



The Tortoise's Burrow At Hugh Taylor Birch State Park

Hugh Taylor Birch State Park
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The NEW Faces of Florida:

One hundred years ago, the 180 acres that comprise Birch was a far cry from what it is today. The Intra-Coastal Waterway, for example, was brackish water where Sunrise Blvd links Turtle Island with the mainland. As a result, the solemn and ancient Bald Cypress dominated as one of the primary canopy trees. This region, has been completely transformed by human hands. At one time it looked a lot more like Big Cypress National Preserve rather than the hustle of speeding watercraft and deluxe coastal homes. Around the time that Mr. Hugh Taylor Birch purchased this land (for 75 cents an acre), people were introducing Australian Pine and Melaleuca to the Everglades and adjoining coastlines to "dry up the land." This seemed a good idea at the time, especially for potential future profiteers, but it was a dire mistake which wrecked havoc on Florida ecology. Federal, State and County lands now know the danger in introducing unchecked exotic species to a habitat. The repercussions have been far-reaching, provoking the threat and reality of extinction to numerous native plants and animals.

State Parks have implemented parallel policies of removing exotic, invasive species, such as Australian Pine and Water Hyacinth (the list of exotic, invasive species is tremen-

dous). The same policies are considered for animal species as well, although they are more controversial and more difficult to implement. The European Starling, for example is a savvy, omnivorous little bird succeeding across North America. A direct consequence of its infestation can be seen in Florida with a decline in Red Bellied Woodpecker populations whose nests, amongst other birds' nests, they love to pirate. Green Iguanas are a highly visible difference to Birch State Park fauna over the few years. Released directly by "tired" pet owners or irresponsible breeders, these Central American creatures have shown to thrive in our sub-tropics. We know a bit about Iguanas, but not the entire effects they are having on Florida ecology. They are known to be primarily herbivorous (plant eaters) although it is speculated that they may occasionally consume eggs in their youth. We do know that they burrow to lay their eggs and that breeding and hatching take place from late Spring through Summer. The biggest concern with Iguanas it seems is displacement; that is, where certain birds or reptiles may have taken up residence to nest and live are simply "moved out" by the presence of the menacing-looking Iguanas. By nature we are lucky that Iguanas are docile and frightened of humans. Even the largest males will dart away if you get too close for their comfort. There is a danger in catching them, however, as their tails are powerful "whips" and their mouths contain razor-like teeth that may inflict bacterial infection.



The future of Florida's native plants and animals is uncertain, yet there is hope in the resilience that life always displays. It is true that human beings have completely mixed up stable ecosystems, setting them on unknown trajectories. The best that parks can do today is manage these changes, to help diminish species loss and restore damaged lands where it is possible. The best thing that you can do individually is promote native plant and animal species on your own property.

There is much effort and success by the hands of biologists, naturalists and rangers to be thankful for. Melaleuca, as an example of successful management, seems to finally have a check and balance with the release of two tree-specific insects that have drastically reduced its invasion. The FPS is currently looking into, if any, maintenance needed for Iguana populations. Studies are underway right now here at Birch. One thing is for certain, that the future of Florida will include many new faces, and amongst those we must remember the one that has been the most invasive of all, is us.

Mark E. Foley, park ranger, Birch

Monthly Highlights

Hurricane Season!— Use Brita to filter water. Never fear contaminated water and use less bottles!

The Heat's UP—Use all-natural sunscreen purchased at Whole Foods or other holistic shops.

Tidbits: Sapodilla fruiting
-Pigeon plum fruiting
- Red Mangrove pods abound
-Firebush lure Sulphur butterflies

Common Birds this month:

Nighthawks—catch their call by night
Common Moorhen—Nesting!
Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers
Ruddy Winged Doves

Ask about our tours!

- Jul 11 Mangrove by day 2pm
- Jul 16 Full Moon Mangrove Sunset
- Jul 18 Mangrove by day 12pm
- Jul 25 Mangrove by day 12pm

• Environmental Tip of the Month

Go Vegetarian at least once a week. One less meat-based meal a week helps the planet and your diet. For example: it requires 2,500 gallons of water to produce one pound of beef. You will also save some trees. For each burger that originates from animals raised on rainforest lands, approximately 55 square feet of forest has been destroyed. There is a huge selection of meat substitute products on the market today including tofu, and boca meals. Lessening your meat intake is simply good for reducing cholesterol and fat intake.

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!

Mr. Ranger

Mr. Ranger, I was curious if there were snakes in our park.

The short answer is YES. However, there have been no reported poisonous snakes in our park for over 30 years. We do have a good number of Corn Snakes, also known as Rat Snakes. These are beautiful snakes that get no more than 3 feet long (usually) and come in a wide variety of reds, yellows and browns. Another very common snake is the Black Racer. In our area there is a lighter, grayer, variation also called the Everglades Racer. Venomous snakes could come in here anytime. A Coral Snake was recently sited in West Broward. There would be a lot of urban territory for it, or say a Pygmy Rattler, to get through, but they would be quite at home in our woods—so always watch your step!



Ft. Lauderdale Beach circa 1920



Ft. Lauderdale Beach circa 1980

Tressle to Trails

When you take your next walk on the Old Rail Trail (as we call it - this would be the road-wide trail that parallels Long Lake) you will encounter a new overlook. This overlook shows the dilapidated train track that crosses the lagoon. The park has proposed a long-term project called Tressle to Trails which is a comprehensive overhaul of our trails. It will include a resurfacing and railing of the overpass and an extension of our trail systems (which already span over 2.5 miles collectively). You too can be a part of this community venture. The project is long-term since budgets will not cover the expense, so financial donations are welcome. For more information please see the kiosk at the overlook or contact the park's CSO. Thank you!