



The Skimmer



Jekyll Island 4-H Center



Coordinator's Corner

Greetings from the coast! We are pleased to bring you a new look to our old newsletter, The Skimmer. As many of you already know, there have been many other changes at Jekyll Island 4-H Center over the past year or so.



The renovated Jekyll 4-H dorm facilities

Structural damage was discovered in the hotel during some renovations. The dam-

age required major repair and the 4-H Center was forced to shut down for the remainder of the spring of 2003. We are proud to announce that all renovations are complete and the 4-H Center looks great! We have an updated look and many positive changes at the center.

Another change occurred when I joined the staff as program coordinator in July 2003. I am filling the giant shoes of Donna Stewart who is now the program coordinator at Rock Eagle 4-H Center. I love my new job and having come from the high school classroom, I really appreciate everything that each of you do to plan your

trips to our facility. I look forward to meeting each of you.

Please take a moment and check out the newsletter. Our fabulous EE staff has included some great info. Thanks and we hope to see you at the beach!

Melanie Biersmith



Dining Hall, post-renovation

We had a baby!

Since the summer of 2003 the Jekyll Island 4-H Center has had a lot of new additions. Melanie Biersmith started in July as the new Program Coordinator, and a new full staff of Environmental Educators joined the team late August. However, none of these additions can compare to the baby Gopher

Tortoise that was discovered in October 2003.

To our surprise, we discovered our very own Gopher Tortoise named Amelia had mothered several hatchlings. Unfortunately only one of her hatchlings survived and he is now a wonderful addition to the Jekyll Island 4-H

community. His name is Mac, short for Immaculate. Mac is currently 2.75 inches long and 2 inches wide. Mac is considerably orange on his soft parts (plastron and marginals) and his carapace is full of yellowish scutes bordered by brown. The baby

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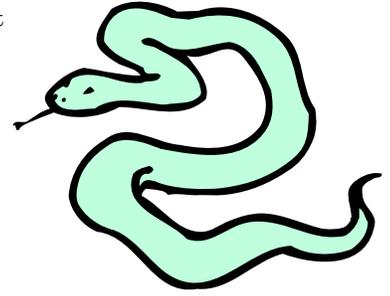
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We are now involved in coastal monitoring!

- *Adopt-A-Wetland water quality sampling takes place once each month. We test water temperature, salinity, pH, dissolved oxygen, and settleable solids.*
- *Phytoplankton Monitoring Network sampling, occurring twice each month, involves the collection of water temperature, salinity and plankton abundance (by species).*
- *Call us at (912) 635-4117 if you want to help out!*

The Uncommonly Bad Reputation of Snakes

A lot of people hate snakes; this is a well-documented and often experienced phenomenon. But what I find particularly interesting are the causes leading to this aversion for snakes. Just what is it that people find so abhorrent about snakes?



If you were to question any of today's youth (or perhaps, to an even greater degree, any of today's adults) about why they hate snakes, the resounding answer would be that "snakes bite!" But the logic of this answer confuses me: after all, squirrels (or raccoons or even horses) bite too, but you rarely come across someone with a paralyzing fear of squirrels. Squirrels may have an advantage over snakes, merely because they are furry and cute, but I think humanity's affection for squirrels is dependent more upon the inherent timidity and quickness of a squirrel. Put simply, the average person just cannot get close enough to a squirrel to be bitten.

Snakes, on the other hand, are not particularly fast; they do not even have legs on which to run away. So what happens when a curious – dare I say reckless – young adventurer grabs hold of a sunning snake? The same thing that would happen if he were to grab hold of any wild animal: he is bitten. In the responsive world of "fight or flight," snakes are not particularly well adapted to flight (being cold-blooded does not lend itself to moving quickly for long distances), but snakes can fight like a champ. Just ask anyone whom a snake has bitten. Chances are, they saw the snake well before they received the bite.

Moreover, I have been told (and it sounds plausible to me) that young men, ages 13 to 23, are most likely to be victims of snake-bite. Any guesses why? Because most everyone else has the common sense to leave snakes – or any wild animals - alone; young men, on the other hand, tend to think picking up snakes is impressive – maybe girls dig it.

