



Myakka River State Park January 2019



Bays, Beetles, and Butterflies

A few years ago, I was walking along Ranch House Road when I noticed a small bay tree. This tree stood out because all of its leaves were uniformly brown, almost as if they had been spray painted. The leaves clung to the branches tightly, but the tree was already dead.

This tree was the victim of Laurel Wilt, the end result of a fungal attack on trees in the Laurel family (primarily the genus *Persea*). Here at Myakka, we have two members of that genus—the Red Bay (*Persea borbonia*) and the Swamp Bay (*Persea palustris*). There is an example of a healthy Red Bay growing in the butterfly garden near the bathrooms at the Ranger Station.

The avocado (*Persea americana*) seems to be slightly more resistant to Laurel Wilt, although the threat to this crop remains significant. Farmers are understandably concerned, and scientists are working against the clock to protect this food source. The avocado is not native to Florida; it was intentionally introduced from tropical America.

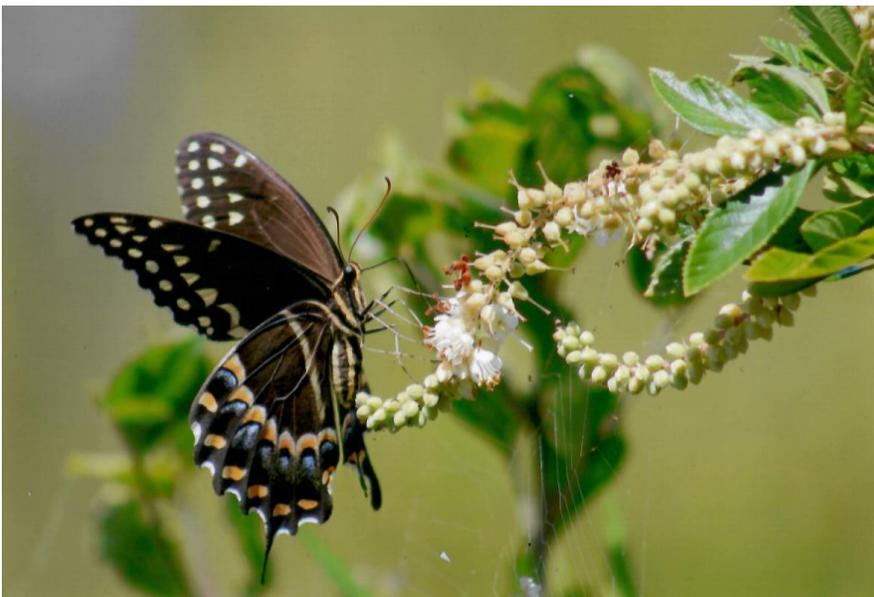
Laurel Wilt was also introduced, accidentally, from Asia. It is a fungus spread via the Asian Ambrosia Beetle. This particular fungus disrupts a tree's sap flow, quickly shutting it down. My records estimate that about 90% of laurels in Myakka have fallen victim to Laurel Wilt. I've seen a bit of resprouting from old root systems, but a second wave of Laurel Wilt is systematically destroying these, too.

To the casual observer, the loss of the park's bay trees probably goes unnoticed. They are a generic-looking substory tree, more of a gap-filler versus the highly-noticable, shade-producing oaks of our hammocks. Bays do not produce obvious flowers or edible fruits and are so easily overlooked.

I did see Laurel Wilt's effects on another population, though. This fall, there was a drastic reduction in the number of Palamedes Swallowtail butterflies. In past years, while assessing the prairie, I see enormous numbers of these large, dark brown butterflies with striking yellow markings. This year, I saw but a handful of these once prevalent pollinators.



"When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe." -John Muir



The connection? Plain and simple: the Red Bay is a host plant for the Palamedes Swallowtail.

It still remains to be seen what effects follow. Palamedes Swallowtails are a main pollinator of many plants in the Florida Dry Prairie, including our spectacular wildflowers. Will other butterfly species be able to pick up the slack? What will happen to predators like the Green Lynx Spider, which relies on healthy butterfly populations as its main food source? And what other unforeseen repercussions will happen with the loss of our bays?



