

BEAUTYBERRY POST

THE NEWSLETTER OF MACKAY GARDENS AND LAKESIDE PRESERVE

July-August / 2014



In Touch By Steve Franklin

While reading my May-June copy of the AT Journal, the magazine of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, an article entitled “More Than a Footpath: Thinking Across Landscapes” caused me to re-think my perceptions of the purpose and importance of places like Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve. Jonathon Peterson’s article focuses on a concept known as “landscape-scale conservation.” It seems as though Benton Mackaye (no relation to Alexander Mackay), who is referred to as the “father of the Appalachian Trail,” had the foresight to envision the trail as something more than an 18-inch-wide footpath of indeterminate length. He “trained his attention on a geographically regional scale that brought three “elemental environments” into focus: the primeval, the rural, and the urban.” From this concept landscape-scale conservation emerged as a form of conservation that enabled partnerships

between people inhabiting those three types of environments. Working together these conservation-minded groups are merging wilderness and conserved lands, farm fields and working forests, communities and industrial lands into a fully integrated entity, which is environmentally and people friendly.

Places in our county like Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve, Circle B Bar Reserve, and Lake Howard Park are conservation islands surrounded by rural and urban lands, but that's changing. Landscaped paths like the Fort Frazier Trail, the Winter Haven Trail, and the Auburndale and Van Fleet Trails are beginning to transit urban and rural settings alike to connect our residents and communities to these biologically-diverse, people-preserved islands. Future plans call for even more "natural" bi-ways throughout the county. Please join us in supporting and encouraging our government, farm, and business leaders' efforts to embrace landscape-scale conservation as a necessity to planned growth and the physical and psychological well-being of the people who call Polk County their home.

Top photo by Cathy Butcher. This lovely moth is probably a Red-bordered Emerald moth, *Nemoria lixaria*, a common moth in the southern United States. The beautiful combination of green moth and blue spigot on the outside wall of the Mackay restrooms drew my attention to the fact that many other insects were resting in the textured stucco of the building as well. All students of nature should use this opportunity to take a peek at the variety of fascinating insects, moths, and spiders that daily seek refuge on the outside walls of the Mackay restrooms. Go, look!



Nature Quiz

This is: (1)mammal(2)reptile(3)human

It lives: (1)on Mars (2)in water (3)in the air

It eats :(1)fish(2)armadillos(3)Caesar weed

It is: (1)friendly (2)unfriendly(3)cute

Males are: (1)smaller (2)more fun(3)less emotional, than females

What is this?

Answers in Turtle Rescue!



Turtle Rescue

By Cathy Butcher

Sondra McLouth and a friend recently happened to be in the office at Mackay when a visitor stopped by to report a stranded turtle in the bottom of the grotto pool. This coincidence was truly fortunate for the unlucky turtle. Sondra's fondness for turtles has

prompted her to come to their aid numerous times. She didn't hesitate to act when she heard about this one.

Sondra knew exactly where to locate the turtle. As a Mackayster and Polk Master Gardener she has spent many volunteer hours working in the grotto over the last nine years. Somehow the turtle had ended up on the bottom of the large concrete pool with no way to climb out, since the cracked structure no longer retains much water. Sondra retrieved the exhausted Florida softshell and made haste carrying it to the shoreline of Lake Rochelle. Before she could arrive, the heavy, and now smelly, turtle suddenly revived and brought the rescue to a higher level of excitement. Sondra managed to avoid being bitten or clawed by the large flailing turtle and was rewarded for her rescue efforts by witnessing its energized run for the water once she was close enough to release it.

The Florida softshell turtle, *Apalone ferox*, is found abundantly throughout Florida and lives in parts of Georgia, Alabama, and South Carolina as well. Typically found in lakes and shallow, freshwater habitats, it also inhabits canals and drainage ditches. It even tolerates brackish waters. Softshells commonly use logs, floating vegetation, and banks for sunshine basking. They are fast swimmers and move rapidly across land, frequently moving overland seeking new territory. Possibly this was the reason our turtle fell into the empty concrete pool and became trapped.

