

Volunteer News

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Volunteer anglers gather reef fish data

Due to extensive fishing pressure on gray snapper and other reef species, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) established minimum-size and bag limits. The effectiveness of minimum-size limits depends heavily on the survival of released fish. As a result, it is critical to estimate the rate of catch-and-release mortality. The Fisheries Independent Monitoring (FIM) program received a Cooperative Research Program grant to study gray snapper and other reef fish in lower Tampa Bay and its near-shore waters (< 20 nautical miles from shore).



—Photo by Frank Courtney, FWC

Volunteers prepare to tag a gray (mangrove) snapper.

Volunteers for the FIM program participate in hook-and-line sampling and gather important data on catch-and-release mortality rates of gray (mangrove) snapper (*Lutjanus griseus*).

An online survey was implemented to characterize hook-and-line sampling efforts and to

gauge interest in participation in the project (<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/graysnapper>). More than 130 recreational guides and anglers responded to this survey, and several volunteered to assist with the project.

Bill Fehl led seven nearshore guided trips with FIM staff, catching many snapper and grouper. Other participants include Capts. Matt McDuffee, Steve Papen, Harry Conner, Tony Frankland, Doug Hall, Jim Lemke, Steve Betz and John Fabian.

Twenty-five volunteer anglers have participated thus far, contributing more than 250 hours to the project, including Rich Franz, who fished on six trips totaling more than 65 hours on the water. Anglers Rick Veit and Josh Therrier fished on two trips, and two husband and wife teams – Dave and Carol Reed and Jose and Kerry Borrego – have also participated.

In addition, Hubbard's Marina partnered with FIM staff to conduct a 24-hour catch-and-release mortality study on gray snapper in November 2010. The captain and crew of the Florida Fisherman II worked tirelessly to make this a successful experiment. More than 600 fish were caught, measured and released, including a variety of reef fish species such as red and gag grouper and gray snapper. Several hundred of these reef fish



—Photo by Frank Courtney, FWC

Volunteer anglers assist with gray (mangrove) snapper research.

were also equipped with a dart tag prior to release, which will provide movement, growth and survival data for these species in the future.

This study will close at the end of July. Thanks to all of the fishing guides and anglers whose participation has helped to make this project a success.

A more detailed summary of this study can be found on the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute's website: <http://myfwc.com/research/saltwater/fish/research/gray-snapper-angler-help/>. For more information and to volunteer, please contact Mandy Tyler-Jedlund or Kerry Flaherty at 727-896-8626 or send an email to graysnapperfishing@MyFWC.com.

— By Frank Courtney



Volunteers monitor kestrels in Hernando County

The Southeastern American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius pauls*) is the smallest falcon in the U.S. and is a nonmigratory subspecies of kestrel found year-round throughout Florida.

Southeastern American Kestrels are found in open pine habitats, woodland edges, prairies and pastures. Preferred nest sites are tall dead trees or telephone poles with an unobstructed view of surroundings. The Southeastern American Kestrel is listed as threatened in Florida due to loss of nesting and foraging habitat. Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) biologists initiated nest box programs to augment populations in many areas including the Brooksville Ridge.

Currently, the FWC Brooksville Ridge volunteer program monitors 10 nest boxes on four



—Photo by Annemarie Hammond, FWC

Volunteers learn how to use a peeper scope to monitor kestrel nest boxes.

properties in Hernando County. Volunteers monitor the nest boxes during breeding season (April-July) and use a peeper scope and ladders to view the nests and record the presence/absence of eggs and chicks and the numbers of each. Volunteers also record

additional pertinent information such as behavior and other species present in the nest boxes.

On a recent monitoring day, four volunteers were delighted to see that five of the 10 nest boxes contained eggs. Jennifer Myers, FWC Southwest Region conservation biologist, was also pleased with the nesting success and noted, “The enthusiasm of the volunteers for conservation is great to see. Their efforts to help us expand the kestrel nest box program represent a great collaboration between citizen scientists and the FWC.”

For more information on this project or other volunteer projects in the Brooksville Ridge region, contact Annemarie Hammond at 352-754-6722 or at Annemarie.Hammond@MyFWC.com.

— By Annemarie Hammond

FWC volunteers assist at the Florida State Fair

The Florida State Fair in Tampa comes and goes each year, leaving many central Florida families with memories of fun and tasty fair food. For the past 47 years, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and its predecessor agencies have been part of that experience, producing exhibits designed to educate Florida residents and visitors about the FWC and the importance of conserving Florida’s fish and wildlife.

The theme for the 2011 FWC State Fair exhibit was “FWC is research, management and law



—Photo by Gina Russo, FWC

FWC volunteer Chris Bemelmans answers questions and assists guests with the FWC “Wildlife Challenge.”

enforcement.” Exhibits inside and outside the FWC’s Red Barn highlighted some of Florida’s most common native as well as nonnative plants and animals, while focusing on the importance of habitat. A simple six-question quiz called the

“Wildlife Challenge” was used as a fun way to encourage fair patrons to go through the exhibits.