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Bird Feature: Roseate Spoonbills

Written by Myakka Staff

(Platalea ajaja)
(The “Other” Pink Bird)

Photography by Mike Kaplan

Roseate spoonbills are easily identifiable by their wide beaks and bright pink coloration. They love feeding and bathing in the shallow waters of Myakka River State Park. Recent hotspots for sightings include the Weir (near the concession area), the bridge (about one mile into the park), and behind the South Pavilion. However, they can be found anywhere that has lots of yummy minnows, crustaceans, and snails in the water.

Their diet is mostly small aquatic creatures with occasional consumption of plants. To feed, they slowly walk forward in shallow water, usually near the bank. They swing their spoon-shaped bill side-to-side, using their strong sense of feel to search for food. When they find a good snack, they quickly snap their bill shut (see above). It's common to see them eating alongside other wading birds, such as herons and ibises.



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Spoonies nest in large colonies within Florida mangroves about late winter. Once the 2-3 eggs are laid, both parents are active in incubating and raising the younglings. The young leave the nest around 5-6 weeks old, and begin flying around 7-8 weeks old. Juvenile spoonies (up to 2 years old) are very distinct from full-grown adults. They are a much lighter shade of pink and lack the distinct red “strip” on their shoulders. Juveniles also have white feathering on their head. As they mature, this feathering sheds off to reveal a greyish, bald head.

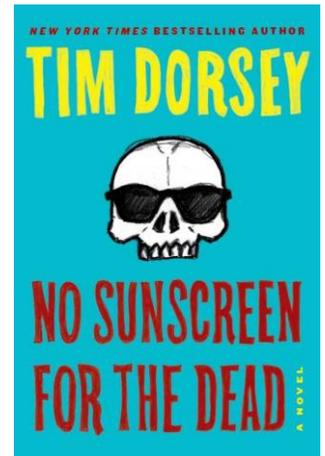
Unlike Flamingos, Roseate Spoonbills do not gain their color from eating small crustaceans. They are genetically predisposed for their flashy pink. Their coloration is seasonally-dependent; adults will become brighter and gain a goldish tinge on the top of their shoulder during breeding season. Their feathers were extremely fashionable in the early twentieth century hat industry, and as a result, the species was hunted to near extinction. While the global population is recovering, they are still a threatened species in the state of Florida.

JANUARY EVENTS

Saturday, January 12th- A Night with Tim Dorsey

6:00 p.m. at the South Pavilion

Come and spend an evening with **New York Times best-selling author, Tim Dorsey** as he takes us on a new adventure deep into the turbulent and ever creative mind of Florida's own one-man vigilante, Serge Storm. Tim is a fantastic author and speaker whose adventures rival that of his protagonist. Come hear what both are up to now! Advance copies of his brand new book, *No Sunscreen for the Dead*, will be available for purchase.



Monday, January 14th- Friends' Annual Meeting

4:30 p.m. at STOP Camp

Join the Friends at their Annual Meeting. Board members will be elected and exciting projects for the new year will be discussed. Call (941) 373-7839 for more information. Become a member of the Friends here: <https://www.joinit.org/o/friends-of-the-myakka-river>

Friday, January 18th- Reverend Barry & the Funk

7:00 p.m. at the South Pavilion



The opening act of the Friends of Myakka River *Moon Over Myakka* Concert Series features **Reverend Barry & the Funk**, an eight-person funk/soul band with a varied repertoire (including originals and covers of *Earth, Wind & Fire*, *Commodores*, *Kool & the Gang*, and *Prince*).

\$20/person (\$15 for Friends members). Tickets available on the day of the concert or in advance here:

<https://www.friendsofmyakkariver.org/events/2019/1/18/reverend-barry-amp-the-funk>

Saturday, January 19th- Moon Over Myakka Bike Ride

7:15 p.m. at the Visitor Center

Experience Myakka at night! Bring your bike for a leisurely 10-mile ride on the park drive. Ride starts at the Visitor Center and goes to the Birdwalk (with a fire, drinks and snacks). On the return, we visit the Canopy Walkway to see the moon. **Lights required.** Wear a helmet. Not advisable for children under 12. \$10/person (\$8 for Friends members). Reservations required—call (941) 373-7839.



