
The Head Spring

Friends of Blue Spring State Park Newsletter

April 2024

Meet a member of the Friends of Blue Spring - Susan Hardester

Susan Hardester was born in Brooklyn, N.Y. of Irish and Italian heritage. With her family and friends, she enjoyed the ethnic culture of "the City." Susan moved to Orlando in her senior year of high school, and then began a nursing career at age twenty. Rearing two daughters and a son as a single mother, Susan's career and family consumed her attention. But guess what? Her hard work paid off! Now, her children have their own beautiful families, and her eight grandchildren love their Mimi. Retirement after forty-five years gives her time to pursue her creative interests. Her



husband Dan encourages her artistic and volunteer activities. Susan cherishes her garden as a sanctuary of peace and beauty. She has pursued painting at Art Studio 308 in DeLand with Georgia E. Dickson for ten years and participates in the Deltona Art Club. Susan has been a member of the Friends of Blue Spring since meeting current president Karen Kellerman at the Lyonia Festival three years ago. She regards her "Paint Out" project (see below) as one of many engaging promotional endeavors by this Citizen's Support Organization (CSO). The Paint Out "Plein Air" event this month is intended to catch the spirit of French "Plein Air", in which artists gather to paint outdoors. With portable easels, artists create with loose brushwork and soft forms in the Impressionistic style. Park guests will have opportunities to witness the creation of art in a tranquil natural setting.

Are you interested in volunteering with the Friends?
[click here!](#)

Blue Spring Paint Out and Family Picnic: A Day of Art and Nature

Greetings to all Friends of Blue Spring State Park! We are thrilled to announce the upcoming Blue Spring Paint Out and Family Picnic. This event is a wonderful opportunity for families and the community to experience Plein Air art in the beautiful surroundings of Blue Spring State Park.

Event Details

When: Saturday, April 27th

Where: Blue Spring State Park

Address: 2100 W. French Ave., Orange City, FL

Time: 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM



[Click here to sign up for a class!](#)

Activities

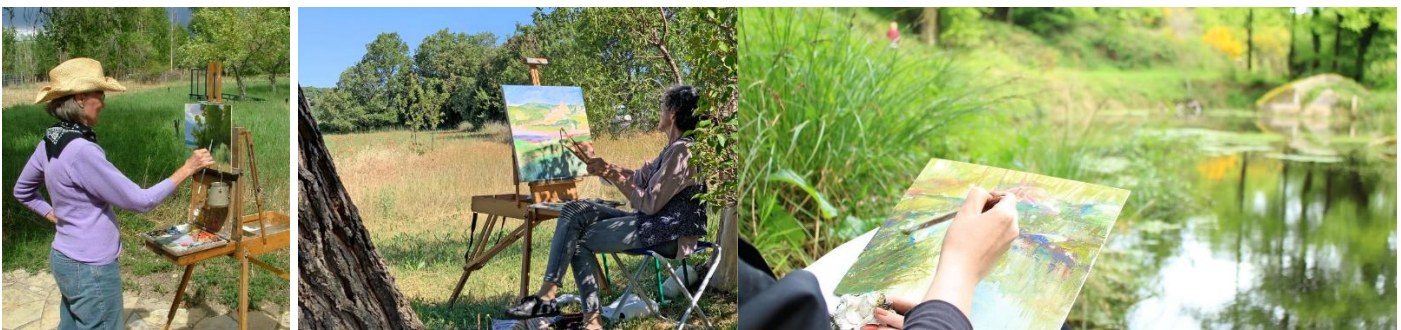
Artists are invited to paint in the beautiful setting of Blue Spring and the St. Johns River, surrounded by nature and history. A basic Plein Air class will be held near the Thursby House. If you're interested in attending as an artist or want to take the Plein Air Class, please sign up at the link provided above by April 14th, 2024.

But that's not all! Here's what else we have planned for the day:

- **Family Picnic:** Bring a blanket and enjoy a picnic lunch with family and friends. There are also picnic tables, pavilions, and grills if you want to have a BBQ.
- **Tour the historic Thursby House:** take a self-guided tour to see and learn the history of this beautiful place that is now one of the most iconic parts of Blue Spring State Park.
- **Guided Scrub Jay Hike:** Join us for a guided scrub jay hike at 10:00 AM.
- **Art Table:** We will have an art table set up for children of all ages. Feel free to let your creative juices flow!
- **Silent Auction:** Cast your bid for amazing pieces of donated artwork. The auction closes at 3:00 PM and winners will be announced at 3:15 PM.
- **The Outpost:** Don't miss out on delicious food and refreshing beverages! The Outpost (near the lower parking lot) will be open, serving a variety of tasty treats and ice-cold beer and soft drinks.
- **Shop:** The Friends of Blue Spring will be on hand to offer you our selection of T-shirts, key chains, totes, travel mugs and hand sewn manatees.
- **Meet Ranger Blu!** Blu, the park's manatee mascot, will be available for photos throughout the day.

