



GTM NERR NEWS

NERR NEWS is Good News!

January 2012 issue

The GTM Environmental Education Center will be closed for the State holidays on Jan 1st, 2nd and 16th. The beach, trails and Guana Dam fishing area will remain open regular hours.

State of the Reserve Wrap up and Thank You!

The GTMNERR held its second annual Research Reserve (GTM NERR) State of the Reserve conference on December 2, 2011. The conference is an annual event that showcases current and ongoing research at the GTM NERR through presentations and posters. Presentations, led by the researchers on their own research, were presented throughout the afternoon. 75 people attended and the event was a great success. The attendance was very diverse and included local community, GTM volunteers, non-profit organizations, university representatives, students, and many of our local government organizations. The conference concluded with a reception sponsored by the Friends of the Reserve as well as a poster session.

During the State of the Reserve conference, GTM NERR researchers discussed the current status of research projects and results. Topics included alligators as apex predators, gopher tortoise ecology, and system-wide water quality monitoring, as well as a report from the GTM Invasive Plant Task Force. “The GTM NERR looks forward to many more years of working within our local community to educate and inspire future generations, while continuing to preserve our precious natural and historic resources.” said Mike Shirley, Director of the GTM NERR.

Q&A for the Holiday Season

Reindeer: <http://wild.enature.com/blog/was-rudolph-actually-a-female-reindeer>

Poinsettias: <http://wild.enature.com/blog/our-christmas-poinsettias-arent-actually-flowers>

Mistletoe: <http://wild.enature.com/blog/is-mistletoe-really-the-kiss-of-death>

‘Tis the Season – of the Whale

When you think about wildlife that is rare in Florida, the Florida panther, Florida black bear and West Indian manatee probably top the list. But another species commonly visits Florida’s coastal waters during the winter months – a giant of sorts – the North Atlantic right whale, *Eubalaena glacialis*.

From December through March, right whales use the waters along the southeast Georgia and northeast Florida coasts as their calving grounds. They are also often seen in the coastal waters of Guana River Marsh Aquatic Preserve. They are easy to identify, as they weigh about 70 tons and range from about 45 to 55 feet in length. Right whales are grayish black with whitish patches on their skin and unlike other whale species, do not have a dorsal fin.

The calves are bluish-gray and about 14 feet long when they are born. The calves are completely dependent on their mother, whose entire job is now to take care of her calf. In the spring, when

the waters begin to warm, the whales migrate north to the much colder waters off the coasts of New England and Canada.

The right whale is the most endangered of all large whales. Only about 350 remain, so to see one is a real treat.

If you spot a right whale, report the sighting to researchers at the whale sighting hotline at 1.888.97WHALE or 1.888.979.4253. If you happen to be boating and see a right whale, federal regulations require you to stay 500 yards from the whales.

All photos in this set were taken under research permit #594-1759, #775-1875, and #932-1905/MA-009526 issued by NOAA Fisheries.



SUCCESS IN ORLANDO!

Both of the GTM NERR St. Johns County 4-H teams placed first in their age groups at the Marine Ecology Event on December 3rd held at the Orange County Extension Office in Orlando. Teams of four 4-H members from counties around Florida displayed their knowledge of marine plants, animals, and habitats as they were tested for over two hours at the competition. Contestants were given as many as 215 (depending on age) of plants and animals to be able to identify and to know interesting information about how they function, are used by humans, where they live, etc. Coastal ecosystems (beaches, estuaries, marshes and swamps) were emphasized. The special topic this year was the invasive Lionfish; competitors needed to know where Lionfish came from and when, how they are harming marine ecosystems, and what adaptations they have that are making them a success.

The first place Intermediate team (ages 11-13) was comprised of Sarah Gordon, Liam Harrington, Henry Keating and Ellie Leach. Ellie also placed first overall of all Intermediates in the contest, and Henry, who was competing for the first time as an Intermediate, tied for second. Riley Connor, Ryan Edwards, Lark Harrington, and Harrison Keating were the members of the first place Junior team (ages 8-10). Harrison placed first among all Juniors for the second year running. Sage Edwards and Club President Cybill Winkel competed as Seniors (14-18).