EVENT SERIES

Mondays: Florida Tales

Every Monday at 7:00pm, campers are welcome to join in our weekly story-telling time. Hear old-time Florida legends, folksy stories, and other campfire tales at the Log Pavilion. Everyone is welcome, no reservations necessary. Please bring your own snacks and wear clothing appropriate for the weather.

Thursdays: Coffee Hour

Every Thursday at 9:00am, join Myakka experts for some coffee and knowledge about this wonderful park. They'll give you inside information about all the incredible resources that Myakka has to offer. You'll gain a greater view of the ecosystems, natural processes, and history of the park. \$2.00 donation greatly appreciated to offset costs of beverages and snacks provided.

Thursdays: Guided Hike with a Myakka Ranger

Every Thursday at 10:00am, one of Myakka's rangers will take up to twenty people on a guided hike in the park. Each week will feature a new topic. Topics for January include freshwater wildlife, birds, ecosystems, and park history. Walks are no additional charge (beyond regular admission fees).

If you would like to secure your spot for one of the walks, please call (941) 361-6511. We will hold spots for you until the beginning of the walk. Please show up on time; if you are late, we may give your reserved spot(s) to other interested attendees. Bring water, closed-toe shoes, and weather-appropriate clothing.

Please call (941) 361-6511 for more information about these programs.

Save the Date: Friday, February 15th, 2019

Mac Arnold & Plate Full O' Blues



Friends of Myakka River *Moon Over Myakka* Concert Series continues with **Mac Arnold & Plate Full O'Blues**. This blues/soul/funk fusion band features stellar bass player Mac Arnold, a highly influential musician on electric bass for decades.

\$20/person (\$15 for Friends members). Tickets available on the day of the concert or in advance here:

<https://www.friendsofmyakkariver.org/events/2019/2/15/mac-arnold-amp-plate-full-oblues>

The Friends thank the following sponsors for supporting all concerts and events:



THANK YOU, LINDA!

Myakka River State Park would like to deeply thank Linda MacGrath. This month, she is celebrating volunteering here for 15 years! In this time, she has done a wide variety of projects, including working in the Ranger Station, teaching children, picking invasive plants, removing old fencing, tree trimming, and more.

She is drawn to nature for its unexpected treasures. When she first started volunteering, she would bike about twelve miles off-road every day! Now, she enjoys walking on the trail along the river, taking photos, and helping visitors find new adventures. After volunteering here for a few years, she noticed an obvious trend in her photography: she loves alligators. Seeing this, she wanted to learn more about them, and got her hands on every book and article she possibly could. Now, her brain is fuller than her camera! Their prehistoric qualities and amazing adaptations keeps her interest, and she is now Myakka's "Alligator Expert." Children's and adults' eyes light up when she brings out her alligator skull and educates about their characteristics, behavior, life cycle, and evolution.



Volunteering, for Linda, is her chance to "give back" by giving forward to the next generation. She loves guiding young nature-enthusiasts to their next adventure, whether it be hiking, biking, photography, birding, or (of course) gator watching! She encourages everyone to go somewhere out of their comfort zone and see a wonderful new world of nature! Thanks, Linda!

"Live in each season as it passes; breathe the air, drink the drink, taste the fruit, and resign yourself to the influence of the earth." - Henry David Thoreau

Weird Winter Weather

Florida winters are usually sunny, warm, paradise times. So, what's going on this year? Why is it so cold and rainy? When the trade winds in the South Pacific are too weak, the water off the coast of South America near the equator becomes warmer. This is called an El Niño. Depending on the severity of warming and area affected, this can have a global impact on weather patterns.

In Florida, a large El Niño means more severe weather, particularly thunderstorms and tornadoes. (Water is evaporating off of the coast of South America faster than normal and the Gulf of Mexico churns.) We also may experience cooler temperatures and above average precipitation.

El Niño and its opposite, La Niña, are fascinating occurrences. I looked at [Encyclopedia Britannica](#) and the [National Weather Service](#). Both are great sources if you're looking for more information.