

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Protecting Native Wildlife



Spring 2018 • Quarterly Newsletter Celebrating Volunteers

Florida celebrates volunteer service!

Volunteers bring successes statewide



FWC volunteers build wood duck nest boxes. FWC photo by Emily Hardin.



FWC volunteers and their wood duck nest boxes. FWC photo by Emily Hardin.

Wood Ducks

Volunteers, **Vernon Todd**, **Gary Kenworthy**, **Dan Brickner** and **Dan Brown**, made six new [wood duck](#) nest boxes for the Carter Tract of Econfina Creek Wildlife Management Area in



Regional Volunteer Program biologists and FWC volunteers assist Wildlife Habitat Management biologists with pre-season wood duck nest box maintenance and installation at Everglades and Francis S. Taylor WMA. FWC photo by Andy Wraithmell.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) appreciates our volunteers and their incredible gift of time, energy and enthusiastic support to sustain Florida's wildlife and habitats. In this quarterly edition, we share how volunteers and FWC staff work together to protect native wildlife in South Florida. We also share ways for you to get involved and support the FWC's volunteer programs. There is no time like [Florida Volunteer Month](#) to get involved and explore wild Florida because together, we can positively shape the future of our fish and wildlife resources.

— Sharon Tatem, Volunteer Program Manager

Trapping black spiny-tailed iguanas helps

Washington County. These nest boxes will replace old and damaged boxes throughout the tract and will provide safe places for wood ducks to lay, hatch, and raise their young. A big thank you to **Vernon, Gary, Dan and Dan** on their hard work!

Southeastern American Kestrels

Students from Odessa Christian School and skilled volunteers hammered out more than 40 new nest boxes at the Chinsegut Conservation Center. FWC staff and volunteers are now using these new nest boxes to replace damaged boxes in Hernando and Marion counties for the 2018 southeastern American kestrel monitoring season. One of the new nest boxes even made it as far east as Osceola County, where it was installed by biologist, Bryan Ames, at the [Split Oak Forest Wildlife and Environmental Area](#). The [southeastern American kestrel](#) is a cavity nester, and these bird boxes provide important nesting sites in areas where natural cavities are sparse for this state-threatened falcon. FWC staff and volunteers hope to see critter activity soon!



Students and skilled FWC volunteers build nest boxes for the southeastern American kestrel. FWC photo by Logan McDonald.



Southeastern American kestrel nest box at Split Oak Forest WEA. FWC photo by Bryan Ames.

Suncoast Youth Conservation Center (SYCC)

The [SYCC](#) in sunny Apollo Beach has been experiencing shoreline erosion. Chris Young, Research Administrator for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research

conserve Florida burrowing owls

By Andrea Pereyra



Caroline Jordan and Shannon Granger, FWC volunteers, set-up a trap to capture the black-spiny tailed iguana. FWC photo by Andrea Pereyra.



Black spiny-tailed iguana tail drags. FWC photo by Andrea Pereyra.

Often seen basking in open, mowed areas or sticking their heads out of burrows, [black spiny-tailed iguanas](#) seem to enjoy a stress-free lifestyle. South Florida is a dream destination, not only for tourists and winter vacationers but for nonnative species as well. The black spiny-tailed iguana is one such species with everything in its favor to establish in south

Institute's (FWRI) Stock Enhancement Research Facility (SERF), said we can help! The crew from FWRI-SERF measured elevations, harvested plants and drilled holes so the area was ready for a planting day. Kathy Guindon, Director of SYCC, realized she needed even more help as she had other projects to be completed, leading to a community partnership among Tampa Electric, The Florida Aquarium, FWC and community volunteers.

Thirty-nine people descended on 20 acres around the SYCC to assist with planting marsh grasses, shoveling shells to truck beds and then into flower boxes, and moving shells to the front circle of the building by bucket and wheelbarrow. Volunteers didn't stop there – they also assisted with filling and placing shell bags for living shorelines, moving kayaks, pulling weeds, picking up trash and helping a graduate student with her biodigester project. Biodigesters are mechanical stomachs that produce biogas (methane) and liquid fertilizer. At SYCC, these experimental biodigesters, made from two 275 gallon intermediate bulk container tanks, can be used as an educational tool for waste reduction, renewable energy, and water reduction. The fertilizer produced by the biodigesters can be used in landscaping on site or in tower gardens. The gas produced can be harnessed and used to make food.

The area around the youth center was transformed in 2.5 hours! This group contributed 97.5 hours and saved the SYCC funds that can be invested back into youth education.



FWC volunteers come together for a successful workday at the SYCC. FWC photo by Kathy Guindon.

Get involved!

Shorebirds and Wading Birds

Florida, and thus, it has done so in Dade, Broward, Collier, Lee and Charlotte counties. The subtropical climate and a shortage of predators are some key factors leading to the success of this prehistoric looking lizard.