The 4-H Marine Ecology Club is supported by St. Johns County Cooperative Extension Service and the Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve (GTM NERR). Monthly meetings are held at the GTM NERR Environmental Education Building which supplies many of the resources for the meetings. This year the Club adopted a Leatherback Sea Turtle nest and watched as GTM NERR volunteers surveyed the nest after most of the hatchlings had emerged. One hatchling was still in the nest and the children watched as it made its way to the ocean at dusk. Field trips included a boat ride and exploration led by a naturalist at the Marine Discovery Center at and a guided plant walk on the beach and the intracoastal area around the GTM NERR Marineland office. Club President Cybill Winkel produced a video of

some of the clubs activities and another on the Leatherback Sea Turtle experience, both of which are accessible at <http://www.youtube.com/user/GTMResearchReserve>.

The Marine Ecology Club Leaders are GTM NERR volunteers Janet Koehler and Clare Bailey and youth co-leader Ellie Leach. Youth ages 8-18 who are interested in joining the club and would be interested in preparing for the 2012 Marine Ecology contest are asked to contact the St. Johns County 4-H Office at 209-0430 or go to <http://stjohns.ifas.ufl.edu>.

SEA TURTLE MANAGEMENT AT GTM RESEARCH RESERVE

With the help of volunteers and satellite tracking, biologist Scott Eastman at Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve has kept a sharp eye on threatened and endangered marine turtles. The resulting data will add to an international effort to better understand population dynamics and habitat utilization to help conserve all marine turtle species and prevent their numbers from dwindling beyond the possibility of recovery.

The GTM Research Reserve surveys are from May 1st through October 31st and cover 7.7 miles of coastline in Northeast Florida to document nesting marine turtles.

Nesting counts at the Reserve in the 2010 and 2011 seasons were unusually high. From 1989 to 2009 the average number of nests was around 72. This year Eastman reports that overall there were 187 documented marine turtle nests and calls this the second highest nesting season on record for the GTM Research Reserve, after the previous 2010 season when there were 261 nests.

Of the total nests documented this season, 175 were loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*), five were Atlantic green (*Chelonia mydas*), and seven were leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*) turtles.

In addition to simply monitoring the nests, Eastman is studying such variables as temporal and spatial patterns in nesting, strandings, and in-water use of habitats which he tracks via satellite.

Volunteers working under Eastman's permit monitor nests and record data throughout the season, working in pairs and arriving on duty to patrol the beaches by 5:00 a.m. daily. Eastman also does some of the monitoring and understands the hardships of rising at 4:00 a.m. and doing this every day for six months. He credits the volunteers as dedicated and crucial to the goal of gaining a better understanding of marine turtle populations.

Many of the same volunteers return to duty year after year, doing their part to help these great turtles continue to populate the world's oceans. As volunteer George DeMarino recently told a Jacksonville News Tribune reporter, "Sea turtles have been around since the time of the dinosaurs, and now they need our help to survive."



Don't forget to "Like" us on Facebook! "GTM Research Reserve" Compliments of the Friends of GTM Reserve

There is also a blog <http://gtmresearchreserve.blogspot.com/> being put together by one of our fans.

Activities at the GTM Research Reserve

GUIDED NATURE TRAIL TREK TUESDAY AT MARINELAND

On Wednesday, January 4, 8:30 AM – 10:00 A.M., GTM Research Reserve volunteer Ron Ceryak will guide hikers through Flagler County's "River to Sea Preserve" wooded coastal hammock to the Matanzas River along a mile-and-half trail. Expect to see turtles, alligators, wading birds, and signs of other critters. Also learn about seasonal flowering shrubs, moss-laden oaks, cedars, mangroves, cabbage palms and other native vegetation as well as Native American lore, including how the Indians made use of various plants for food and medicinal purposes.

