

# Easy Nature Hikes In or Near Naples

Paul Pacter

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## Nine Easy Walks In or Near Naples

- 1 Six-Mile Cypress Slough Preserve – Ft Myers
- 2 Lovers Key State Park- Ft Myers Beach
- 3 Audubon Corkscrew Swamp - Naples
- 4 Freedom Park - Naples
- 5 Gordon River Greenway - Naples
- 6 Naples Preserve - Naples
- ~~7 Rookery Bay- Shell Island~~
- 7 Rivers Road Preserve
- 8 Serenity Walk Park - Naples
- 9 Eagle Lakes Park - Naples

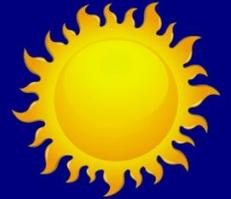


### By "easy" I mean:

1. Flat (no uphill).
2. Suitable for a one-mile walk.
  - Of course, there are usually opportunities for two- or three-mile walks.
3. No hazards like roots to trip on or water on the trail.
  - Still, need to be alert.

### Suggestions for all:

- Bring a hat.
- Bring insect repellent.
- Bring sunscreen.
- Bring water.



### About the photos:

- I took virtually all of the photos.
- Any I didn't take are obvious or noted.

# Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary Naples

## Corkscrew Swamp – “Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary”

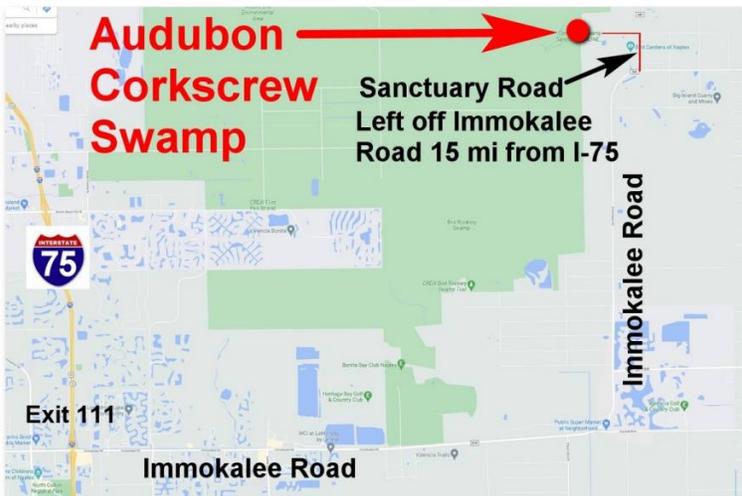
Website: [corkscrew.audubon.org/](http://corkscrew.audubon.org/)

Where: 375 Sanctuary Rd W, Naples

Get There: East on Immokalee Road. 15 miles East of I-75, turn left onto Sanctuary Rd. Follow signs.

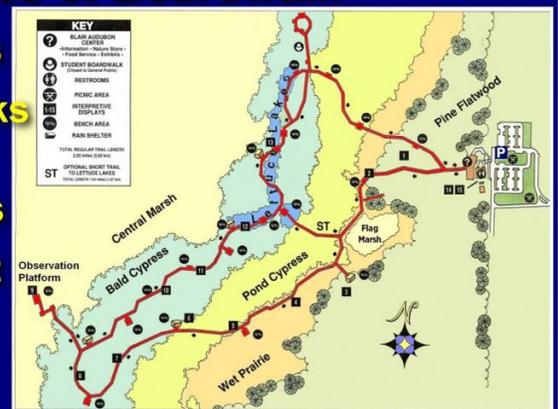
When: Daily 8:00 am to 3:00 pm. *Close 5pm In Season*

Admission: \$17. College students \$10. Children 6-14 \$6. Book online. *Recommended*