Adult black spiny-tails are primarily herbivorous, but they can eat small animals. This species will feed opportunistically on insects, lizards, fish, bird eggs, nestling birds and hatchling sea turtles. Black spiny-tailed iguanas are not too finicky when going "house hunting" and will not miss the opportunity of a "free house." Spiny-tails shelter in burrows and have been observed utilizing the burrows of the Florida burrowing owl and the gopher tortoise, both listed as threatened species in Florida.

Though we haven't unraveled all the impacts of black spiny-tailed iguanas on the threatened [Florida burrowing owl](#), management actions for spiny-tailed iguana populations are recommended. In collaboration with the FWC's Wildlife Impact Management Section, the South Region Volunteer Program captures and removes spiny-tailed iguanas from areas with the presence of burrowing owls. Armed with binoculars, live traps and cat food, volunteers go to urban areas, such as parks and schools, in search of iguanas. If no iguana is seen in the open, these eager volunteers put on their detective hats and look for tail drags (the marks iguanas leave with their tails when they walk) at the entrances of burrows and around cracks found under sidewalks or buildings.

Once volunteers determine where the spiny-tails shelter and identify the common pathways that the iguanas use, they bait the traps with cat food, set the traps in strategic locations and wait patiently from a distance until a hungry iguana walks into the trap. Trapped iguanas are then transported to an FWC facility to be humanely killed. No special permits are needed to capture and remove iguanas from private properties, but once captured, it is illegal to release them back into the wild.

With the assistance of volunteers and continued collaboration between FWC staff, state agencies, private organizations and the public,

Shorebird nesting season is just around the corner!

- The [Florida Shorebird Alliance](#) needs volunteers to assist with monitoring, stewarding and posting of nesting sites. Here are some of the counties where the most help is needed: St. Johns, Volusia, Brevard, Monroe, Palm Beach, Martin and St. Lucie.

- Do you have kayaking and birding experience? We need your help monitoring shorebird colonies in St. Johns County.

- It's raining chicks! Help return fallen chicks to their rooftop nests in Brevard County.

- Experienced birders are also needed to assist with monthly wading bird surveys at the new [Port Orange Critical Wildlife Management](#) Area in Volusia County.

Contact your Regional Volunteer Coordinator for more information!



Sue Killeen, FWC volunteer, sets-up a scope to show the public shorebird chicks at Anastasia State Park in St. Augustine. FWC photo by Logan McDonald.



Caitlin Boverly, FWC volunteer, covers drain holes to prevent chick-falling from a roof-nesting site in Fort Lauderdale. FWC photo by Natasha Warraich.

Diamondback Terrapins

FWC biologists aim to learn more about [diamondback terrapin](#) populations throughout Florida – and for this, we need your help! If you see one of these beautifully spotted turtles, please report it using the iNaturalist app.

we hope to increase our trapping success rate to a level that could limit spiny-tailed iguana populations and thus reduce the risk they pose on the threatened burrowing owl.



Florida burrowing owl. FWC photo by Carol Rizkalla.



Black spiny-tailed iguana in trap. FWC photo by Andrea Pereyra.

What is hiding in the marshes?

By Andrea Pereyra

These turtles (listed as “near threatened” by the [International Union for Conservation of Nature](#)) love brackish water, which is a mixture of fresh and salt water. They typically live in salt marshes, mangroves and tidal creeks. To report a sighting:

1. Download the iNaturalist App (free!)
2. Join the project **“Diamondback Terrapins of Florida.”**
3. Click to add an observation.
4. Take a photo and submit!

Biologists will view the submitted photos, notes and GPS coordinates of sightings, allowing them to better manage and protect this species!

FWC has more iNaturalist projects that you can be a part of! Visit [Florida Nature Trackers](#) to see what other wildlife you can help monitor.



Diamondback terrapin. Photo courtesy of the FWC's Species Conservation Planning Section.



Volunteers transition to FWC careers

Christina Kontos is currently a biologist for the [Dinner Island Ranch Wildlife Management Area](#).



Daniel Marchio, FWC volunteer, during a spotlight survey. FWC photo by Andrea Pereyra.

The daylight fades away while the last rays of sun reflect on the flooded marshes of our public lands, unveiling a vibrant and colorful piece of art. Volunteers and staff traverse bumpy roads, stopping to allow basking cottonmouths to get to safe refuge, and often being caught by surprise by mourning doves flying right in front of your windshield. Volunteers wait patiently until it is dark enough to start looking for a bright green-yellowish reflection among the vegetation. Sitting on top of the vehicle and holding a spotlight, volunteers carefully scan the area to find that reflection. But, what are they looking for? What is hiding in the bushes that volunteers are so eager to find?

[White-tailed deer!](#) White-tailed deer are a popular harvested species and an important food source for the Florida panther. Volunteers search for the reflection of the deer's eyes that glow like lightning bugs in the dark night. In the Everglades, spotlight surveys are used as a management tool to indicate the stress level of the deer population. Volunteers record the location, number, sex and age (fawn or adult) of

- As an FWC volunteer, Christina assisted staff with activities such as bird counts on Critical Wildlife Areas, habitat enhancement for shorebirds and burrowing owls, management of nonnative species and native plantings.