Ceryak is a retired hydrogeologist who worked with Suwannee River Water Management District for thirty years. He is now volunteering with the GTM Research Reserve. Meet the guide in the parking lot of the River to Sea Preserve, located on the west side of A1A at the southern end of the town of Marineland. Directional NERR road signs will be placed at the entrance. Please make reservations by calling 904-823-4500, and wear comfortable, closed toe shoes.

BROWN BAG LUNCH LECTURE --Longnose Gar--

The GTM Research Reserve will host a brown bag lunch lecture from noon to 1:00 p.m. on Friday, January 6, 2012. GTM Biological Scientist Max Henzler will give a presentation on some aspects of reproduction and diet in a coastal South Carolina population of Longnose gar. Max attended Penn State for his undergraduate work in wildlife and fisheries sciences and general biology and received his Masters from the University of South Carolina in earth and environmental resource management. His presentation is on his graduate research at USC. Bring your lunch and join us for an interesting presentation. There is no cost to attend the lecture. Reservations are required by calling (904) 823-4500. The GTM Research Reserve Environmental Education Center is located at 505 Guana River Road, Ponte Vedra Beach FL 32082.

FREE WEEKEND NATURE MOVIE AT THE GTM RESEARCH RESERVE

--Jean-Michel Cousteau Ocean Adventures--

The GTM Research Reserve will present the nature movie "Jean-Michel Cousteau Ocean Adventures" every Saturday and Sunday during the month of January at 10:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. Join Peabody and Emmy Award-winning Jean-Michel Cousteau and his acclaimed diving teams as they explore a thrilling array of natural phenomena, investigate little known territories and ecosystems hundreds of feet beneath the ocean's surface, and come face to face with the friendly and ferocious inhabitants of the deep in this film. The GTM Environmental Education Center (EEC) is located at 505 Guana River Road, Ponte Vedra Beach FL 32082. There is no cost to see the movie. If you would like to tour the EEC before or after the film, the cost is \$2.00 for adults, \$1.00 for children age 10 to 17 and children under 10 are free. Call 904-823-4500 for further information.

FRIENDS OF THE GTM RESERVE BOARD MEETING--Open to the Public--

The Friends of the GTM Reserve will hold its monthly board meeting on Tuesday, January 10th from 5:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. at the Environmental Education Center. The public is invited to attend. For information please contact Teri Webley at (904) 823-4527.

Guana Peninsula Guided Trail Walk

The GTM Research Reserve will host a trail walk on Saturday, January 14th from 8:30 a.m. to 10:30 am. Join GTM Volunteer Cat Eastman for a 1.5 mile interpretive walk that the entire family will enjoy. Meet at the Guana trailhead pavilion (far west end of Guana River Rd.). Wear comfortable closed toe shoes and dress for the weather. There is a \$3 per vehicle parking fee. Reservations are required. Please call 904-823-4500. The GTM Research Reserve Environmental Education Center is located at 505 Guana River Road, Ponte Vedra Beach FL 32082.

BIRDING LECTURE AT GTM RESEARCH RESERVE, MARINELAND

On Tuesday, January 17, at the GTM Research Reserve Marineland Office, 10:00 to 11:00 A.M., volunteer Diane Reed, leading expert on birding, will present a description of birding opportunities within the 73,000 acre Reserve. Her lecture will include shorebird monitoring and marshbird surveys, and she will provide an exciting update on the Falcon Migration Watch. Outstanding bird photos by leading regional photographers will be included in the program. Reed has been an avid birder for over 20 years. She is past president and board member of St. Johns Audubon. For Audubon of Florida she has served as Board of Directors and also chaired the Northeast Florida Regional Conservation Committee. Her local activities include leading bird trips and conducting surveys such as the Annual Christmas Bird Count and other migratory counts for St. Johns County. For the last 14 years, Reed has assisted in and now maintains the Falcon Migration watch.

This program is one of an ongoing lecture series held on the third Tuesday of the month at the GTM Research Reserve southern office. The series is designed to help inform the public about their coastal natural world. The southern Reserve office is located just off A1A at 9741 Ocean Shore Blvd at the south end of the Town of Marineland. Due to limited seating, reservations are required. Please call 904-823-4500.