## 2.2 Miles of Boardwalk

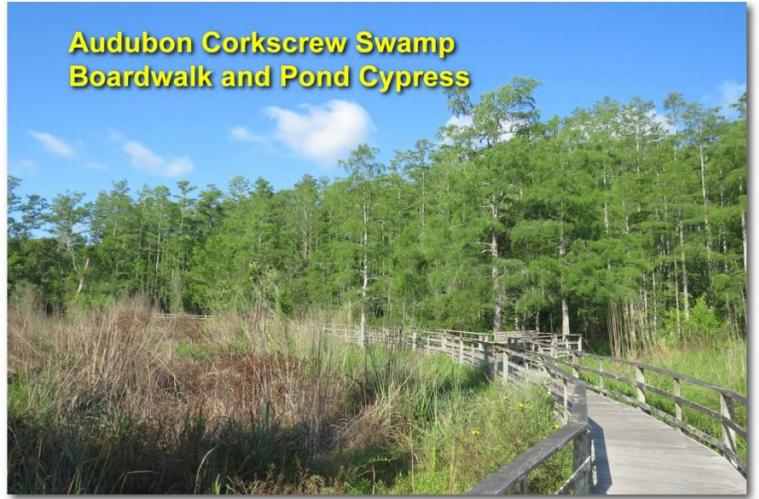
- Benches
- Overlooks
- Rain Shelters
- Shortcut



**Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary**  
2.2 miles of boardwalk  
Through pine flatwoods, marshes, swamps,  
stands of ancient cypresses, lettuce lakes.



**Audubon Corkscrew Swamp**  
Boardwalk and Pond Cypress



**At that same place on the boardwalk in**  
**October, a spectacular sunflower display**



**Corkscrew Swamp Boardwalk**  
**Across the Prairie to the Cypresses - November**  
*Cypress Needles Have Fallen. Deciduous!*



**Many of the ancient cypresses at**  
**Corkscrew Swamp PRE-DATE COLUMBUS!**



**Audubon Corkscrew Swamp**  
Wet Prairie (Marsh)



**Audubon Corkscrew Swamp**  
**Alligator Flag (Plant) Marsh**  
*Growing in water where gators can hide*  
*These were a "flag" for early settlers.*



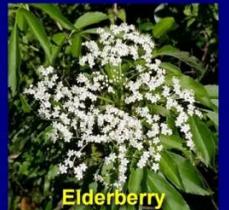
**Several of the Many Flowers at Corkscrew Swamp**



Swamp Lily



Buttonbush



Elderberry



Virginia Iris

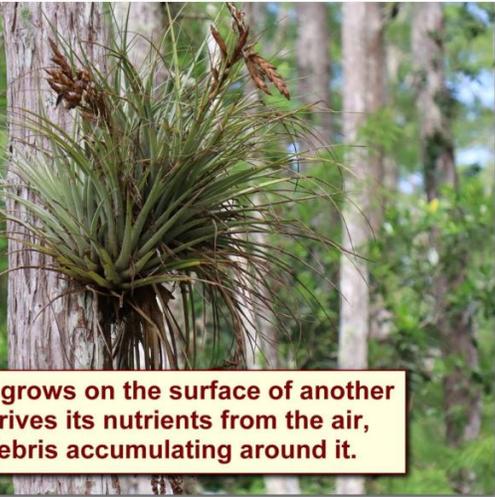


Scarlet Hibiscus



Pickerelweed

**Epiphyte –  
Does not  
harm the  
host tree**



An epiphyte grows on the surface of another plant and derives its nutrients from the air, water, and debris accumulating around it.

### Corkscrew Swamp: Two Small Reptiles



**Brown Anole**

Lizard.  
Native to Cuba, Bahamas.  
Invasive in US. Drives out  
native green lizard.  
7 to 8 inches.