Of course, one must also keep in mind that snakes are venomous; hence, they can kill you (but so could a rabid squirrel, for that matter) – which could lead to humankind's paralyzing fear of serpents. But in Georgia, only six of the 46 species of snakes are venomous. The more important question is why are snakes venomous. To kill you? Hardly. Snakes have venom so that they can paralyze their prey. And contrary to popular culture, snakes (in America) do not eat people. In fact, many venomous snakes deliver a "dry" bite, a bite in which no venom is injected, when defending themselves from potential threats. This is because venomous snakes must conserve their venom, if they are to have enough of the toxin to paralyze a potential food source. Using venom on humans (a potential threat – not a food source) would be a waste of valuable resources for a snake.

But I contend that our society's dislike for snakes runs much deeper than a mere passing fear of being bitten, for we conjure up outrageous stories about snakes. It seems that snakes have become the ecological bad boy of our culture. Anyone ever seen the movie *Anaconda*? Not exactly a friendly depiction of snakes. Perhaps, though, my point would be better taken if we turned to Genesis. Remember this passage: "The woman said, 'the serpent tricked me, and I ate [the fruit].' [And] the Lord God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, cursed are you among...all wild creatures....'" Undoubtedly, the curse of God does little to improve the snake's public image, but it does help bring things into focus for those of us who think snakes get a bad rap. Snakes are to be feared, loathed and cursed – according to our collective, Judeo-Christian culture.

Finally, despite the bad press surrounding snakes, I would like to suggest that they are really not so horrible. Some people even go so far as to suggest that snakes are beautiful. I will only say that some serpents have an awesome sense of style; just check out the patterns they sport on their skin. Ask any snakeskin boot-wearer, and he will tell you. But more importantly, snakes fill big ecological shoes. Some biologists suggest that mammals (you and I) arose from reptiles (snakes) way back in the evolutionary day. More practically, snakes, especially the venomous variety, have an exceptionally valuable ecological (and societal) importance, in that they keep the local population of insects and rodents in check. Think of that the next time you see a mouse or cockroach run across your kitchen floor. And many other animals, raptors in particular, depend upon snakes as a food source. In short, snakes (like most living beings) play an important, functional role in the local ecosystem. And whether we like it or not, we need snakes to keep our environment functioning properly.

Neil Veilleux

Meet the EE Staff

Greetings from Jekyll Island 4H Center's 2003-2004 EE Staff! We've traveled from near and far to this little barrier island in order to teach visiting students about barrier island ecology. Here's a brief picture of who we are, where we're from, and what we've done!

Heather Aboud ventured down from the "Wolverine State" (Michigan) with a Bachelors degree in Parks and Recreation Management from Lake Superior State University.

Melanie Biersmith lives in Brunswick, "The Gateway to the Golden Isles." She has a B.S. in Biology from Georgia College & State University and a M.A. in Science Ed. from UGA.

Kim Cressman is proud to be from "The Gateway to the West" (St. Louis, Missouri) and received a B.S. in Biology from Truman State University and a M.S. in Marine Biology from UNCW.

Megan Duffey comes to us from the "Mini-Apple" (Minneapolis, MN) with a B.A. in Biology from St. Olaf College.

Melanie Jacobs, hailing from "Mad-Town" (Madison, WI), earned a B.S. in Environmental Science Conservation from UW Milwaukee.

Katie Knick is a local who grew up in the "Home of the Masters" (Augusta, GA) and has a B.S.A. in Biological Sciences from UGA and a M.A. in Marine Biology from The College of William and Mary.

Andy Lantz grew up in "The Home of Abigail Adams" (Weymouth, MA) and received a B.A. in Environmental Stud-

ies from UMass Boston.

Eva Matthews has a B.S. in Environmental Science from Lander University and calls "The Grand Strand" of North Myrtle Beach, SC home.

Christina Stamer, from "Cow-Town" USA (Fort Worth, TX), has a B.A. in Physical Anthropology from Texas A&M and a M.Sc. in Primate Conservation from Oxford Brookes University.

Liz Strojny, from "The Land of Lincoln" (Illinois), received a B.S. in Marine Science from The University of South Carolina.