Park Entrance Fees

While the event is free for guests, the regular park entrance fees must still be paid at the entrance. We look forward to seeing you soon for a day of art, nature, community, and culinary delights!



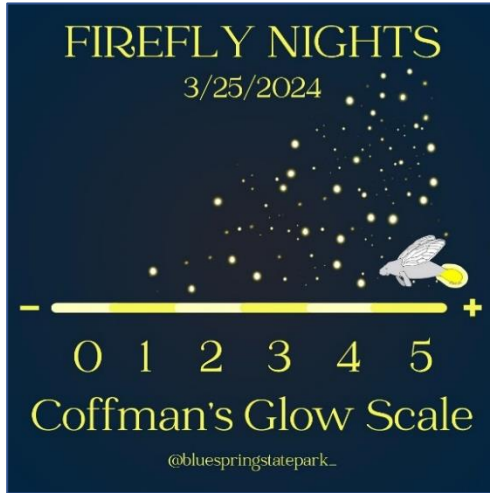
<https://www.outdoorpainter.com>; <https://blog.artweb.com>; <https://www.artfinder.com/blog/post/plein-air/#/>



Night of Lights and the 2024 Firefly Season



The 2024 Firefly season started off on March 15th with our annual sneak peek Night of Lights social event. Over 160 guests and sponsors were in attendance, enjoying good food from Angelina's, music provided by Ranger Adam, a silent auction, firefly swag, and the main event - the fireflies themselves!



On March 16th, we started the main firefly event and also inaugurated our Coffman Glow Scale and nightly educational talks about fireflies. Although there have been a few nights that got rained out or were a tad chilly for the fireflies, the season has been spectacular! The event will continue until the fireflies slow down, so keep an eye on Facebook for further announcements.



Here are our new firefly models of the adult Florida Single Snappy (*Photurus congener*) (upper left) and its larva (glow worm) (left). The image above is a 3-minute exposure of fireflies flashing near the Diver Entry. Notice the tracks of individual fireflies in the foreground and the light voids where trees blocked the light!

Blue Spring State Park History - Our First Residents

By Rich Hatton

We have all seen "Indians" on TV, but those portrayals are often very different from reality. The primary tribe that was occupying the St. Johns River around Blue Spring before Europeans arrived, was the Timucua. The Timucua were agricultural (planting squash, maize, cucumbers, peas, and beans), foraged for wild berries & roots (e.g. sassafras), and hunted game (bear, deer, boar, opossum, manatees, and alligators). Fish and shellfish (especially snails) were also a large part of their diets. I bet you didn't know that the word barbeque is thought to originate in the Timucua language! The Timucua were roasting game over a framework of sticks over a fire, and that clearly made an impression on the Spanish explorers.



by Teodor de Bry (Florida State Archives)

Did you know that the Thursby House is built on a huge mound of shells (a midden) discarded by generations of Timucua people? Year after year, they harvested and ate snails and tossed the shells and other debris into the midden, and even though it might be tempting to pick up a snail shell around the Thursby House, please don't! That is a piece of our local history that we want to preserve.



Timucua Fisherman (c) Theodore Morris



Timucua palm frond hut (c) National Park Service

By the mid-1800s, most Timucua had disappeared from Blue Spring State Park. Where did they go? Most probably died of smallpox and other European diseases that they had no resistance to, others were killed or captured in the slave trade, and the remnants of the tribe may have found refuge with the Seminoles.

Upcoming Events

Spring Into Migration Bird Walk - Tuesday April 12th and 19th from 8:30 a.m.-10:30 a.m. Meet in front of the Thursby House.

Plein Air Paint Out Event - Saturday April 27th from 9 a.m. -4 p.m.



Weekly Wednesday Bingo - Wednesday nights at 6:30 p.m. at the Riverwalk Pizzeria and Brew Pub in Orange City. Come join the fun and maybe you will win a stuffed manatee or another fun prize! **Would you like to help out at Bingo?** We are always looking for volunteers to sell bingo cards and call numbers. Please click [here](#) to sign up to help.



Junior Ranger Program - "Leave no Trace" - Wednesday, April 17th from 4:30 p.m. -5:30 p.m. behind the Thursby House. RSVP to [Connor](#) by April 15th.

National Bird Day Guided Bird Walk and River Cruise - Enjoy a free bird walk from 8:30 a.m. -10 a.m. on Saturday May 4th, and then sign up for a bird-focused river cruise starting at 10:30 a.m. (just \$30, plus tax).