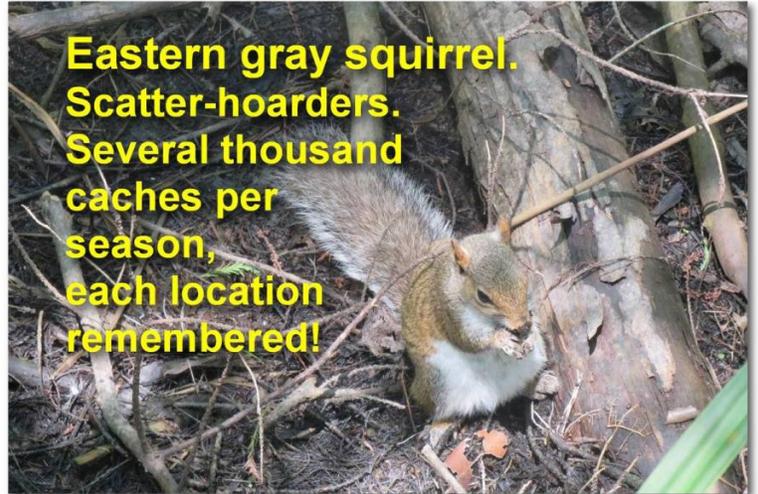
**Skink**

Lizard.  
Big neck, small legs.  
About 5 inches.  
Can shed tail if predators  
grab them. Regrows.

**Eastern Lubber Grasshopper  
Cannot Fly - Harmless  
Up to 3 inches**



**Eastern gray squirrel.  
Scatter-hoarders.  
Several thousand  
caches per  
season,  
each location  
remembered!**



**Alligator at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary**



**Alligator Sunning - Corkscrew Swamp**



**Audubon Corkscrew Swamp  
Two Juvenile Alligators**



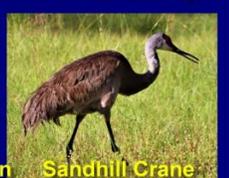
### Several of the Many Birds at Corkscrew Swamp



**Ibis**



**Yellow-crowned Night Heron**



**Sandhill Crane**



**Anhinga**

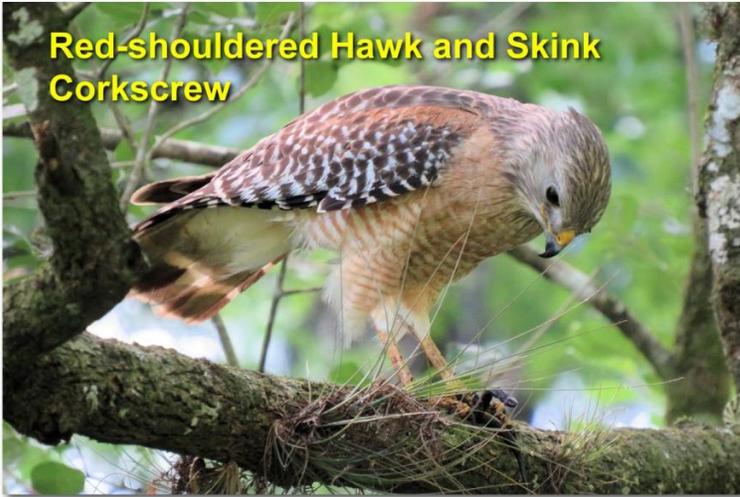


**Roseate Spoonbill**



**Barred Owl**

**Red-shouldered Hawk and Skink  
Corkscrew**



**Lookout Over the Central Marsh**



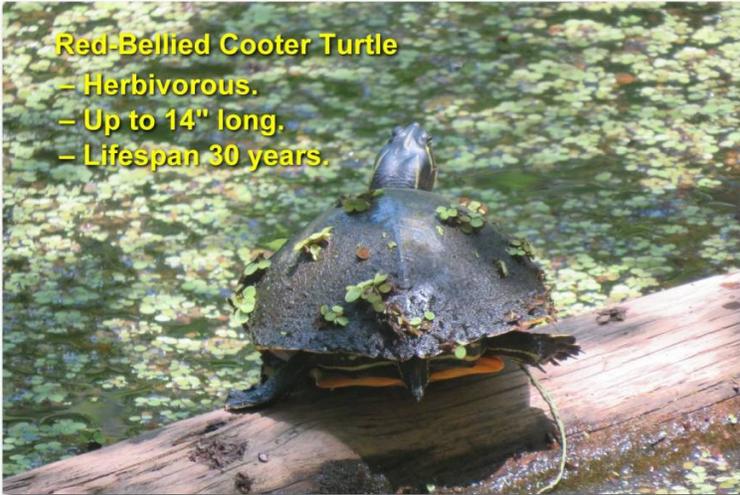
**Lettuce Lakes at Corkscrew Swamp.**  
– Shallow ponds.  
– Covered with water lettuce plants.  
– Full of fish and birds.



