

# The Head Spring

## Friends of Blue Spring State Park Newsletter

### November-December

**Meet our Members:** Gina is a Florida native who grew up in and around Lady Lake and spent many school and family outings in the lakes, rivers and oceans around Florida. It was in Crystal River that she first encountered wild manatees swimming "with" her in the water when she was very young. It was very impactful, and she has loved manatees ever since. Gina has recently become the Volunteer Specialist at Save the Manatee Club (SMC)!

Gina enjoyed a successful career as an executive in retail, self-storage and senior living, during which time she moved around the US, living in Florida, Oregon, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Louisiana. After moving back to Florida almost 22 years ago, her fascination and adoration for manatees came back in full swing!

It was the Save the Manatee Club that first "recruited" Gina to be an in-person volunteer. Since then, Gina has volunteered at festivals, park clean-ups and as a Manatee Observer. Gina also became a Florida State Park volunteer and through that connection became a member of The Friends of Blue Spring State Park. Through all of these volunteer opportunities, Gina has educated and interacted with thousands of folks about how humans can better support manatees.

Since we have the "Best" State Park in Florida (oh the manatees!!), Gina would like to see our CSO efforts focused on increasing our membership overall with a target on the recruitment of more professionals. As a member of the Events Committee and Bingo Volunteer, Gina is excited to raise money to support our park and special projects like the Manatee Rescue and Release Ramp. Gina is looking forward to welcoming more Friends to the CSO during this Manatee Season and especially at the Manatee Festival on January 28 and 29, 2023!!



## Manatees and other species at Blue Spring

Most visitors come to Blue Spring in the wintertime to see large aggregations of manatees in the protected warm water sanctuary. It's a wonderful place to observe these gentle giants in their natural habitat and last season a record number of 721 manatees was counted in a single day! But if you look closely, there are also many other species and sometimes they can even be seen interacting with manatees! Some of the best interactions have been captured on Save the Manatee Club's [webcams](#) over the years. Of course, alligators are always a big hit with the crowds as they are large and pretty easy to spot from the boardwalk. They are usually out on a sunny day and can be seen [sunning themselves on logs](#) or swimming through an aggregation of manatees. Did you know that manatees and alligators co-exist peacefully? Nobody is exactly sure why, but most likely manatees are simply too large for an alligator to consider them a prey item and small calves are usually with their mom. To answer some of

those questions, Save the Manatee Club made a short video a few years ago that takes a closer look at [Florida's odd couple](#). One manatee at Blue Spring was even seen [chasing after an alligator](#) – he was aptly named “Gator”, and is part of Save the Manatee Club’s adoption program and proud adoptive son of the West Volusia Tourism Association!



Manatee “Dix” and an alligator at Blue Spring State Park. Photo courtesy of Patrick M. Rose, Save the Manatee Club.



Manatees also share the spring with a variety of freshwater turtles and have even been observed [playing with a turtle](#) or investigating a large [snapping turtle](#)! There are also a variety of birds that share the spring with the manatees, for example anhingas and cormorants that can be seen on the tree branches in the lower part of the spring run near the river, one occasionally jumps into the water and startles a group of sleeping manatees! And the anhinga in [this video](#) checked the manatee out up close! Other bird species include various kinds of herons, ibis, limpkin, egret, turkey and black vultures and every now and then an eagle. A few years ago, some very lucky visitors got to see a snowy egret standing on the back of manatee “Volusia” near Hontoon Island!

Over 50 species of fish, including mullet, juvenile tarpon, gar, bass, and some non-natives like the pacu and tilapia, call Blue Spring their home, too. The fish species the manatee probably dislikes the most is the invasive armored catfish, oftentimes referred to as a pleco, which will attach itself to the manatee and nibble on the algae growing on its skin, causing the manatee to roll and move to shake off the fish. More on this interaction can be viewed in this [short video](#) featuring Dr. Melissa Gibbs from Stetson University, who is an expert on armored catfish. Many people wonder why tarpon come into Blue Spring since they are characteristically a saltwater fish. It turns out that Blue Spring is not entirely freshwater (it is a little salty), and juvenile tarpon come for the warmer water, just like the manatees!

## New Educational Signs

The Friends of Blue Spring was recently awarded a \$5,500 grant from the Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida's Protect Florida Springs grant program! Our project "Educating the Public About Conservation and a Major Restoration of the Blue Spring State Park Headspring and Run", was inspired by the major restoration project that has been happening in the spring run and all of the questions that people have asked about it (e.g. why is the spring being restored?, what is erosion?, how can we help to maintain our favorite park?). We are pleased to announce that the signs have been mounted along the boardwalk, and hope you enjoy them!



## Calendar of Upcoming Events

November 22<sup>nd</sup>: BSSP JayWalk 9:30 am-10:30 am  
November 25<sup>th</sup>: BSSP Boardwalk Tour 11 am-12 pm  
December 10<sup>th</sup>: Orange City Christmas Parade 4 pm -7 pm  
January 28<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup>: Orange City Manatee Festival, 9 am -5 pm each day

We are looking for volunteer help for the Orange City Christmas Parade and the Manatee Festival. If interested, please contact Park Services Specialist [Connor Wagner](#)



## Critter Corner

Florida is home to many birds of prey, including falcons, hawks, and eagles. The Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) is the easiest eagle species to recognize, with its distinctive white crown, bright yellow beak, dark brown body, and white tail feathers with black tips. The juvenile bald eagles do not have the white head and tail, but are more of a mottled brown. Their diet depends on where they are. Field mice, small birds, turtles, rabbits, and carrion are all on the menu, however fish are the preferred meal. Bald Eagles mate for life, and the Blue Spring State Park pair can be seen on the highest of the trees across from the lower viewing platforms, where the Blue Spring run empties into the St. Johns River. The next time you visit the park, look up in the trees near the river, and just maybe you will see the pair of eagles sitting proudly in the top of the tree.



## Brick Fundraiser Update



The first order of bricks has arrived and has been installed along the walkway leading to the Thursby House. Now for the exciting news: We have opened a new campaign just in time for manatee season and the holidays! Visit our [website](#) to look at brick options, including the miniature souvenir bricks.

