



Colleen Braun



FLORIDA
STATE PARKS
...the Real FloridaSM

Myakka River State Park

June 2019

Rain, Rain, (don't) Go Away...

It's storm season! With June comes higher temperatures and higher rainfall. While there are obvious dangers associated with Florida's thunderstorms, there is also enthralling beauty.

Florida owes a lot of its weather to its peninsular shape. Unlike landlocked areas with thick coasts, storms can easily traverse the entire state horizontally. As air masses on land grow hotter with the summer sun, they collide with cooler air masses from the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Ocean. When hot and cool air masses collide, it creates a *stormy* situation.

While many people resent the dreariness or fear the ferocity, wildlife thrives. Thunderstorms clear the air of summertime's oppressive humidity and nourish plants so long deprived of a healthy drink.

Increased rainfall allows plants such as the Resurrection Ferns and Spanish Moss to shed their greyish winter tones and burst into a vibrant green, covering the hammocks. Grasses and shrubbery stretch to the skies, drinking the water and sunlight.

Myakka's soil is poor for drainage. There is a thin, very sandy layer that rests atop a thick, nonporous substrate (mostly clay, sometimes limestone). So, when water can't drain, it only has one place to go—up. The stormy season also means higher water levels throughout the park: a faster river current, deeper ponds, and new shallows to explore.

Wading birds thrive as shorelines expand, giving them new and fertile feeding grounds. The juvenile wading birds will start to mature and grow their adult plumage, too, joining adults beside them in flourishing flocks.

Fun Fact!

Myakka fine sand is the official State of Florida Soil.

Learn more here:

<https://dos.myflorida.com/florida-facts/florida-state-symbols/state-soil/>

“Some people walk in the rain. Others just get wet.”

-Roger Miller



It's more than just plants and wading birds that love the wet season; alligators benefit, too! More ponds equal more mobility because they can easily find a water source. The water gives these cold-blooded reptiles reprieve from the scorching sun. Unable to control their own body temperature like warm-blooded species, they cherish the cool oasis of ponds. They also dislike rain and wind and will frequently submerge to avoid these unpleasant weathers.

Unfortunately, this means fewer viewing opportunities for humans. Alligators spend a great deal of the day in the water during summer. They regularly hold their breath up to two hours, and larger alligators have been recorded to last six to eight hours without taking a breath! They slow their heartrate down to 2-3 beats per minute. (For comparison, human average resting heartrate is 60-100 beats per minute.) In addition to beating slowly, alligators won't circulate blood to their lungs. This triggers their oxygen-carrying blood cells into super-efficiency mode.

Water is fundamental for the proliferation of life. When the rainy season comes, don't become dreary. Try to remember how important it is and cherish the abundance it provides!

CONGRATULATIONS!

to **Rocco**, our 9-year-old kayak winner! We hope you have many years of wonderful experiences in your new Santee Sport 126.

With everyone's support, the Friends of Myakka raised almost \$2,500! 100% of funds raised will go directly to the park, aiding projects to remove invasive plants, provide equipment, and improve this public land we all cherish.

Happy adventures and thank you to all participants!



Help the Park!

Myakka needs you! Volunteers are a critical part of preserving this truly special Floridian place. (You can also earn a free pass to the state parks!) Start your adventure here:

<https://www.floridastateparks.org/volunteers>



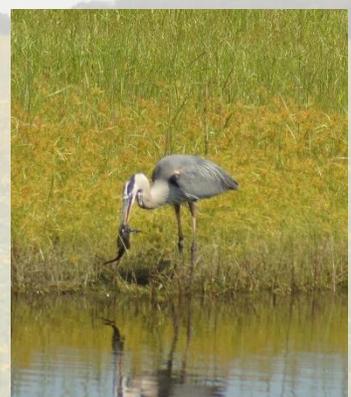
In the words and photos of a returning summer volunteer:

"My husband and I volunteer all summer at Myakka. Helping the rangers and staff to maintain this great park is one of the most rewarding parts of our lives.

Both during work time and while we're off, we get to enjoy the wildlife and beauty that is Myakka. Imagine seeing a family of sandhill cranes, does and their fawns, alligators, hawks, owls, osprey, and countless other species every day!

We also frequently meet people from across the country and across the world who come to enjoy this amazing park. They'll stop to chat with us about the wildlife and thank us for the work we do. Volunteers here make a difference, and the staff and the visitors openly appreciate us.

Please join our volunteer family. There are daytime and resident opportunities. Summer at Myakka is an adventure every day, and we hope you'll join us in the fun!"



All photos were taken while volunteering this May by Rosalie and Barry Coddington.



The Heat is On

Florida is hot. You shouldn't need a newsletter to tell you that! However, heat can be very dangerous, and it's a great time of year to remind ourselves about heat-related risks and how to protect yourself when temperatures and humidity are high.