Neil Veilleux, from "Hotlanta" (Atlanta, GA), earned a B.A. in English from Sewanee University.

Tom Woolf is from the "Azalea City" (Mobile, AL). He has a B.A. in Journalism from University of Alabama and is working on an M.S. in Geography.

Dawn Zenkert is from "The Empire State" (Brockport, NY). She has B.S. in Biology, a B.S. in Sports Management, and a M.P.A. in Public Administration.

Jason Zimmerman calls "The Rubber Capital" (Akron, OH) home and has an Associates Degree in Natural Resources/Natural and Historical Interpretation from Hocking College.

Baby (from p.1)

Gopher tortoise diet consists of baby rabbit food mixed with fruits and vegetables.

We care for two threatened species at the 4-H Center, the Loggerhead Sea Turtle and the Gopher Tortoise. The Gopher tortoise is the only tortoise native to the United States. They get their name because they have the interesting behavior of burrowing tunnels into the ground. Gopher tortoises regularly are found in sandy regions of Coastal Plains from South Carolina to Louisiana and most of Florida. Their natural habitat of longleaf pine and wiregrass communities are rapidly disappearing which makes the Gopher Tortoise a threatened species in Georgia.

Thank you for welcoming baby Mac to our Jekyll Island community. Don't forget to say hello during your next visit to the Jekyll Island 4-H Center.

Melanie Jacobs



EE Staff on Boneyard Beach, Fall 2003.

Mac, the baby gopher tortoise.



A Few Wonderful Things about Pelicans

“A wonderful bird is the pelican;
His beak can hold more than his belly
can.”

A flock of seagulls rests on the beach. Sandpipers run lightly along the shore, pausing only to peck in the sand for food. Flying out over the breaking waves, in single file, are brown pelicans: four-foot long birds with a wingspan of six to seven feet. The feathers along their body are grayish-brown; their heads are white. Although it is not obvious when they are flying, their bills have a pouch that can expand to hold 2.5 gallons – three times as much as the stomach! Though they may appear awkward in flight, brown pelicans weigh only nine pounds; they represent the smallest of the world’s eight pelican species (the heaviest pelicans weigh about 30 pounds).

Brown pelicans are found in shallow

coastal waters, usually within 20 miles of shore, where their diet consists primarily of fish (especially anchovies, menhaden and smelt). A brown pelican may dive for a single fish from up to 60 feet above the water, and spend about 2 seconds underwater catching it. Then



the pelican drains the water out of its bill pouch (which takes up to a minute), tosses back its head, and swallows its meal.

The sight of brown pelicans may be commonplace along Georgia’s beaches

today, but this was not always the case. The heavy use of DDT and other pesticides in the 1950s and 60s decimated the populations of several bird species, brown pelicans among them. When ingested, the pesticides and their by-products interfere with calcium metabolism, a process essential to egg formation. This led to thinner egg shells and, as a result, lower hatching rates. Brown pelicans were listed as endangered in 1970, under a federal wildlife protection act that predated the Endangered Species Act of 1973. At the time of listing, there were less than 100 pelicans in the U.S. Since DDT has been banned, populations have recovered. East coast populations, along with populations in Florida and Alabama, were delisted from the ESA in 1985; however, continuing use of pesticides is causing west coast populations to remain low.

Kim Cressman

That Tree is Huge!

Most people who have visited the Jekyll Island 4-H Center leave with vivid memories of the “Grandfather Tree.” Many groups take pictures climbing this live oak conglomeration estimated to be 150 years old. Such admiration is very understandable due to the magnificent size of the tree species. Upon viewing the beauty of live oaks among the maritime forest, it is no wonder that these were named the state tree of Georgia!

Live oaks, or *Quercus virginiana*, are commonly found in the Atlantic and Gulf coastal areas of the southeast. These oaks have the common name “live” because throughout the year, they appear in full foliage. With large acorns and majestic Spanish moss draped all around, live oaks are the centerpiece of Jekyll Island’s maritime forest climax community.

