



The Tortoise's Burrow

At Hugh Taylor Birch State Park

Hugh Taylor Birch State Park
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Manatee Migrations Hurray!

Manatee Holiday E-Card. Check it out!

savethemanatee.org/stm-postcard/index.cfm?fa=CardDetail



With a face only its mother could love, a body able to discourage any predators just because of its large size and the knack for gaining popularity even as its population decreases, the Florida manatee has become an icon of Florida wildlife. A 2006 census counted manatee populations at a staggering 2,300. They are most definitely a threatened species and suffer at the mercy of slow birth rates and our ever-increasing boating practices.

Long migrations are common for manatees, which gracefully swim from the Carolinas to warmer Florida waters every fall (typically about 5 miles per hour). A few manatees may range as far west as Texas and as far north as Virginia (one manatee was even documented in Cape Cod, Massachusetts!), but these sightings are rare. Sporadic summer sightings in Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina are relatively common.

Manatees are warm blooded

mammals and need mild water temperatures to thrive in. At temperatures below 68F, manatees stop eating, suffer cold stress and oftentimes die. This is why they migrate to the coastal areas, rivers, canals and estuaries in southern Georgia and South Florida. In Ft. Lauderdale they are often spotted along the Intracoastal and canals. Sightings have taken place in the last few weeks here at Birch.

Manatees prefer the slow-moving rivers and shallow coves and bays where there are warm springs and lush sea grass beds—which they eat up to 150lbs a day! They often converge around power plant outfalls and warm-water discharges. During winter, hundreds of manatees congregate close to Florida Power and Light Company's power plants at Cape Canaveral, Fort Lauderdale, Riviera Beach, Fort Myers and Tampa Bay.

The culverts installed here at Birch State Park during the Mangrove Restoration Project connect the Intra-

Coastal to the mangrove areas. These culverts are sized so that Manatees can enter into the mangrove tidal area if they so choose. So far we have not observed them taking advantage of this special amenity.

Manatees are an ancient species which scientists believe are related to Elephants. Fossil records indicate that they were once a land dwelling creature that returned to the waters. Fossils of extinct relatives can be found in the Iberian Peninsula (Spain) from times long past when both North America and Europe were much closer together and the Atlantic Ocean was not much more than a warm sea. In this distant past the ancient Manatee easily swam back and forth between the continents and pre-Florida regions. From this ancestor diverged the West Indian Manatee from the Florida Manatee that we enjoy as our plump and gentle neighbor today.

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December Monthly Highlights

Hurricane Season Ends!— South Florida was LUCKY this year, but studies show that Hurricane intensity and frequency is increasing. Cuba and Haiti, our close neighbors, were hit hard this year. Let us keep them in our thoughts this Holiday season.

Birds Seen this month:

Barred owl, Wood Stork, Hooded Warbler & Catbird



Want Something Different for the Holidays?

Grandma's Way Holiday Create Arts and Crafts in Workshops~Green Vendors~Music. See Trash2treasureFL.org

Ask about our tours!

We have been offering various tours during the daytime with school groups or independent visitors. You may arrange a guided walk with a ranger. The best days have been set for Fridays, with exceptions made. We also offer a Full Moon nighttime canoe tour in the Mangrove restoration area—weather dependent. This usually runs a night or two before the Full Moon. Watch for announcements at the Ranger Station.

Mistletoe In Florida?



Mistletoe has an unusual habit of growing out of the trunks and branches of certain trees. It has its own distinctive green leaves, stems and white berries with a sticky seed inside. Mistletoe is not reserved for white Christmases. This vampiric plant is quite common in Florida too. Florida's variety is called Oak Mistletoe or *Phoradendron leucarpum* and can be found all over the state. Mistletoe got its name in the second century, from the Anglo-Saxons. "Mistel" is the word for "poop," and "tan" is the

word for "twig" – misteltan, the Old English version, tells us that mistletoe is named after bird droppings on a branch. Kissing under a sprig of mistletoe has been around for centuries. This may have origin as far back as the Druids who considered it a sacred plant with many magical properties, including fertility. The Druids also celebrated the Winter Solstice as a sacred day and this has specific links to our Winter Holidays today. The proper procedure of kissing under the mistletoe is to take one berry off for every kiss received. When all the berries are gone, so are the kisses.

Holiday Card Lane's First

This month Birch State Park debuts its first annual Holiday Card Lane. The Friends of Birch State Park have joined hands with a few participating businesses to feature this holiday cheer and raise charity for both the park and community non profits.

Tequest Drum Circle's 13th!



The Tequesta Drum Circle initiated at the Winter Solstice 2005 now reaches a milestone by celebrating its 13th gathering this coming Sunday, December 21, 2008 from 6pm—Midnight. Spectacular!

We thank Moonpath circle and all of the organizers of the event for a wonderful celebration that honors the Earth. This event has brought together a tremendous group of individuals who gather to celebrate the turning of the seasons under the canopy of the Florida night sky and around a great bonfire. If you've yet to attend this is a highly recommended event. Bring your percussions, wind instruments some snacks to share and smiles!

Environmental Tip of the Month

Wrapping paper constitutes one of the biggest wastes during the holiday seasons, felling millions of trees per year for moments of tear and throw. There are many alternatives to wrapping paper. One is reusing wrapping paper. Teach your children something different on the holidays than this wasteful practice, perhaps to unwrap the gifts slowly so that some portions of the gift paper can be reused. Use decorated and reusable bags instead of wrapping paper, or use decorated and reusable boxes that still preserve the look of an anticipated and full Christmas Tree.

FRIENDS OF BIRCH St. Pk.

Share your ideas and help enhance the features of our park through this wonderful volunteer, citizen's organization. Inquire at the Ranger Station today!