GUIDED NATURE TRAIL TREK TUESDAY AT MARINELAND

On Tuesday, January 24, 8:30 AM – 10:00 A.M., GTM Research Reserve volunteer Ron Ceryak will guide hikers through Flagler County's "River to Sea Preserve" wooded coastal hammock to the Matanzas River along a mile-and-half trail. Expect to see turtles, alligators, wading birds, and signs of other critters. Also learn about seasonal flowering shrubs, moss-laden oaks, cedars, mangroves, cabbage palms and other native vegetation as well as Native American lore, including how the Indians made use of various plants for food and medicinal purposes. Meet the guide in the parking lot of the River to Sea Preserve, located on the west side of A1A at the southern end of the town of Marineland. Please make reservations by calling 904-823-4500, and wear comfortable, closed toe shoes.

ADULT EXPLORING OUR ENVIRONMENT CLASS

Are you curious about the coastal environment of NE Florida? Have you ever wished that there was a "summer camp" for adults? If so, "Exploring our Environment—from the ocean to the river" may be the perfect opportunity for you! Join biologists from the University of Florida, GTMNERR and many other locations as they team up to provide hands-on learning experiences in this one-week program.

The program combines field studies (outdoors), lectures and educational crafts (indoors). Topics covered include beaches, sea turtles, estuaries, water quality monitoring, invasive species, coastal

uplands and marine mammals. The ways in which humans interact with the coastal environment will be a recurring subject throughout the program.

Located within the town of Marineland, Flagler County's River to Sea Preserve will be the setting for most of the activities in this program. Within the preserve are beaches with rocky tidepools, a coastal hammock that includes a freshwater pond and gopher tortoise burrows, and saltmarsh/mangrove shoreline along the intracoastal waterway (Matanzas River).

People learn best by doing, so this program is designed to incorporate as many hands-on activities as possible. These may involve extended periods of time outdoors, wading in shallow water and hiking along flat trails. Participants should be prepared to take part in these activities. Registration fee includes all supplies, coffee and drinking water. Lunch is not included in the registration fee—participants should bring a bag lunch each day. All participants must be 18 or older, please! Class size is limited.

For more information, see <http://stjohns.ifas.ufl.edu/sea/education.html>. To register, go to <http://exploreapril2012.eventbrite.com/>



Other Nature related Activities in the area

The events/activities listed below take place at a variety of locations around St Johns and Flagler County. Please be sure to make note of their location.

Return of the Northern Right Whale, Sierra Club Program for Tuesday, January 3, 6.00 p.m. in Ponte Vedra Beach

Author and publisher Frank Gromling will present a slide program about one of the world's most endangered large mammals, the North Atlantic right whale. Frank has been a volunteer with the Marineland Right Whale Project since its inception in 2000, and has monitored and photographed these 50-ton animals as they visit the coastal waters off Flagler Beach each winter. Pregnant right whales, often accompanied by other adults and curious juveniles, come to Northeast Florida waters to give birth to calves. Coming close to shore, the whales are easily visible along the coast, even without binoculars. The program will be held in the main meeting room of the Ponte Vedra Beach Public Library on Library Road at A1A (blinking light south of the intersection of A1A and Solana Road, on A1A about two miles south of Butler Boulevard). Books about the whales and the national marine sanctuaries will be available for purchase. Everyone is welcome (including children)! Snacks will be provided, but bring your own drink. For further information, contact Larry Lickenbrock at (904) 537-6047.

Experiences with wild dolphins and other wildlife along the Matanzas River Basin, Jan. 4

Zack McKenna, an interpretive naturalist from St. Augustine Eco Tours, will present a photo-illustrated talk on wild dolphin populations and other Matanzas River wildlife at the Wednesday, January 4, SACA meeting. The meeting begins at 7:00 p.m. in the Lohman Auditorium at the Center for Marine Studies, University of Florida Whitney Lab. The meeting is open to the public. McKenna will share water experiences with turtle and bird rescues and significant dolphin observations. He is compiling base line information about resident and migrating

populations of wild dolphin along the local Intracoastal Waterway and is using that data as research for his master's thesis at the University of North Florida. In 2005, McKenna and wife Gracie founded their kayaking company to fit their own passion for the environment and to educate others. Call 904.471.0753 for more information.

