



The Tortoise's Burrow At Hugh Taylor Birch State Park

Hugh Taylor Birch State Park
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The Vitality of Barrier Islands

The Barrier Islands that protect the mainland of most of eastern America—indeed, from New Jersey extending southward and wrapping around the Florida Keys, the Gulf of Mexico and Texas — are a fragile environment. “Mans' best efforts to stabilize them and live there can only be temporary as it is frequently proven that change is inevitable.” (Guide to Coastal North Carolina)

As geologic features our continents' islands are relatively young. At the close of the last ice-age—about 12,000 years ago—sea levels were about

300 feet lower than today and the climate was considerably cooler. In the Appalachian area, most of the boreal type trees discovered there extended to the present day coast, which at that time were much steeper foothills to a younger mountain chain.

Barrier islands provide many vital functions. The first is to buffer the mainland from major storms such as hurricanes and tsunamis. The second is to offer refuge to wildlife, often

times endemic only to the islands themselves. **The Anastasia Island Beach Mouse** (*Peromyscus polionotus phasma*), for example, is listed as a federally endangered species. They are found only in the sand dunes of Anastasia Island and at Guana River St. Park.

The ocean side of the barrier islands are subject to tides thus flushing the area daily with fresh salt water. Mollusks and crabs may

be abundant in areas less populated by humans whereas shorebirds are summoned in to feed on the perpetual churning sands. The elevation of the barrier islands sharply rise at the first dune, where in

the case of Florida, sand-blasted seagrass and shrubby, stunted foliage abound. From the St. Augustine area southward Mangrove begin to populate the coastline, providing refuge to hundreds, if not thousands, of aquatic species; fish, mollusks, crustaceans and more. Succeeding dunes, and the buffer of the first barrier plants allow for more dense canopy trees to emerge. In our case we see Paradise, Gumbo Limbo, Live Oak, Strangler Fig, Mahogany and Mastic populating the first

“woods.” These upper canopy trees provide refuge to a myriad of wildlife, from invertebrates to vertebrates, that we have come to know as the life heart-beat of Birch State Park.

Goodbyes, yet Neighbors



Goodbyes are oft times difficult for staff members who have worked years and long hours alongside the rest. The staff at Birch State Park bids a sad adieu to Ranger Steve Crossett who has been a vital asset and colleague to us all. But the goodbye is a positive one and is accompanied by many Congratulations. Former Ranger, Steve now advances to Assistant Park Manager at nearby Oleta River State Park. Where he will surely be noted for his capabilities as a leader and value as a hard worker. Keep it up Steve! We will miss your good nature and wit dearly, but are proud to have had you as a teammate and friend—oh, and let us know when your first house party is. (signed, Birch Staff).

“Mans' best efforts to stabilize Barrier Islands and live there can only be temporary as it is frequently proven that change is inevitable.”

Monthly Highlights

Hurricane Season!

BEWARE RIP CURRENTS

If you find yourself being pulled out to sea, don't panic. You are caught in a rip current that you **can** swim out of. To get out of the rip swim parallel to shore. That is, swim so that the shore is either to your right or your left. **Never swim against the current.**

Birds sighted this month:



Great Horned Owl hunting
Magnificent Frigate Bird
Sharp-Shinned Hawk

Ask about our tours!

Please see notices at the Ranger Station for Friday walks and/or Full Moon tours. Leave your information at the Ranger Station. Slots fill fast and times vary!

Environmental Tip of the Month!

Buy Locally! Cheap energy and agricultural subsidies facilitate a type of agriculture that is destroying and polluting our soils and water, weakening our communities, and concentrating wealth and power into a few hands. It is also threatening the security of our food systems, as demonstrated by the continued e-Coli, GMO-contamination, and other health scares that are often seen nowadays on the news. We can only afford to do this now because of the artificially low energy prices that we currently enjoy, and by externalizing the environmental costs of such a wasteful food system. We do this also to the detriment of small farmers. Buying locally diminishes all of these detrimental practices as well as increases the quality and freshness of the food that we consume! Please see the following website to seek out local farmers!

www.localharvest.org

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!

A Farewell to Redbay?

Globalism and free trade have brought us all the luxury of exchange of exotic and cheaply-made goods. It seems to be an inevitable reordering of world dynamics, deleting many domestic jobs yet creating foreign jobs in other countries, all the while allowing markets to expand in an ever evolving human, world-wide society. But with transportation increasing exponentially through ports around the globe comes the consequences of unintentional infestation of exotic species as well, much to the detriment of local species.

Such has been the case with the introduction of the **redbay ambrosia beetle**, *Xyleborus glabratus* first detected in the U.S. in a survey trap near Port Wentworth, Georgia in 2002. By 2003, this Asian beetle and its associated fungus had caused substantial mortality of **Florida Native redbay** (*Persea borbonia*). Yes, that same wonderful tree that adds so much

flavor to our cooking, is currently under threat of extinction. Unfortunately, studies have proven that there is no pesticide that seems to suitably work to fight this invasion.

Now in 2008, the ambrosia beetle appears to have arrived at Birch. The vast majority of our red bay trees are (or were) located near the Primitive Camp area. It has been within the last year or so that both staff and visitors alike have noticed the beginning of an unhealthy appearance in our red bay trees which has increasingly become apparent as their degradation browns them to death. This is a clear example of the challenge that our local ecology, and indeed global ecology, faces in this day and age of homogenization.

On the flip side of infestation is one exotic pest feeding upon another. The **fig white fly**, *Singhiella simplex*, also an Asian insect arrived to South Florida

only last year—yes, 2007— and is currently spreading like a plague through the very commonly used hedge and Asian tree, **Ficus benjamina**. As much as individuals may like the thick foliage of the so-called **Weeping Fig**, it is considered a class 2 exotic pest plant species, dangerous during hurricane seasons for the unnatural trimming that we add to them and terrible to building structures as their root systems can stretch for hundreds of yards. The fig white fly might just be the equilibrium called for in controlling the Weeping Fig—that is, until the fig white fly begins to attack our native or extralimital (naturally occurring nearby) fig trees, such as **Strangler Fig** and **Cuban Laurel**. These local trees, vital to our subtropical ecology, appear to be less preferred by the fig white fly, but are still under threat. Keep your fingers crossed and go love the red bays while you can.