The shells of these reptiles are flattened and covered in leathery skin. They have odd tubular snouts and large, webbed, clawed feet. The females are twice the size of males and can reach lengths up to 24 inches. Females have the ability to lay multiple clutches within a year and can produce up to 200 eggs! This explains the abundance of this species. In our area, nesting season

occurs from March through July. The female will choose a sunny location with sandy soil to dig her nest and lay 9 to 39 eggs per clutch. Hatching occurs within 58-80 days.

Softshells are primarily carnivorous hunters. They will bury in sand or mud with their head protruding and attack unsuspecting prey from this position. They are aggressive and will bite and scratch if threatened. Hence, the reason for the Latin name *ferox*; ferocious. Another defense mechanism is the release of an unpleasant, foul-smelling musk.

The list of predators that eat softshell turtles, or their eggs, is long but man is their greatest danger. Habitat destruction, pollution, and cars threaten their numbers.

For years man has used them for food and collected them for pets.

Softshell turtle meat is considered a delicacy in Asian countries. Apparently, these countries exhausted their own turtle populations through over-consumption and then turned their eyes to the abundant supply in Florida. Exploitation of this species seemed likely as more wild turtle meat was being harvested and exported. Scientists and environmentalists raised concerns about the potential threat this posed to Florida's turtle population. In 2009 laws were enacted in Florida to regulate the harvest of turtles before their numbers became threatened.

At this time softshells are being raised, mainly in south Florida, for domestic meat production and exporting overseas. Licensed breeding farms raise turtles for the pet industry and are allowed to capture a certain number of wild softshells for breeding stock. FWC regulates these activities along with commercial and non-commercial wild harvest.

Hopefully, our rescued turtle will live a long and healthy life at the Preserve. Thank you Sondra McLouth!



Sondra McLouth holding rescued softshell

Calendar of Events

July 2014

- 7/3-10AM First Thursday Master Gardener Workshop- Sprouts: An Instant Veggie Garden
- 7/19- Astronomy Night 7-10PM
- Tuesdays & Thursdays 6-7PM- Zumba classes*

August 2014

- 8/7-10AM First Thursday Master Gardener Workshop- Orchids Made Easy
- Tuesdays & Thursdays 6-7PM- Zumba classes*

*A small fee required for this class. For more information about events contact Parks and Recreation at 863-291-5272. The Mackay house is available for weddings and private functions. Contact Parks and Recreation for rental fees.

First Thursday Workshop

July 3 @ 10AM

Do you like to grow what you eat? And eat what you grow? This Workshop welcomes back Master Gardener Pat Cherundolo who taught us about perennial vegetables in the landscape. Her new program will teach us about the easiest and possibly fastest veggie source you can grow. **Sprouts: An Instant Garden!**

August 7 @ 10AM

Joel Campbell, an avid gardener and long-time orchid enthusiast will present **Orchids Made Easy**, an original program that will demystify orchid growing and show all of us that we can have "breathtakingly beautiful orchids" in our own indoor and outdoor gardens with minimal expense and effort.

First Thursday Workshops are hosted by Polk Master Gardener Pat Farris. These free educational presentations are held the first Thursday of every month in the Mackay house beginning at 10AM. Please join us! **Astronomy Night** is also free! A presentation precedes night-sky viewing. Telescopes provided or BYO.

Footprints

One day I could not be still
So I went hiking as some folks will,
Trekking upon a narrow trail
Of weary grass that looked quite frail,
Touching the breeze that rustled leaves
In overhanging live oak eaves,
Eavesdropping on conversations
Devoid of human translations.

The thick canopy made a cave,
Which cooled the forest floor and gave
Katydids a reason to sing
Of birds and beasts and blooms and things.
And once there I chose to pause,
To try and determine the cause
Of the serenity I knew
In the green midst of all that grew.

And then while gripped by reverie
I looked back, wondered what I'd see.
Only a few footprints remained
To mark the place where I'd proclaimed
This grand forest heaven on earth,
A weak appraisal of its worth,
And so I continued to walk
And listen and ponder and talk.

I spoke to all who heard me there,
Maybe just to the clear fresh air,
But with its help I decided
That nature's rare gifts abided
Long before our footprints tainted
Landscapes that her essence painted,
And with care, as those footprints fade,
All else will thrive, inspired yet staid.