Heat Exhaustion is miserable, but preventable and typically does not require medical attention. Symptoms include: sweaty goosebumps, weak pulse, dizziness or low blood pressure upon standing, heat cramps, nausea, fatigue, and headache. If you suspect heat exhaustion, you should find a shaded or air-conditioned place, relax, and drink water. Your body needs to cool down. If symptoms get worse or last more than one hour, seek medical attention.

Heatstroke—A person experiencing heatstroke needs IMMEDIATE medical attention. Call 911. Left untreated, it can cause permanent and significant damage to the brain, heart, kidneys, and muscles. It can be fatal. Symptoms include: altered mental state (confusion, agitation, slurred speech, irritability, delirium, seizures, coma), vomiting, flushed skin, rapid breathing, and rapid heart rate. After calling 911, cool the person however possible: cold water, ice packs, wet towels, etc.

Know Your Risks:

Age (both young and old), certain medications (such as vasoconstrictors, beta blockers, diuretics, antidepressants, and antipsychotics), illegal stimulants (amphetamines, cocaine), chronic health conditions (heart/lung disease), sedentary lifestyle, and history of heatstroke can increase your risks. Educate yourself about risk factors that may apply to you and act accordingly.

Pets need special attention when temperatures rise, too. Pets should have unlimited access to water and shade while outside on a warm day. **Never leave a pet in a vehicle.** Even in shade or with cracked windows, cars become fatally hot very quickly. (It's also against Sarasota County law.) Try to plan exercise during cooler hours of the day and on shaded paths. Avoid asphalt and other hot surfaces—they can burn your pet's paws. Be vigilant about parasite protection (fleas, ticks, heartworm) because parasites become more prevalent in hot weather.

Prevention Tips

The best thing you can do is prepare and prevent

- Check the weather before you go outside!
- Wear loose, light-colored, breathable clothing.
- Wear a hat and use sunscreen.
- Rest frequently.
- Drink lots of water the day before you plan to be outside, and drink water while outside.
- Take the time to acclimate your body to the heat. Start with short, slow walks, and gradually work your way to longer and more demanding exercise.
- Be cautious of any risk factors that may increase your chances of heat-related syndromes. Be safe while having fun in the heat!

Learn more here: <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/heattips.html>

Pets Tips: <https://www.avma.org/public/PetCare/Pages/Warm-Weather-Pet-Safety.aspx>

Florida Butterfly Orchid

Encyclia tampensis

Myakka River State Park is a wonderful place for a rich array of flowers that bloom throughout the year. Like clockwork, an abundance of one type gives way to bouquets of another. Right now, the golden-yellow fields of *coreopsis* are fading, but in the oaks encircling the river basin, a fresh, new type of flower is emerging. June begins the season for the delicate and beautiful Florida Butterfly Orchid.

While many orchid-looking plants are incorrectly taxonomized, the Florida Butterfly Orchid is a true orchid. It is an epiphyte, meaning its roots do not grow into the ground. The shallot-looking bulb of the orchid nestles into the rough bark of Live Oak branches. In this “onion,” (technically called the pseudobulb) the orchid stores water and digests symbiotic fungi. While it can photosynthesize from its dark-green, strap-like leaves, its primary food source are these fungi. If the plant is divorced from its symbiotic fungi, both species will struggle and fail to survive.



