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OW



Orlando Wetlands Newsletter

July - September, 2023: Volume 11, Issue 4

Important Notices!

Starting Monday, October 2, 2023, the Orlando Wetlands will be closed to the public on all Mondays. This will facilitate our ability to maintain water quality, the wetlands environment, and give our wildlife a rest from visitors. Thank you for your support!

You may have noticed that we've recently dropped the word "park" from our name. We are now simply called the Orlando Wetlands. Why, you may ask? This is to more accurately reflect our mission as an advanced water reclamation facility and to better communicate this to the public.

Demucking



Demucking project at the Orlando Wetlands

Starting this fall, the Orlando Wetlands will conduct a demucking project in Cell 1 located on the western side of the property near the inflow. This project is expected to take several months and last through the winter season. Public access to the berm roads around this area may be affected so please take note of any signage or road closed signs

Over the years, dead plant matter in the wetlands decays and turns into muck soil. Over time, this accumulation of muck interferes with the flow of water and causes the undesired release of nutrients. To mitigate this, the Orlando Wetlands conducts renovation projects called demucking. This is done by draining the affected wetland area, removing the excess vegetation and muck, and then reflooding the area. This process resets the wetland so it can once again do the work of removing excess nutrients from the reclaimed water. Learn more about the process on our webpage [Wetlands Renovation](#).

[Click here for a video about the demucking process](#)

Around the Wetlands



Crested Caracara

Caracara plancus

Photo by Jim Werner

Skyflower

Duranta erecta

Photo by Randy Snyder





**White-blotched
Heterocampa**

Heterocampa umbrata

Photo by Randy Snyder



**Black-crowned Night
Heron**

Nycticorax nycticorax

Photo by Jim Werner





Sweetbay Silkmoth

Callosamia securifera

Photo by Rachel Kessler



Colors of Autumn

Did you know that autumn can be a colorful season at the Orlando Wetlands? While many of the spring and summer flowers have already gone to seed, some of our most beautiful and interesting plants bloom or change color with the cooler weather. Here are a few to look for:





Seaside Goldenrod
Solidago sempervirens

Photo by Mary Keim



Bur-marigold
Bidens laevis

Photo by Randy Snyder



Red Maple
Acer rubrum

Photo by Mary Keim



Virginia Creeper
Parthenocissus quinquefolia

Photo by Mary Keim





Dahoon Holly
Ilex cassine

Photo by Mary Keim



Wax Myrtle
Morella cerifera

Photo by Mary Keim



Muhly Grass
Muhlenbergia capillaris

Photo by Mary Keim



Elliott's Love Grass
Eragrostis elliottii

Photo by Mary Keim



Prairie Iris
Iris savannarum

Photo by Mary Keim



Elliott's Aster
Symphyotrichum elliottii

Photo by Mary Keim

The Value of our Vultures



A committee of vultures. Photo by Jim Werner

The Orlando Wetlands has a lot of birds... over 240 species have been recorded here! Each bird has evolved with characteristics specific to their function. Some species have a specialized organ used to sing melodious songs; some have bright & bold feathers to attract a mate; and some... have features to help them eat the dead?! No, we're not talking about zombies; we're talking about the underappreciated undertakers of the Orlando Wetlands: Vultures!

At the OW, we have two species of native vultures: The black vulture (*Coragyps atratus*) and the turkey vulture (*Cathartes aura*). Vultures play a crucial ecological role in maintaining the health and delicate balance of ecosystems worldwide. They are nature's clean-up crew, scavenging on **carrion** (decaying

animal flesh) that would otherwise rot and spread diseases. To scavenge, some species rely on an exceptional sense of smell (like *C. aura*), where others rely mostly on their sight (like *C. atratus*) to locate a carcass. Vultures prevent the proliferation of bacteria and other pathogens by consuming these carcasses, reducing the risk of disease transmission to other animals and even humans.



Two black vultures (*Coragyps atratus*). Photo by Jim Werner

There are several physical adaptations vultures possess that equip them to handle such a unique task, such as consuming the dead, without suffering any ill effects. Vultures have a highly acidic stomach that allows them to digest decaying flesh, which would be toxic to most other animals. Their immune systems have evolved to withstand the harmful bacteria present in rotting carcasses. They've also been known to **mute** (excrete waste) on themselves to help thermoregulate or to kill off any bacteria they may have picked up while walking through a carcass. Their bald heads and necks are designed to prevent any feathers from getting soiled while they feed, and their strong beaks are ideal for tearing through tough animal hides.

Vulture formations have a variety of names:

- Kettle: A group of vultures circling around a potential food source
- Wake: A group of vultures feeding together on a carcass
- Committee: A group of vultures sitting together in a group, such as perched on a tree

Despite their ecological importance, more than half of the world's vulture species are either threatened or endangered. Habitat loss, the ingestion of poison in the animals they consume, and poaching are some of the major threats they encounter. Though it's not a glamorous job they perform, we owe our flying janitors a thank you for keeping our streets and our air clean!



Left: Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*); Right: Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*)

Photo by Sandy Bauerschmidt

Volunteer Spotlight - Lori Finkel

Like many of our volunteers, Lori Finkel came to volunteer at the Orlando Wetlands after retiring in June of 2022. "I was looking for an opportunity to meet new people, contribute to an organization or group whose beliefs were similar to mine, and to spend time outside." She regularly comes on Wednesdays to do gardening work and help manage inventory. She says "there are many better gardeners than me in the group, but I can pull weeds and invasives with the best of them!"



Lori moved to Orlando in 2017 and first came to the Orlando Wetlands as a visitor during the cooler months where she's enjoyed birding. Now that she volunteers here year round, she has come to appreciate seeing how the birds and plants change with the seasons. As a birder, she particularly enjoys watching nesting season on a weekly basis.

Lori is also a member of the Florida Native Plant Society, the Ding Darling Society, New Jersey Audubon, and the Cape May Bird Observatory. She also describes herself as a voracious reader (mostly science fiction and mystery), and she loves to work out and going to Disney, especially during Epcot's Food and Wine Festival.

Lori's thoughts on being an Orlando Wetlands volunteer: "the group has been so welcoming, enthusiastic, and willing to share their knowledge. It's been my pleasure to work with them. I also appreciate the knowledge and patience of the staff." Thanks for the kind words and all that you do, Lori!

Friends of the Orlando Wetlands
(FOW) is a citizen support



organization and a project committee under the Strengthen Orlando 501c3. Its mission is to assist the Orlando Wetlands in providing educational opportunities to increase community awareness, support and appreciation of the property and its wildlife.

[Become a Volunteer](#)



Weekend Tram Tours

Friends of the Orlando Wetlands volunteers open the Education Center and offer cart tours on:

- Fridays and Saturdays, 9 am - 3 pm, year round
- Sundays, 9 am - 3 pm (September - May)

Tours are first come, first served, no reservations. Multiple carts go out on an ongoing basis. Seating capacity is between 8-12 people per cart. Tours are free but donations are welcome!



The Orlando Wetlands is owned and operated by the City of Orlando's Public Works Department, Water Reclamation Division.

Header image by Jim Werner: Woodstorks (*Mycteria americana*);
Footer image by Jim Werner: River Otters (*Lontra canadensis*)

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