Master Naturalist Course February 2012

Learning more about Florida's natural environment now is possible through the Florida Master Naturalist Program (FMNP), an environmental education extension program being offered by Ripple Effect Ecotours, in partnership with University of Florida's Whitney Laboratory for Marine Bioscience, February 2012. Training in Florida's Coastal systems, the second of three ecosystem modules included in the FMNP, will be available at the Whitney Laboratory in the town of Marineland, and completion of the 40-hour program results in registration in the UF-IFAS Master Naturalist Program database as a FMNP Coastal Systems Naturalist.

The FMNP is not a degree-seeking program. The program is appropriate for both the novice and the highly skilled environmental professional. Training for the Coastal System Module includes classroom instruction, field trips, and practical interpretive experience related to the general ecology, habitats, vegetation types, wildlife, and conservation issues of Coastal areas in Florida, which include marine and estuarine, and coastal uplands. In addition, the program addresses the role of society in coastal conservation, develops naturalist interpretation skills, and discusses environmental ethics. Certified FMNP Provider: Ripple Effect Ecotours: Chris Kelley, Danny Lippi, and Joe Woodbury will be instructing the class with guest speakers from the Conservation Field Station, University of Florida's Whitney Lab and the Marineland Dolphin Adventure.

Course Dates: Start on Saturday, February 4th, 2012 and runs every Tuesday and Thursday evening from 6:00pm - 9:30pm with Saturday lectures and field trips from 9:00am - 4:30pm with graduation on Thursday, February 23rd. Register online at www.MasterNaturalist.org, and click on "Course Offerings" for specific class times. The full class schedule is available at www.RippleEffectEcotours.com Cost: \$225, which includes all field trips, 40 contact hours of instruction, a comprehensive student reference workbook, and, upon completion, registration in the UF FMNP database as a Coastal Naturalist. A UF-IFAS certificate of achievement, embroidered FMNP patch, and FMNP Coastal lapel pin also will be provided at completion.

For more information about the Coastal System Module training or about the FMNP in general, contact Ripple Effect Ecotours at (904)347-1565 or log on to the official FMNP Web site at www.MasterNaturalist.org.

Special Events at Fort Matanzas National Monument www.nps.gov/foma

Fourth Saturday of the Month Nature Program

Living History Day and cannon firing

For more information, call the park at 904-471-0116 or check their website- www.nps.gov/foma

Special Events at Fort Mose Historical State Park

<http://www.floridastateparks.org/fortmose/default.cfm>

Bird Walk at Fort Mose Historic State Park – Sunday, January 15, 8:30-10:30 a.m.

Come meet the birds at Fort Mose Historic State Park. Led by a park volunteer, this fun, informative walk is open to the public and to birders of all levels. We'll view the rookery and search for marsh birds and migrating warblers. Please dress for the weather and bring binoculars

and a field guide if you have one. Walk and park entrance are free. Fort Mose is on Highway 1, one mile north of Route 16.

LIVING HISTORY DAYS AT FORT MOSE HISTORIC STATE PARK: January 28, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. Volunteers will be onsite in period dress offering visitors a fascinating glimpse into the past. Each living history program throughout the year will offer visitors a chance to discover a different topic. This month's program will focus on military maneuvers and colonial weapon demonstrations. In addition to the demonstration, the park's weekly guided ranger tour will be offered to visitors at 11:00am for those who wish to participate (See Ranger Programs). Participants should dress appropriately for the weather and bring insect repellent, as the program will be held outdoors. Program is weather permitting.

