

# Trails and Tales

## NEWSLETTER

*A forum for the exchange of news and ideas about conservation and  
the enjoyment of our valuable natural resources*

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Special Florida Coastal Systems Edition



The gopher tortoise is a slow moving, land based reptile. It is found in dry sandy areas like coastal sand dunes. The gopher tortoise is herbivorous; eating grasses, leaves and berries. It digs long underground burrows which are then shared with up to 36 other species of animals.

### Inside This Edition

- *Master Naturalist Program*
- *Nature Made Easy*
- *On The Internet*
- *Questions Answered*
- *Man and Nature*
- *Featured Critter – The Manatee*
- *Featured Trail*
- *Amazing Nature*
- *The Last Word*

### Florida's Master Naturalist Program

The University of Florida's Extension offers a Master Naturalist Program. Open to anyone who has a serious interest in nature, it is designed to offer insight and knowledge into Florida's past and current natural systems.

“The Florida Master Naturalist Program is more than just a program designed to increase knowledge. The objective of the program is to prepare persons to share their knowledge with others, to act in a positive manner, to help others feel a greater connection to the land...”

A series of six full day classes, including field trips, are the basis of each segment of the program. Thick manuals with nearly 1200 pages of text, pictures and other resources act as valuable background and reference material.

The three segments include Freshwater Wetlands, Coastal Systems and the Upland Habitats courses. The cost is about \$200.00 for each of the three segments of the course and the extensive course material that goes with it. Contact information is on the Internet at: [www.masternaturalist.ifas.ufl.edu](http://www.masternaturalist.ifas.ufl.edu)

## *Nature Made Easy*

in Coastal Florida

### Identifying Little Blue Herons vs. Snowy Egrets

So what color would you expect a Little Blue Heron to be?

Well, blue would be a good guess.

But some Little Blue Herons are all white.

That doesn't make sense does it?

Well we shall help you make sense of it all in this version of *Nature Made Easy*.

The following pictures show two very similar white wading birds. One is an immature Little Blue Heron and the other one is a Snowy Egret. By the end of this page, you will be able to tell the difference between the two birds.



When Little Blue Herons start to grow up they are snowy white in color and resemble Snowy Egrets. But as they age, their feathers gradually turn blue. The picture on the left is an example of an immature Little Blue Heron. Note that it has a plain yellow bill, with a bluish tip, and it has yellowish green legs.

The picture on the right shows a Snowy Egret. Note the all black bill. They also have black legs. Note that when you can see a Snowy Egret's feet, they are wearing "golden slippers," since their feet are a golden color. The heron still has greenish yellow feet, along with the same color legs.

It's that simple to tell one species from another, once you know the facts. A little practice by watching these birds in the wild and you'll be an expert in short order. They travel and feed in the same areas, so you can compare them in the same habitat.

*Nature made easy.* Enjoy it.

## On The Internet

Want to know about endangered species in your area? Simply go to [www.enature.com](http://www.enature.com) and search on their extensive database.

**Hiking:** Walking and hiking enthusiasts should check out:

[www.walkingconnection.com](http://www.walkingconnection.com)

**Biking:** Four Central Florida bike shops of Dave's World are included on his webpage at [www.davidsworld.com](http://www.davidsworld.com). He also provides a media room on his site that includes great information on biking in Central Florida.

**Birding:** Cornell University in New York is the home of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Their website is a source of endless knowledge and contacts about birding. Their webpage is at

[www.birds.cornell.edu](http://www.birds.cornell.edu)

## Questions Answered

**Q: What is it?**



**A:** It's a Black Necked Stilt. It frequents mud flats, pools and grassy marshes. It commonly breeds in both fresh and salt-water habitats during winter.

Haven't seen one? Y'all need to get out in the field more!

## Man and Nature

This photo is telling of a unique relationship between man and nature. In it a lone cormorant and several pelicans wait for a handout from a fisherman. This picture was taken along the Crystal River on the west coast of Florida.



## Sponsorship

*Trails and Tales* is sponsored by Common Man Books, 2024 Falcon Court, Bellingham, WA 98229, Toll free at 877-429-3651, or on the Internet at:

[www.CommonManBooks.com](http://www.CommonManBooks.com)

The goal of *Trails and Tales* is to promote recreational use of the outdoors, and to promote the conservation of our natural resources for future generations.

Material for possible inclusion in this newsletter should be sent to the editors at P.O. Box 123, Alexandria Bay, NY 13607.

This newsletter is now going to be published quarterly. It is free to our customers and friends online through [www.commonmanbooks.com](http://www.commonmanbooks.com) or through [www.RogerFulton.com](http://www.RogerFulton.com). Go to those pages and click on Newsletters.

We welcome input and feedback from those websites and about our other services.

## Featured Critter: The Manatee



### **General Info:**

The West Indian Manatee or Florida Manatee is a large grey to grey-brown aquatic mammal that has a seal-shaped body and a flat round tail. They can grow up to 12 feet long and can weigh up to 3000 pounds, though most are smaller.

They have no natural enemies, other than man, and may live for more than 60 years.

Many manatees have scars on their backs from encounters with power boats. Many can be identified as individuals from the unique scars on their backs from these power boat encounters. Recent laws restricting power boats in known manatee areas have reduced the risk to these animals.