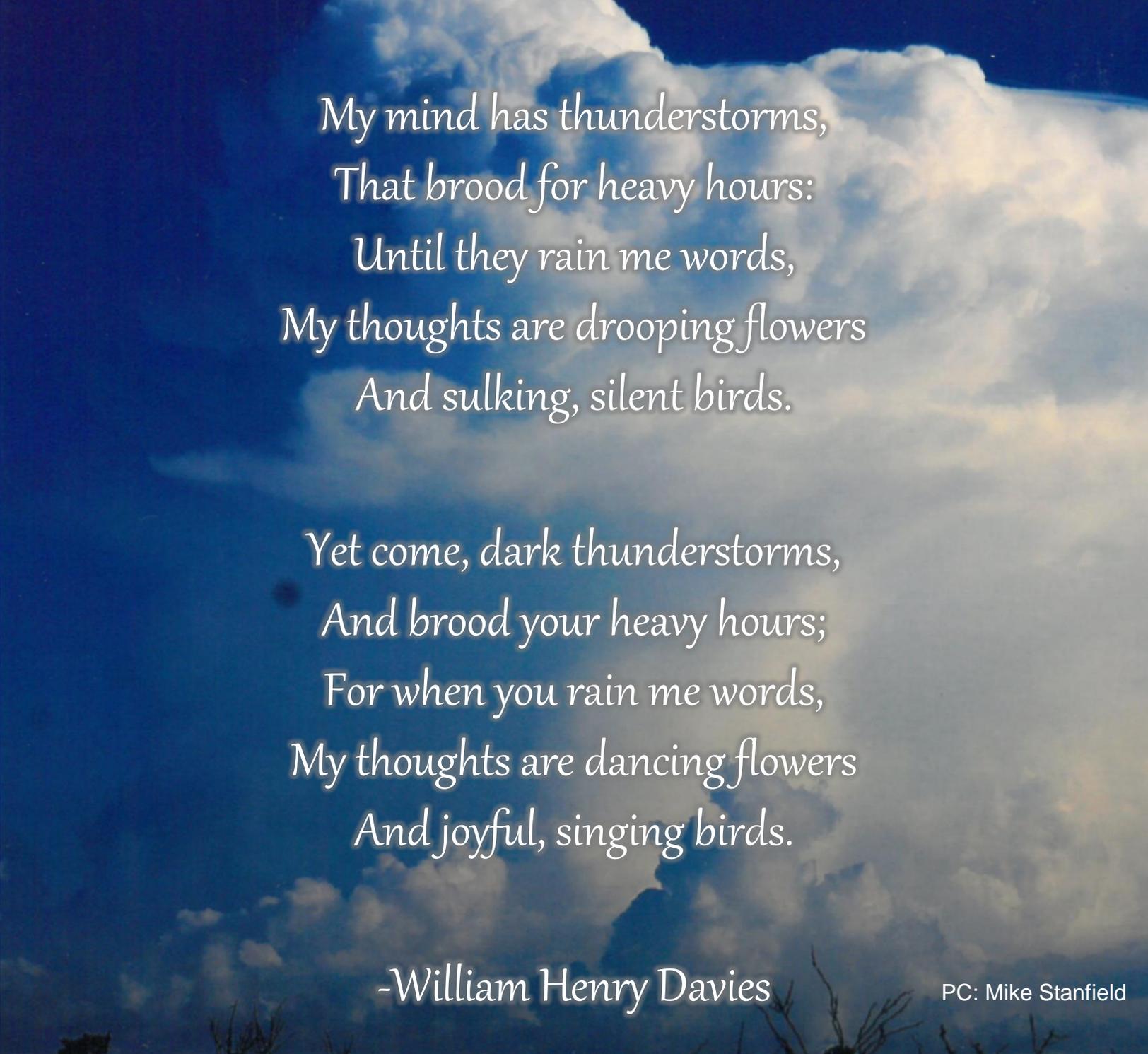
“Earth laughs in flowers”

-Ralph Waldo Emerson



Butterfly orchids usually flower in June and July, but they’re seen flowering sporadically throughout the year. The plant grows multiple thin stems which sprout a handful of little flowers. Each flower is about 1.5 inches diameter, with five petals/sepals. The flowers show a variety of soft yellows, oranges, and/or whites. Like a bullseye in the middle, the flower has a purple and white lip directly in its center. This landing spot is for pollinators seeking nectar and spreading orchids in the process.

Florida Butterfly Orchids are common in Myakka for those who know where to look. Unlike the rolling field of *coreopsis*, butterfly orchids sprout on Live Oak branches about 10-30 feet in the air! Some colonies will have 50 pseudobulbs scrunched together, sprouting hundreds of flowers. It’s truly a treat to see. (Ranger tip: check out the Live Oaks near the Ranch House Road trailhead or in the Clay Gully Picnic area. Wink, wink.)



My mind has thunderstorms,
That brood for heavy hours:
Until they rain me words,
My thoughts are drooping flowers
And sulking, silent birds.

Yet come, dark thunderstorms,
And brood your heavy hours;
For when you rain me words,
My thoughts are dancing flowers
And joyful, singing birds.

-William Henry Davies

PC: Mike Stanfield

Author's Note:

Creating Myakka's newsletter has been a wonderful privilege and joy. I have learned so much and had so much fun; thank you to everyone for sharing this adventure. I owe special thanks to Mike Stanfield for giving me inspiration, articles, photos, and facts, to Sandra Bernardi and Linda MacGrath for being endless supporters and constantly encouraging me, to Michelle Keirseay for her vital input that makes these newsletters soar, to Mike Kaplan for sharing his photography and his artistic view of the park, to all the rangers I've been constantly pestering for information, to the Friends of Myakka who keep this park thriving, and of course to my parents.

I am returning to school for a JD, ready for my next adventure in life. But not to fret! The newsletter will continue with wonderful new writers. There is so much to explore at Myakka, both physically and in words. I am grateful for the adventures I've had and everything I have learned. I hope everyone continues to be curious and find new, wonderful adventures in this incredible natural world.

-Brenna Cameron