Special Events for Washington Oaks Gardens State Park

<http://www.floridastateparks.org/washingtonoaks/default.cfm>

Special Events for Anastasia State Park <http://www.floridastateparks.org/anastasia/default.cfm>

FIRST DAY HIKE: January 1, 2012, 10:00 a.m. Meeting location: Hill Top picnic area
Degree of Difficulty: 0.8 miles moderate to strenuous. Pets are allowed if leashed or otherwise under the physical control of a person at all times. Leashes may not exceed 6 feet in length.
Things to bring: bottles of water, binoculars, snacks, sunglasses and sunscreen. Regular park entry fees apply

Bird Walk at Anastasia State Park – Sunday, January 8, 8:30-10:30 a.m.

Come meet the birds at Anastasia State Park. Led by a park volunteer, this fun, informative walk is open to the public and to birders of all levels. We'll walk the beach, boardwalk and other park areas looking for shorebirds, herons, spoonbills and more. Please dress for the weather and bring binoculars and a field guide if you have one. Walk is free; park entrance fee applies. Meet at Island Beach Shop & Grill at the end of the park road.

Special Events for Faver-Dykes State Park

<http://www.floridastateparks.org/faverdykes/default.cfm>

Special Events for Gamble Rogers State Park

<http://www.floridastateparks.org/gamblerogers/default.cfm>



***** OUT ON THE WEB *****

For additional information, you might want to check out the following websites. These links are simply resources we think may help you enrich your perspective. By listing these websites, the GTM NERR is not automatically endorsing or verifying the accuracy of their content unless explicitly stated.

Florida's GTMNERR site: www.FloridaCoasts.org/gtm

National Estuarine Research Reserve System: <http://nerrs.noaa.gov>

Friends of the GTM Reserve: www.gtmnerr.org

Job site for the GTM Reserve and State of Florida: peoplefirst.myflorida.com

Florida's State Parks: <http://www.floridastateparks.org/>

Fort Matanzas National Monument: <http://www.nps.gov/foma>

Guana River Wildlife Management Area:

<http://www.myfwc.com/viewing/recreation/wmas/lead/guana-river/>

River to Sea Preserve at Marineland: <http://www.flaglerparks.com/riversea/preserve.htm>
St Johns River Water Management District: <http://www.floridaswater.com/trailguides/index.html>
Sea Grant: <http://stjohns.ifas.ufl.edu/sea/seagrant.htm>



*******GTM Research Reserve CALENDAR of EVENTS*******

**All programs listed below are held at the GTMNERR Environmental Education Center, 505 Guana River Rd, in South Ponte Vedra Beach unless noted otherwise. Due to limited space, reservations are requested for programs. Please call 904-823-4500 or visit to www.gtmnerr.org for more details. Environmental Education Center admission: Adults \$2, Age 10—17 \$1, under age 10 Free. Costs for most programs are included with your entrance fee, unless otherwise noted.

January

Jan 1 & 2 * GTM Education Center CLOSED * Beach, Dam and Trails open

Wed* Jan 4* 8:30-10am Nature Walk @ River to Sea Preserve, Marineland, FL

Fri * Jan 6 * Noon - 1pm Brown Bag Lunch Lecture

Sat & Sun * 10am and 1pm Nature Movie

Tues * Jan 10 * 5pm-6pm GTM Reserve Friends Meeting

Sat * Jan 14 * 8:30am to 10:30am Guana Guided Trail Walk \$3 parking

Mon Jan 16 * GTM Education Center CLOSED * Beach, Dam and Trails open

Tues* Jan 17* 10am – 11am Birding Lecture @ GTMNERR Marineland office

Tues* Jan 24* 8:30-10am Nature Walk @ River to Sea Preserve, Marineland, FL

(Other events are occasionally added. Visit www.gtmnerr.org for information)

Please call 904-823-4500 for more details or reservations.

******* SUBSCRIBE/UNSUBSCRIBE INFORMATION *******

To subscribe or unsubscribe to GTM NERR News, send e-mail to Janet.Zimmerman@dep.state.fl.us

Questions, comments or corrections? Contact Janet Zimmerman, GTM Reserve Assistant Manager at 505 Guana River Rd, Ponte Vedra Beach, FL 32082 Janet.Zimmerman@dep.state.fl.us or 904-823-4500.