**That same lettuce lake during  
a Spring rainfall**



**Red-Bellied Cooter Turtle**  
– Herbivorous.  
– Up to 14" long.  
– Lifespan 30 years.



**Wood Storks - North Lettuce Lake  
Corkscrew Swamp**



**Otter - Corkscrew Swamp**



**Yellow Rat Snake**



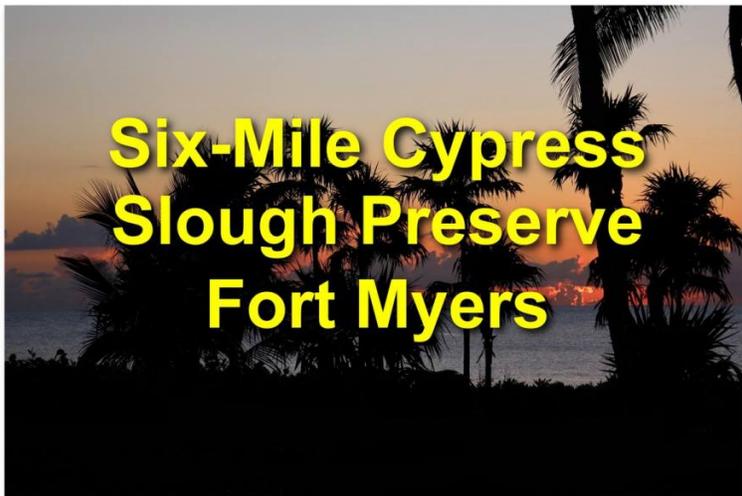
Raccoon on Corkscrew Swamp Boardwalk



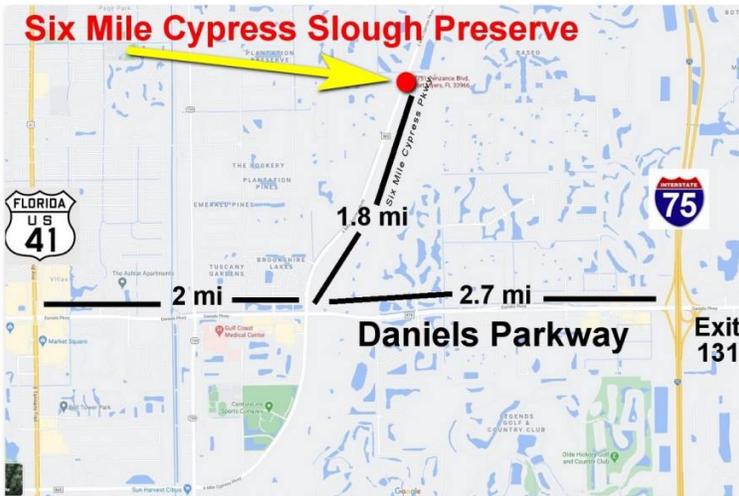
## Discovery Center - Exhibits



## Six-Mile Cypress Slough Preserve Fort Myers

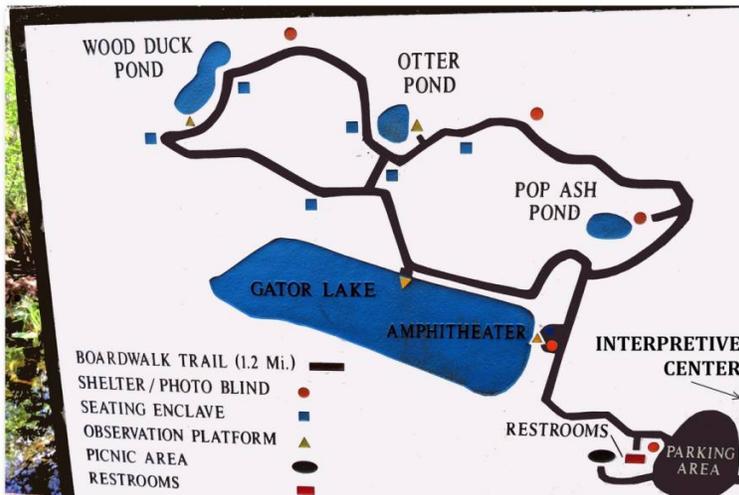


### Six Mile Cypress Slough Preserve



**What's there:** *Slough is a fresh water swamp*

- 3,500 acres of protected wetlands.
- Approx. 11 miles long, 1/3rd mile wide.
- **2-3 feet of water in wet season.**
- **Still mostly wet in dry season.**
- 1.2-mile boardwalk over the water.
- Fully accessible. Free (parking \$1/hr).
- Four viewing platforms onto lakes.
- Many benches and shelters along the boardwalk.