Jesse Suarez was a seasonal check station operator for the [Corbett Wildlife Management Area](#) and is currently an FWC intern working on a green iguana project for the South Region Volunteer Program.

- As an FWC volunteer, Jesse assisted staff with activities such as bird counts on Critical Wildlife Areas, habitat enhancement for shorebirds and burrowing owls, spotlight deer surveys, management of nonnative species and native plantings.

Christin Meilink is currently a beach mouse biologist based out of the FWC's Lake City office.

- Christin volunteered with the FWC's tegu monitoring project in the Riverview area of Tampa and assisted on gopher tortoise surveys at Bullfrog Creek Wildlife and Environmental Area.

Shelby Beard is currently a biologist for the Marine Mammal Research Section at the Tequesta Field Lab with the FWC's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute.

- Shelby was an FWC intern for the Manatee Research and Rescue Team. After her internship, Shelby was hired as part time staff and recently promoted to full time staff and the intern/volunteer coordinator.

Regional connection

Our Regional Volunteer Coordinators are specialists who bring their biological and citizen science expertise to recruit, train and manage volunteers for research, habitat enhancement and stewardship projects throughout Florida. Click [here](#)

the deer observed. This data, along with water levels, is factored into the decision-making process of when to reopen flooded wildlife management areas (WMA) to public access.

In the Everglades and Francis S. Taylor, Holey Land, and Rotenberger WMAs, spotlight surveys are conducted weekly, on levee routes, during high water events. The driest patches of land during high-water events are represented by levees and tree islands. The longer a high-water event lasts, the more stressed wildlife become. This is especially true for white-tailed deer, a skittish species that does not typically congregate in big clusters. When deer are nervous, they can run off in all directions exposing themselves to predators, vehicle hazards and exhaustion. When deer are restricted to higher ground, their food sources are limited, adding to their stressed condition.

The challenge of spotting a deer through the sometimes-tall dahoon holly, saltbush or willow keeps volunteers motivated to endure mosquito bites and chilly wind whiplashing on their faces. When you are out there, it feels that the saying "practice makes the master" was written by an eager observer conducting a spotlight deer survey. The more deer you spot, the easier it becomes to determine the sex and the age. Regularity and commitment are crucial for these surveys, something that volunteer **Lucy Carrizales** realized quickly and managed perfectly.

Lucy has no time to lose; she is studying environmental science and working two jobs. The first time she volunteered with the FWC was to assist with a spotlight survey, and since that moment she has never missed a survey. After her fourth survey, she was skillful enough to spot a deer in one of the trickiest portions of the Rotenberger WMA route. This segment of the route is a narrow strip of land, covered with high and dense vegetation, where deer congregated this past fall when water levels were at the maximum. For Lucy, the feeling of contributing to the conservation of South Florida public lands and the access to remote beautiful areas, while learning land management

to locate your region, then identify your regional coordinator below.

Brendan O'Connor - Southwest Region
Volunteer Coordinator

- Brendan.OConnor@MyFWC.com
- 863-648-3829

Andrea Pereyra - South Region Volunteer
Coordinator

- Andrea.Pereyra@MyFWC.com
- 561-882-5716

Logan McDonald - Northeast Region
Volunteer Coordinator

- Logan.McDonald@MyFWC.com
- 352-620-7345

Emily Hardin - Northwest Region
Volunteer Coordinator

- Emily.Hardin@MyFWC.com
- 850-767-3620



FWC volunteers plant wiregrass to enhance gopher tortoise habitat at Half Moon WMA. FWC photo by Annemarie Hammond.



Don't forget to check out other citizen science opportunities during the month of April. Citizen Science Day is April 14, 2018 and the City Nature Challenge is April 27-30, 2018. Hundreds of events will be held around the world and you can find them [here](#).

techniques, were rewards worth getting back home at midnight.

Volunteers and staff from the FWC's Wildlife Habitat Management Section working together results in quality data that guides management actions to protect deer in our public lands. We extend special thanks to **Lucy Carrizales, Jesse Suarez, Hailee Rech** and all other volunteers who assisted the FWC with deer spotlight surveys.



White-tailed deer spotted on a survey. Photo courtesy of the FWC's Wildlife Habitat Management Section.

Support

In addition to your generously donated time and talent, we welcome tax-deductible monetary contributions. Visit the [Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida](#) to make a donation. Indicate **FWC Volunteer Programs** under the subheading *Donation on behalf of / In Memory of* within the section *Make a Tribute or Memorial Gift*. Your support will help us expand volunteer opportunities as we work to foster a statewide network of conservation volunteers. Thank you for supporting Florida's fish and wildlife resources!

The FWC offers a variety of volunteer and internship programs. Visit [MyFWC.com](#) for more information about how to get involved. In addition, visit the [FWC Calendar](#) for upcoming events.



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