wade out to seagrass beds from almost any location along the bay – choose one close to your home so it's convenient enough to visit often.

Backbay Adventures
Continued on page 13

Save the Date – Saturday, August 27

Tampa Bay's premier snorkeling event is scheduled for Saturday, August 27, when a small flotilla of pleasure boats embarks upon the Great Bay Scallop Search. Held annually since 1993, it's a joint effort between Tampa Bay Watch and

Save the Date
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