### Beginning of 1.2 mile boardwalk over the marsh



Many  
interpretive  
signs

### Bald Cypress Mitigation Area



*Mitigation means these were planted  
to replace logged cypresses.*

**Six-Mile Cypress Slough Preserve  
Gator Lake**



*Man-made 1970s*

**Bald Cypress Trees shed their leaves.  
Cypress knees: Stability? Aeration?  
Trap nutrients for tree?**



**Six-Mile Cypress Slough Preserve  
Alligator at Wood Duck Pond**



**Six-Mile Cypress Slough Preserve  
Juvenile Alligator Sunning - Wood Duck Pond**

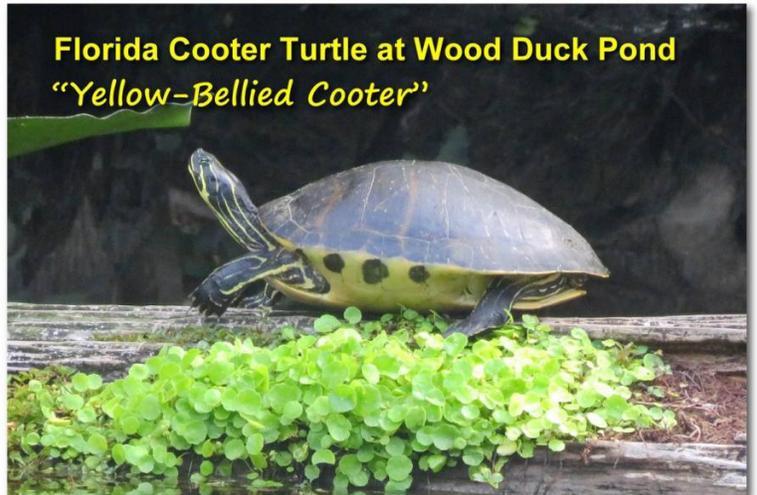


**Gators are about 8 inches when they hatch.  
Grow about 1 inch a month.**

**Raccoon  
Six-Mile Cypress  
Slough Preserve**



**Florida Cooter Turtle at Wood Duck Pond  
"Yellow-Bellied Cooter"**



**Eastern Pondhawk Dragonfly**



**"Within one minute of mating, the female starts to lay her eggs"**

**Yellow-crowned  
Night Heron  
Sleeps in Trees  
During the Day**