Blue Spring State Park Junior Ranger Friends

Charlee the Manatee was recently spotted in the CSO's firewood shed near the Ranger Station. Like a good Jr. Ranger, he knows that you should never collect wood around the park for a campfire (we need to leave fallen wood where it is to provide habitat for Charlee's wild friends). Fortunately, the Friends of Blue Spring sell bundles of firewood near the entrance to the park. Proceeds from those sales benefit the park, so it's a win-win situation!



Effective April 1, 2024:

In-water activities are closed while the spring run shoreline is stabilized

This closure includes swimming, snorkeling, tubing, diving, and paddling in the spring run and spring head. Boat tours and paddling are only allowed in the St. Johns River. Visitors are asked to adhere to all posted signs and avoid closed areas when visiting the park.

Why is the park conducting the shoreline stabilization?

The stabilization project is necessary because the flow of water from the first magnitude spring has created an undercut along the shoreline. Undercuts can be dangerous for wildlife, recreation, and important artifacts. While the stabilization project is underway, other improvements including an upgraded manatee release area, an improved swimming platform, and a new boardwalk along the spring run to the spring head will also be constructed.

The park and the Friends of Blue Spring will be sponsoring a variety of activities during the closure, so keep an eye on our newsletter and social media! Blue Spring Adventures will maintain their St. Johns River Nature Cruise, along with paddleboard, canoe, kayak, and bicycle rentals during the closure. [CLICK HERE](#) to book a St. Johns River Nature Cruise or rent a paddleboard, canoe, kayak, bicycle, or book a segway tour. More closure information can be found on the park's website [here](#).



Critter Corner

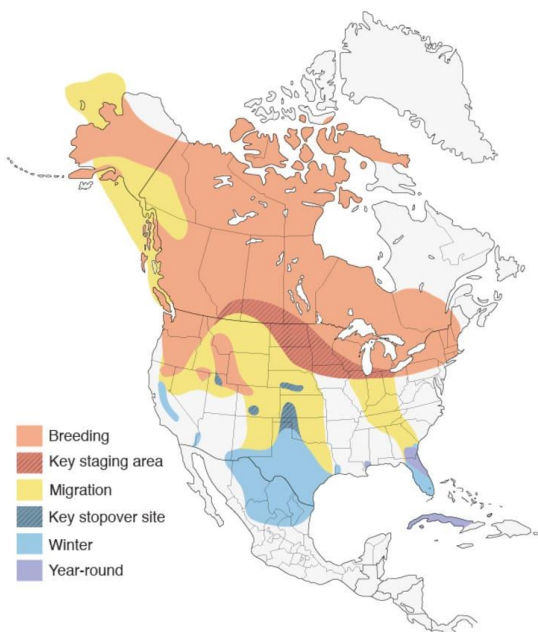
Article and photos by Missy Gibbs

Sandhill Cranes - *Antigone canadensis*

Sandhill Cranes are one of the most amazing of Florida birds. They are migratory in most areas, but Florida has year-round residents in many neighborhoods and golf courses. The bird's distinctive red heads & eyes and loud call makes them instantly recognizable. Do you have a family of cranes in your neighborhood? If you do, please do not put out seeds for them; it is actually illegal to feed them (Migratory Bird Act). Cranes are very good at finding food for themselves; they are omnivorous and will eat everything from lizards, grubs, snails, small mammals, baby birds, seeds, and berries.

Our Florida Sandhill Cranes can be found just about anywhere, although they do prefer wetlands, and that is where you will see them build their nests....on high spots that are a safe distance from predators. They will lay 1-3 eggs, and after roughly a month, the chicks will hatch! Unlike many bird species (e.g. cardinals or robins), baby cranes are able to walk around and even swim within hours of hatching. They initially look like balls of fluff with legs, but soon grow into a more adult form. You will see crane families staying together for most of the year.

But what about the migratory cranes? If you go out to a wild space like Lake Woodruff National Wildlife Refuge during the winter months, you may see or hear hundreds of cranes overwintering in the more distant pools.



[Birds of the World](#)



Lake Woodruff cranes



**Florida Park Service District 3
Volunteer of the Month**

April 2024



Congratulations Dennis & Toni Caldwell!

With over 5,000 combined hours served, Dennis and Toni are a great asset to the Florida Park Service. They are efficient, attentive, detail-oriented campground hosts who never leave a job half-done, and they exude pride and passion for their work. Blue Spring receives regular compliments from visitors about the quality of the campgrounds when Dennis and Toni are hosting. They go out of their way to assist with traffic control and other major events in the park such as festivals or manatee rescues and releases. Nothing is more reassuring to Blue Spring staff than knowing Dennis and Toni have the campground area under control. They are both very independent when they need to be, while remaining great team players. Thank you, Dennis and Toni!

**Dennis & Toni Caldwell
Blue Spring State Park**

Thank You for Making a Difference!