

Florida Master Naturalist Program



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Master Naturalist Classes Off to Exciting Start in South Florida

The first FMNP Freshwater Wetlands classes are underway in eight south Florida counties, and student and Instructor anticipation is high.

The first class began September 12, 2001, at the Fairchild Tropical Garden in Miami. Martin Main (FMNP Program Director) and Patti Anderson (FMNP Instructor) addressed the class.

"The students seem to be paying close attention in class and enjoying the hands-on field trip experiences," Patti states. Students are learning both about large and conspicuous organisms, as well as the small and inconspicuous, such as these students examining lichens growing on the trunks of trees.



Lee County's first FMNP class kicked off October 1 at the Calusa Nature Center in Fort Myers. FMNP Instructor Laura Greeno led students on a field trip to Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary in Naples, where another FMNP course begins October 9. Students learned about various plants, birds, and other wildlife, including the ancient stand of cypress trees for which Corkscrew Swamp is famous.



Laura Greeno (third from right) directs a class discussion at Corkscrew Swamp.

Advanced Instructor Training: Fakahatchee

Leslie Breland of Collier County's Rookery Bay organized wet prairie and swamp field trips for south Florida FMNP Instructors during September. Mike Owen, park biologist, was the host and enthusiastic guide.

Though the wet prairie field trip was cancelled due to a tropical storm, a few brave Instructors ventured out into Fakahatchee Strand State Park on Friday, Sept. 21. Although the water level was high and mosquitoes plentiful, participants didn't mind.

Mike described Fakahatchee as "Florida's Amazon" as he led the group through the slough to find rare plants. In the Fakahatchee, water flows through shallow, elongated depressions or "sloughs" in the limestone base rock. When a swamp is linear and provides a conduit for water flow, it is called a "strand." The Fakahatchee Strand is approximately 20 miles long and three to five miles wide.

Colonized by many water-tolerant species of trees, such as bald cypress, pond apple, pop ash, red maple and others, the Fakahatchee is a diverse swamp forest. "South Florida is unique in having north Florida plants in their extreme southern range and tropical plants in their extreme northern range," Mike explained. The swamp contains the largest stand of native royal palms and the largest concentration and variety of orchids in North America, as well as other rare epiphytes and ferns.

Mike showed the group where he attempted to reattach orchids that were poached in the early 1990s. Out of the 94 orchids confiscated, less than 10% survived the ordeal. Orchid poaching in the Fakahatchee Strand has been a serious problem, and was the basis for the book *The Orchid Thief* and a soon-to-be-released motion picture. Orchids spotted included ghost, clam shell, butterfly, and night scented. Bromeliads were fairly common, such as Giant, Stiff-leaf, and wild pine.

Fakahatchee Strand also provides habitat for many rare species of wildlife, including Florida panther and black bear, wood stork, mangrove fox squirrel, and Everglades mink.



A Pond Cypress towers over Fakahatchee Strand State Park.

Photos by Ginger Allen, University of Florida.



Park biologist Mike Owen leads FMNP Instructors through a Fakahatchee Strand slough.



A Blue Waterlily is spotted during the FMNP Instructor hike.

Central Florida FMNP Instructor Orientation Workshops Set for November

November 7-8 - Disney Wilderness Preserve, Kissimmee, Florida

November 28-29 - Silver River Museum, Ocala, Florida

Interested environmental educators can click on the "Instructor Information" link at www.masternaturalist.org. to read "*Thinking of becoming a FMNP Instructor?*" To apply, complete the online Instructor Application. You will be notified with further information.

Wild Eye Watch on:

Velvet Ant, *Dasymutilla occidentalis*

Body: hairy, red with black bands, 1" long

Characteristics: female wingless

Range: New York south to Florida, Gulf Coast states west to Texas

Habitat: sandy areas near fields and forest edges

Diet: Parasitic - females drop eggs inside a bee nest, ant larvae invade and devour bee larvae

Fun Facts: females have a nasty bite, called "Cow Killer," because people claimed it could kill a cow. Velvet ants are a member of the ant, wasp, and bee order (Hymenoptera). They are considered wasps, not ants. These wasps live in hot or arid regions around the world. There are more than 400 species in North America and 5,000 species worldwide. Individuals of the same species may vary in color, but all are black with bright yellow, orange, or red hairs possibly to warn off enemies. Most males are smaller than the females, all have wings, and like all male wasps, they do not bite.



©Photo by Ginger Allen, Univ. of FL.

Interpretive Tracks

FMNP Instructor Patti Anderson of Fairchild Tropical Gardens in Miami uses the following interpretation activity at the beginning of her class to increase appreciation of the fragile and complex relationships that exist among plants and wildlife.

Missing Species Musical Chairs

Make equal numbers of tags for native plants that grow in your area and associated insects, birds, or mammals eat, pollinate, or use them for cover. Set up chairs for everyone, play your favorite tune and, while the music is playing, remove some chairs explaining that a road is coming through. Stop the music. Have the people left standing read their tags. These are the species eliminated due to habitat loss in their ecosystem. Additionally, species (students sitting) that depended upon the eliminated plants and wildlife also are lost from the ecosystem and out of the game. Remove some more chairs (we need that mall!) and continue as before.

This activity emphasizes that species depend upon each other and that the loss of one often influences many others. Patti says this activity sets the stage for nature interpretation and is a great way for the students to get to know each other at the beginning of the class. Try it!



Cardinal-flowers (*Lobelia cardinalis*) live in marshes and wet meadows. Their chief pollinators are hummingbirds, which are attracted to the bright red flowers. Medicinal uses of lobelias included treatment for hair loss.

©Drawing by Ann Murray, Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants, University of Florida, Gainesville

Master Naturalist Training Opportunities Springing Up

November 5-14, 2001 (Hillsborough Co.)
November 6-December 15, 2001 (Broward Co.)
January 12-February 16, 2002 (Collier Co.)
January 22-February 14, 2002 (Collier Co.)
February 9-23, 2002 (St. Lucie Co.)
February 23-April 6, 2002 (Collier Co.)
May 6-17, 2002 (Collier Co.)

Class sites, schedules, and registration information is available from the main FMNP web site.

www.masternaturalist.org

Click on "Course Offerings" for:

Locations and time schedules. After you have chosen your course, follow the prompts to register online.

Click on "Information" for:

*Thinking of becoming a Florida Master Naturalist?
FMNP-Freshwater Wetlands Course Description*



Training classes in Coastal Systems and Upland Habitats is anticipated to be available during 2002.



This great group of naturalists taught by Karen Pate of the Museum of Science & Industry (MOSI) in Tampa is the first graduating class of the FMNP. "The students were immersed in the program for one straight week. They formed new friendships, soaked up all the information I could give them, and are very enthusiastic about continuing to share what they learned with others," stated Karen. Marty Main and Ginger Allen celebrated with the class graduates at their final session.



Karen Pate, FMNP Instructor at MOSI, serves a special cake to the first graduating class.

Funding for FMNP Wetlands module:

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