Each year, volunteers are an important resource in assisting the FWC at the Florida State Fair. This year, 31 volunteers donated 192 hours assisting staff and helping teach others how to be good stewards of Florida’s natural resources.

Thanks go out to all of the dedicated volunteers who donated their time and helped make the 2011 Florida State Fair “The Best Time of the Year.”

— By Gina Russo

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Volunteers support biodiversity studies



—Photo courtesy of FWC

Student volunteers and interns assist with specimen information services research.

Volunteers, interns and marine-life specimen donors from many walks of life cooperate to support the work of Specimen Information Services' natural history specimen collections at the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) in St. Petersburg. In Specimen Information Services (SIS), student volunteers and interns from several major colleges and universities work with marine science colleagues ranging from local fishermen to senior emeritus faculty.

Student volunteers and interns work with staff to add specimens to the collection, as well as catalog and maintain the institute's specimen collections. They have the opportunity to work with specimens collected from various FWRI programs, and to participate in the development of taxo-

nomic keys, guides and training materials for FWRI's researchers to use for specimen identification in the field.

Natural history collections document the presence of individual species in place and time. This historical record provides a biodiversity baseline that enables researchers to track geographic and temporal changes in species and communities, and to correlate those patterns with changes in the environment, such as climate change or pollution.

These collections preserve over 50 years of Florida's marine biological history gathered by the agency's researchers, as well as specimens donated from around the globe. Specimen Information Services assists scientists and educators by identifying and vouchering (storing for future reference) specimens and by supplying specimens, data and materials

for research. Volunteers are an integral part of our program.

Recent projects have included curating baseline specimens for use during Natural Resource Damage Assessment work following the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, and the discovery of a new species of a shell-less snail from local waters off the Gulf of Mexico. Some of FWRI's current projects include examining the evolutionary history of Gulf of Mexico batfish and assessing changes in the diversity and distribution of coral reef invertebrate community species.

If you are interested in volunteering or interning with SIS, contact the FWRI Outreach Coordination Office at 727-896-8626 or Interns@MyFWC.com. While students are actively recruited, student status is not required. Everyone is encouraged to apply.

— By Joan Herrera

New online training for Project WILD

Project WILD is an interdisciplinary conservation and environmental education program which emphasizes wildlife and also capitalizes on the natural interest that people have in wildlife by providing activities that enhance learning in all subject/skill areas.

Florida's Project WILD program relies on the expertise and commitment of its volunteer instructors. A Project WILD facilitator has the ability to touch the lives of educators throughout the state and also to make an impact on Florida's students.

Florida Project WILD recently added innovations to its facilitator-training program. The Project WILD coordinator and assistant developed a new



—Photo by Lori Haynes, FWC

Facilitator trainees practice a Project WILD activity.

training module that incorporates pre-workshop online learning, group collaboration and a one-day face-to-face training session that takes place simultaneously in two different locations.

Using an interactive web-based education program, partic-

ipants work online with the coordinator, complete assignments and collaborate with peers, all without traveling.

In 2011, a culmination of the pre-workshop training will take place on Friday, July 29, from 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. at both Chinsegut Nature Center in

Brooksville and Hobe Sound Nature Center in Martin County.

For more information on becoming a Project WILD facilitator, go to MyFWC.com/Education, select “Educators,” and then select “Project WILD.”

— By Bev Eikeland

Florida hunter-safety volunteers assist with world archery tournament

More than 900 kids from four countries met in Orlando in October 2010 to compete in the second annual National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) World Tournament. Two Florida teams, Union Academy Middle School from Bartow and Robert H. Jenkins Middle School from Palatka, were among the excited participants.

The NASP World Tournament awards ceremony had the largest turnout since the inception of the NASP tournaments in 2002. There were 64 team and individual award categories.

Volunteer assistance is essential to the success of the NASP World Tournament. The FWC would like to offer special

thanks to the following Florida hunter-safety volunteers for their participation in the tournament as lane judges: Buster and Robin Stratton of Marion County, Brenda Heberling and Albert Fuller of Levy County, Suzanne Redditt of Dixie County, Tinker Kershliis of Orange County, Tim and Lesia McKinnon of Baker County, Bill Hewes of Columbia County, Ricky Roland of Duval County, and Jimmy Peagler of Marion County. These dedicated volunteers enjoyed two days of archery competition with kids from Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and the United States.



—Photo by David Westmark, FWC

Florida hunter safety volunteers at the 2010 NASP World Tournament.

The 2011 NASP World Tournament will again be at the Josten's Center at Walt Disney World. If you are interested in helping out as a lane judge for this event (scheduled for October 6-8, 2011), please contact Steve Robbins at Steven.Robbins@MyFWC.com or 386-754-1051.

—By Steve Robbins