### **Where they live:**

Manatees live in fresh water, brackish and marine habitats in the southern United States and are distributed throughout the Caribbean Islands to eastern Central America, Columbia, Venezuela and southward to the northeast coast of Brazil. In Florida they can be found year round on the west coast at Homasassa Springs. In winter

they can be found near warm spring areas across Florida.

### **What they eat:**

Manatees can eat 100-200 pounds of sea grasses and other aquatic plants each day.

### **Interesting facts:**

Manatees are mammals that require surface oxygen to live. You can watch them surface every 2-4 minutes to get a gulp of air. Often, particularly in cloudy water, you will only see two nostrils above the surface as they breathe. In clear water you will see the whole animal as it rises to the surface.

Averse to cold water below 68 degrees, manatees will gather in winter near freshwater springs which generally bubble out of the ground at 72 degrees here in Florida. As a result, you can easily view them in several locations around Central Florida.

### **Florida Manatee Viewing locations:**

Homosassa Springs – Located on the west coast of Central Florida, manatees can be observed in the Homosassa River 365 days a year. Many tour boats in the area will take you out to them.

Haulover Canal – Nobody is quite sure why manatees congregate at this east coast location on Merritt Island. But they do. An observation deck has been built to observe them along the Kennedy Parkway.

Blue Spring State Park – This is a favorite location for manatee viewing during the winter months. Crowded on weekends, try to do your viewing on a weekday.

## Featured Trail

### Smyrna Dunes Boardwalk

Nearest Town: New Smyrna Beach,  
Florida

A 1 ½ mile, all boardwalk, easy loop  
trail



#### General Description:

This 1 ½ mile, all boardwalk, “dune walkover,” loop trail protects the fragile sand dunes from foot traffic, while still allowing the public to view the dunes, dune life and the ocean. It is truly an ecological savior for the dunes area.



#### What you will see:

You will pass through lush vegetation as you enter the dunes. But as you approach the ocean, you will view a much more barren landscape among the sand dunes. There are several beach access boardwalks so you can enjoy the

beach, as well as the dune landscape.

Shore birds, coastal songbirds and a wide variety of other wildlife may be seen on a good day. What you will find on the beach, well, it's what you find on the beach. An observation tower will allow you a panoramic view of the Indian River and surrounding area.



#### How to get there:

From I-95 take Exit 249 and travel east on S.R. 44 toward New Smyrna Beach. Follow Route 44, but don't go to Route A1A. Once in New Smyrna Beach, follow Flagler Avenue for about 1.7 miles, crossing over the Indian River, until you reach Peninsula Avenue. Turn left and follow it for about 2 miles to the Coast Guard Station. Smyrna Dunes Park is across from the United States Coast Guard Station.

There is adequate parking and there is a small entry fee to the park.

If you don't find it the first time, don't worry. The friendly people of New Smyrna Beach will be glad to help you find your way.

(This wildlife viewing trail is excerpted from a future book on wildlife viewing areas in Central Florida due out by the Fall of 2005. Or, maybe sooner! To inquire about the exact date, call toll free to 877-429-3651.)

## Future Publications

We have been busy at work seeking out hiking, bicycling and wildlife viewing trails in Central Florida. You can expect to see the following titles out now or by the Fall of 2005.

**25 *MORE* Short Hikes and Interesting Walks in Central Florida** (Done and available!)

**25 Great Wildlife Viewing Sites in Central Florida** (Available around August 2005)

(If you have an interest in any of these titles, you might even get them early by going to [www.commonmanbooks.com](http://www.commonmanbooks.com) and sniffing around. Or, call toll free to 877-429-3651 and talk nice to whoever answers the phone.)

Our already completed trail guides for Northern NY and Central FL are listed at [www.RogerFulton.com](http://www.RogerFulton.com) and/or [www.CommonManBooks.com](http://www.CommonManBooks.com)

## Amazing Nature



Yes, that's a Snowy Egret in VERY close proximity to an alligator. Coots, moorhens and many other birds don't seem to worry about their proximity to a predator alligator.

One thing about a predator; if they are not hungry, they won't bother **anything**.

## The Last Word

On page one, we mentioned the Florida Master Naturalist Program. Well, we went one step further and we actually took that 40+ hour Master Naturalist Course. And here are our findings and critique of that course.

We received more than 1200 pages of course materials to read. That covered just the Coastal Systems of Florida. We learned about, and picked up, lightning whelks (BIG snails) from a tidal area, examined parchment worms in the same area, and waded through tidal waters to do that and many other things.

A field trip to a marine medical research facility gave us a very serious perspective on the study of marine science. They were on a serious mission to save lives through marine research.

Classroom sessions covered every type of marine animal and critter, from those marine worms to the king of the dunes, the gopher tortoise. Other plants, animals and "hidden" critters were all covered.

We examined microscopic plankton samples, identified many species of shore birds and even learned the differences between white, red and black mangroves which hide so many evolving and young species of animals and fish.

I learned a great deal about the Coastal Systems of Florida from this great course. It is the kind of practical, hands-on course I have always wanted to take on this subject.

Can't wait to take the next segment of the Florida Master Naturalist Course.

The next two segments include the Freshwater Wetlands Course and the Upland Habitats Course. If they are as good as the first segment, we'll tell you about them.

Stay tuned.

Roger