The 150-year-old “Grandfather Tree” is

a middle-aged example of its species; most live oaks can live approximately 300 years! In the middle of the 1700’s, Americans began cutting the oaks to produce war ships. Live oaks were prized for this use because of their exceptional strength and thickness. Most notably, it is said that the U.S.S. Constitution (a currently active Naval vessel) was produced using Georgia live oak. The U.S.S. Constitution, commonly called “Old Ironsides” was used in the war of 1812. It gained its nickname because the strength of the timber is said to repel cannon balls. The hull for such war ships is said to consume as many as 700 trees!

In the early 1900’s, the Georgia coast saw different exploitation, this time in the form of development and tourism. Though many forests have been previously cut down, many more ecosystems were taken over by new homes and businesses. Luckily before all were destroyed, the state, the federal govern-

ment, as well as individuals and private organizations protected large tracts of land and islands.

Today, when visiting Georgia’s barrier islands, it is clear which tree “rises above the rest.” Making up the maritime forest’s canopy, the live oak is truly an unmistakable symbol of this area, and the southeast as a whole. Next time you come to the area, make sure and give a local “Grandfather Tree” a climb!

Andy Lantz



Jekyll Island 4-H Center
Environmental Education
ADOPT-AN-ANIMAL PROGRAM

The Jekyll 4-H Environmental Education Program would like to introduce the NEW ADOPT-AN-ANIMAL program! Adopting an animal from our education facility helps us design and construct new classroom habitats and provides for the daily care of our animals. Individuals or entire classrooms are encouraged to sign up!

Adopt an animal and you (or your classroom) will receive:

- An information sheet full of fun facts about your animal
- A full-color photograph of your animal
- A listing in The Skimmer as a “Proud Parent” of your new animal
- An adoption certificate with information about your adoption

You can choose from:

_____	loggerhead sea turtles	(Dylan or Joey)	\$75
_____	gopher tortoises	(Amelia or Mac)	\$50
_____	American alligators	(Alli and Buddy)	\$40
_____	diamondback terrapins		\$30
_____	yellow-bellied sliders		\$25
_____	snapping turtle		\$20
_____	snakes		\$20
_____	touch-tank animals	(marine invertebrates)	\$15
_____	aquariums	(fish, crabs, etc.)	\$10

Please fill out the following with the information you would like to be used on your adoption forms.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

Please fill out this form and mail it, along with your check to:

Jekyll Island 4-H Center
Attn: Animal Adoption
201 S. Beachview Drive
Jekyll Island, GA 31527

Sea Turtle News

The year 2003 was filled with sea turtle activity on Jekyll Island. There are five species of sea turtle that swim off the Georgia coast: loggerhead, leatherback, Kemp's ridley, green and hawksbill. The loggerhead is the only species that nests regularly in Georgia. Loggerheads nest from May to August and lay approximately 120 ping-pong size eggs per nest. Sixty to eighty days later the hatchlings emerge and head for the sea.

The Jekyll Island Sea Turtle Project stayed busy throughout the summer months monitoring the record-breaking 204 sea turtle nests. The previous record for Jekyll set in 1999 was 136 nests. Only Cumberland Island and Blackbeard Island surpassed Jekyll with more nests on the Georgia coast for the 2003 nesting season with 299 and 212 nests, respectively.

Unfortunately, Jekyll also had a record year for sea turtle strandings. The coast of Georgia suffered 271 stranded turtles, with 97 of those found on Jekyll Island. Officials suspect most

of the turtles drowned in the nets of large Gulf Coast shrimp boats. Georgia shrimp boats are required to pull nets with TEDs (turtle excluder devices) that allow the turtles to escape from drowning. During the 2003 shrimp season, there was an increase of Gulf Coast shrimpers pulling their nets off of Jekyll Island. These Gulf Coast shrimp boats rarely dock in Georgia, therefore regulation proves difficult.

Sea turtles are endangered throughout the world and are protected in the United States under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. Without continued effort to save these wanderers of the sea, it is possible they may become extinct. Human threats such as poaching, harvesting, shrimp nets, beach development and dune removal make the plight of the sea turtle a difficult battle. Hopefully, with increased education and outreach sea turtle populations will improve.

Eva Matthews

Jekyll Island 4-H Center

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<http://www.jekyll4h.org>

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