**Sleeping in a Tree**

**Otter Pond  
(I wasn't lucky enough to see one)**



**But I did see  
several peninsula  
cooter turtles.**



**We have now looped back to  
Gator Lake. The lake got its name  
for a reason...**

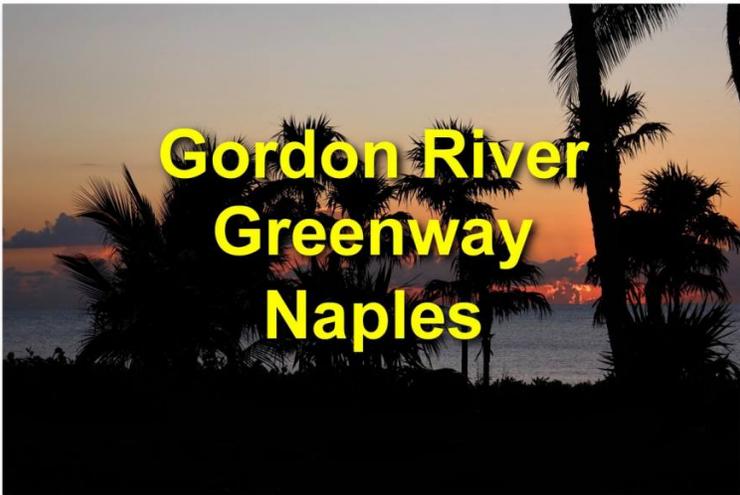


**American Alligator**



**About 5 million alligators in USA,  
1.25 million in Florida.  
Fresh water. Natatorial.  
Cold blooded.**

**Gordon River  
Greenway  
Naples**



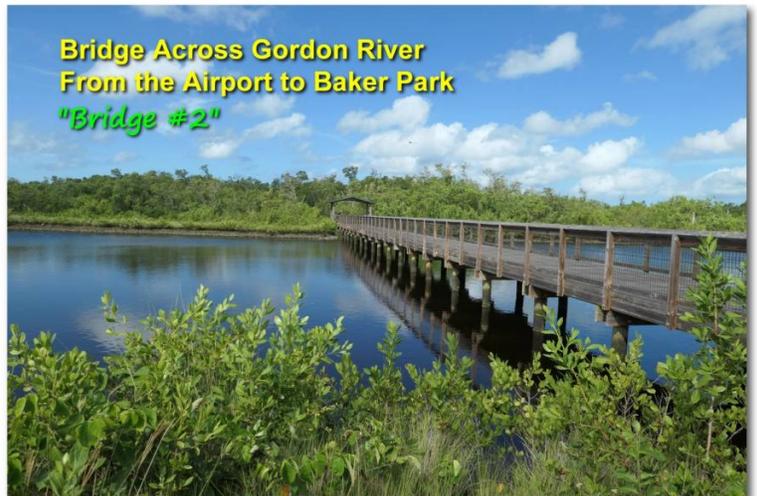
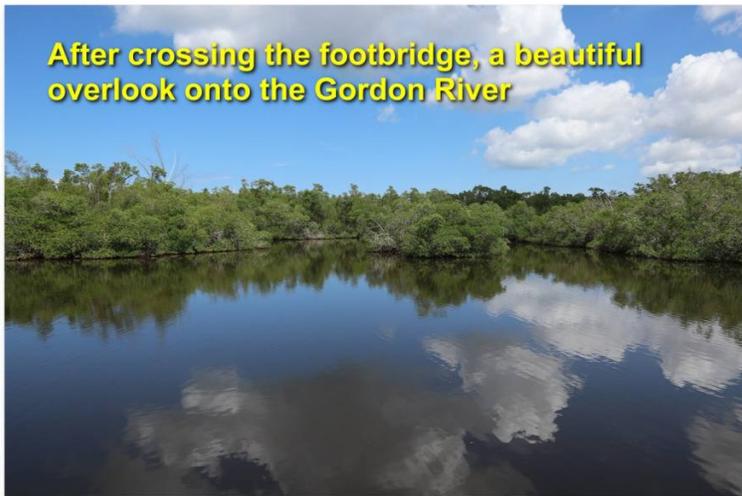
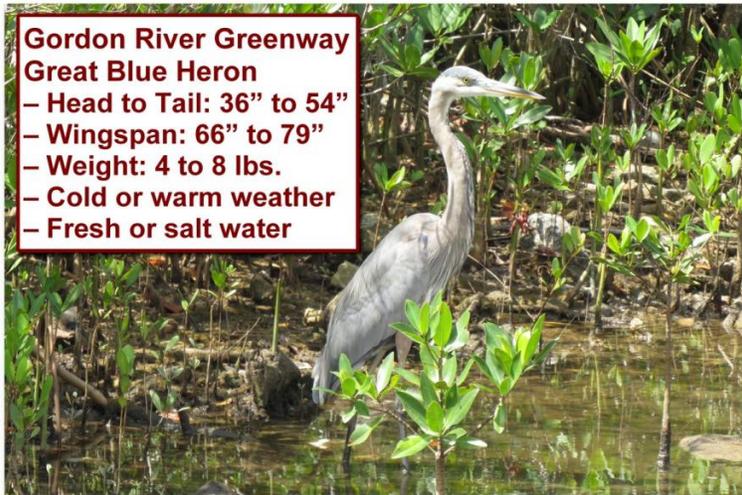
**Gordon River Greenway**

**Website:** [www.gordonrivergreenway.org/](http://www.gordonrivergreenway.org/)  
**Where:** Two entrances and parking areas:  
**1590 Goodlette-Frank Road.** Main  
entrance for Naples Zoo. Back of zoo  
parking lot.  
**1596 Golden Gate Parkway.** South side of  
Golden Gate between Airport Rd and  
Goodlette-Frank Rd.  
**Admission:** Free.