By Steve Franklin

History By Steve Franklin

Fearless, resilient, determined, intelligent, loyal, and engaged are just a few of the adjectives that come to mind when attempting to describe the Seminole Indians of the early nineteenth century. They were Native Americans who'd survived the diseases brought to this continent by Europeans when they began arriving in the 1500's. They'd managed not to be taken away as slaves or force-marched to Oklahoma like the Cherokees. Some were peace-loving Lower Creek Indians who migrated south to escape the brutality that their Upper Creek cousins regularly administered upon them. Some were Alachua Seminoles who moved south to their winter hunting grounds after Andrew Jackson attacked them on their native soil during the first Seminole Indian War. According to one source, the Upper Creeks used the word "Seminole" to describe Florida Indians. For them the word meant, "The people whom the Sun God does not love." In spite of that, English explorer William Bartram, exploring Florida near the time of the American Revolution, found them friendly and resourceful, and the land where they lived a lush garden moistened by tropical rains, which spawned bubbling springs and the streams and rivers they created.

During the Second Seminole Indian War in 1839 Ft. Cummings was established in the vicinity of what would later be known as the City of Lake Alfred. It was part of a line of forts constructed to protect the route from Ft. Brooke in Tampa to Ft. Mellon in Sanford. It was located here until the mid-1840's when Chief Coacooche, otherwise known to the U.S. Army as Wild Cat, turned himself and his tribe in to be shipped from Tampa to the western Indian Reservations. In all probability, he was taken prisoner and pressed to call in his tribe after having been invited to come to the fort under a flag-of-truce for peace talks. That trick was an extremely unpopular policy of General Jessup's at the time. Chief Coacooche's intelligence and eloquence are displayed here, quoted from the book, Fearless and Free.

"The whites...dealt unjustly by me. I came to them, they deceived me; the land I was upon I loved, my body is made of its sands; the Great Spirit gave me legs to walk over it; hands to aid myself; eyes to see its ponds, rivers, forests, and game; then a head with which I think. The sun, which is warm and bright as my feelings are now, shines to warm us and bring forth our crops, and the moon brings back the spirit of our warriors, our fathers, wives, and children. The white man comes; he grows pale and sick, why cannot we live here in peace? I have said I am the enemy to the white man. I could live in peace with him, but they first steal our cattle and horses, cheat us, and take our lands. The white men are as thick as the leaves in the hammocks; they come upon us thicker every year. They may shoot us, drive our women and children night and day; they may chain our hands and feet, but the red man's heart will be always free."

I like to believe that Chief Coacooche would be pleased to know that the citizens of the City of Lake Alfred managed to save a small part of his beloved home land, and with the help of dedicated volunteers they strive to restore the preserve portion to its original condition.

Happenings

One year ago a large number of the MGLP gopher tortoise population was trapped and moved to another location. They had migrated from the Preserve onto nearby privately owned land awaiting development. That land had been cleared and vacant for some time. Regulations for this endangered species require these actions before construction is allowed. Apparently, the tortoises found the sunny, open site more appealing than living at the Preserve.

Gopher tortoises need a specific habitat to thrive. Historically, the area these tortoises lived on at the Preserve was upland pine woods which would have been a very open tree canopy and supporting native grasses and vegetation that tortoises feed upon. Without proper management, or fire, over the last ten years or longer, the habitat degraded. Oak saplings and non-native vegetation proliferated, creating a dense understory and shading out native grasses, herbs, and shrubs; no longer prime real estate for tortoise survival.

In an effort to conserve the remaining tortoise population, FWC Wildlife Biologists Luis Gonzalez and Joe Sage, are assisting Lake Alfred's Parks and Recreation Manager, Jeff Tillman, in implementing a plan to re-establish the upland pine community.

Hikers should expect to see clearing of the dense understory in the NE corner of the Preserve. Look for future plantings of long-leaf pine and native vegetation. With these proactive steps and good land management we should plan on a future that includes gopher tortoises. And who knows? We might just see a comeback of another endangered species that requires this habitat-the scrub lupine!



We have lots of ideas for upcoming newsletters, but we'd like to hear from you as well. Let us know what you would like to read about in future Beautyberry Posts. Please send remarks and suggestions to: cassibelle@verizon.net. If you would like to receive this newsletter by email or unsubscribe please contact Anaeli Quinones at aquinones@mylakealfred.com. Did you know? Mackay is pronounced.... Mack EYE?