**Gordon River Greenway  
Trail is Partly Boardwalk  
and Partly Asphalt**

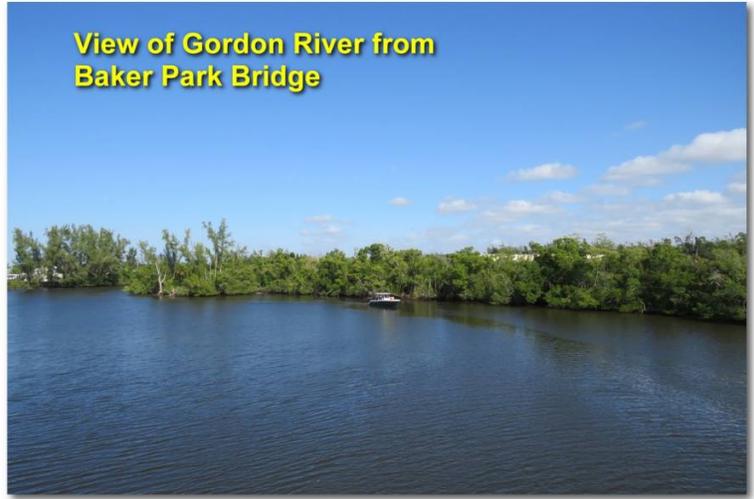




**Bridge Across Gordon River  
Baker Park  
"Bridge #3"**



**View of Gordon River from  
Baker Park Bridge**



**Lovers Key  
State Park  
Fort Myers Beach**



**Lovers Key State Park – Trails and Beaches**

**Website:** [www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/lovers-key-state-park](http://www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/lovers-key-state-park)

**Where:** 8700 Estero Blvd, Fort Myers Beach, FL 33931.

**Get There:** West on Bonita Beach Rd to Gulf. Curve right onto Hickory Blvd. About 5 miles to Lovers Key.

**Admission:** \$8 per vehicle. *1 person \$4.*

**When:** 8am to sunset, daily.

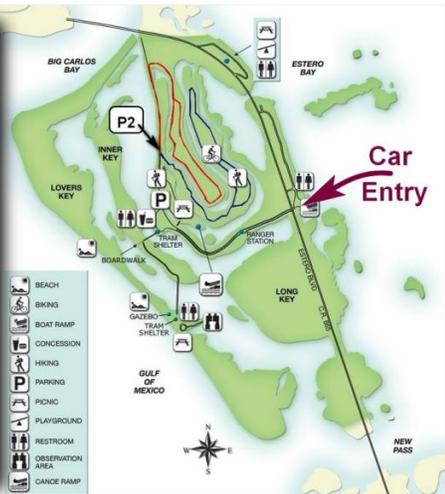


**What:** Two miles of Gulf Beaches. Miles of hiking trails. Kayaking, canoeing, shells. Dolphins, manatees, birds, gopher tortoises.

**Two trails at Lovers Key:** **Black Island Trail and Eagle Trail.** Each about 2.5 miles long (with shortcuts). They follow estuaries originally dredged to make way for residential development. That was stopped by the State.

**RED is Eagle Trail  
BLUE is Black Is. Trail**

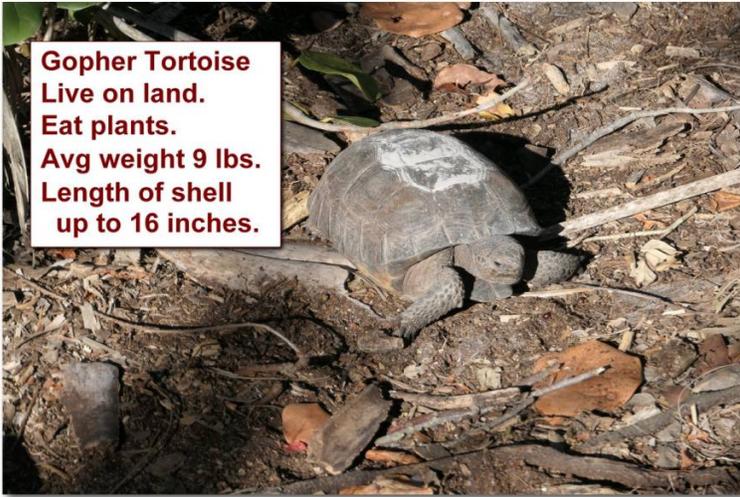
**P** Drive PAST first (beach) parking lot.  
**P2** For trails use SECOND parking lot.



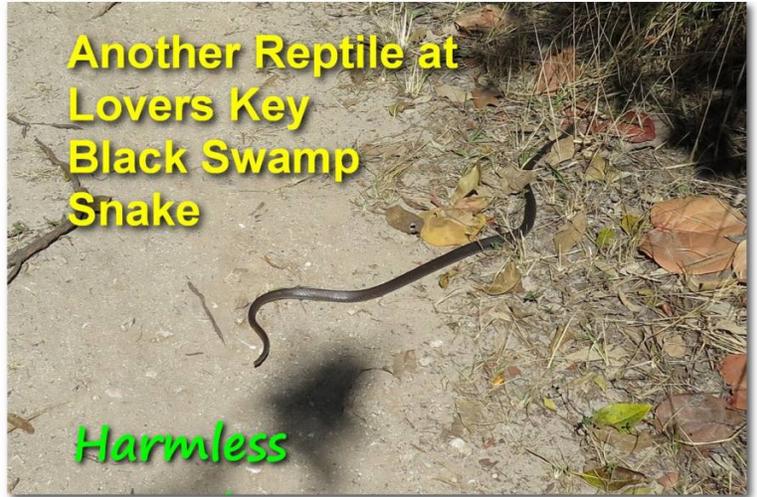
**Trails at Lovers Key Are Mostly Like This  
Some More Shaded  
Some Alongside Estuaries**



**Gopher Tortoise**  
Live on land.  
Eat plants.  
Avg weight 9 lbs.  
Length of shell  
up to 16 inches.



**Another Reptile at  
Lovers Key  
Black Swamp  
Snake**



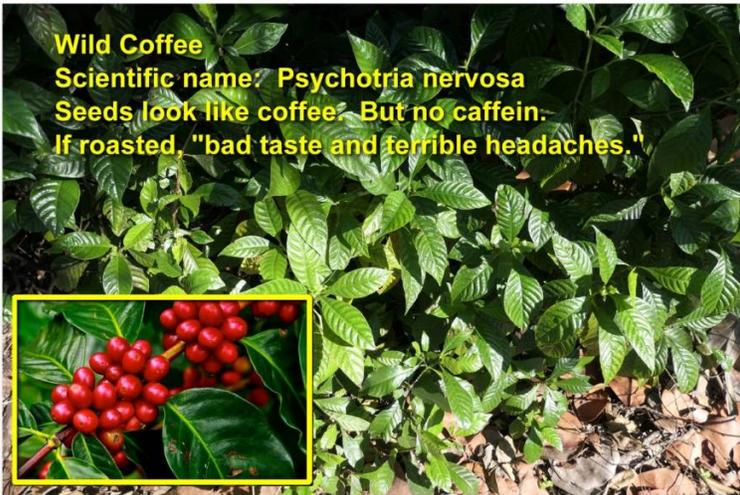
**Harmless**

**Lovers Key – Black Island Trails**



**Gumbo Limbo "Tourist Tree"  
Skin is red and peeling**

**Wild Coffee**  
Scientific name: *Psychotria nervosa*  
Seeds look like coffee. But no caffeine.  
If roasted, "bad taste and ferribe headaches."



**Kayakers at Black Island – Lovers Key.  
Park Offers Canoe and Kayak Rentals**



**Manatee - Lovers Key Black Island**



**Manatees live in water but  
come up for air every 5 to 20 minutes.**

**Sabal Palm or Cabbage Palm  
Florida's State Tree**

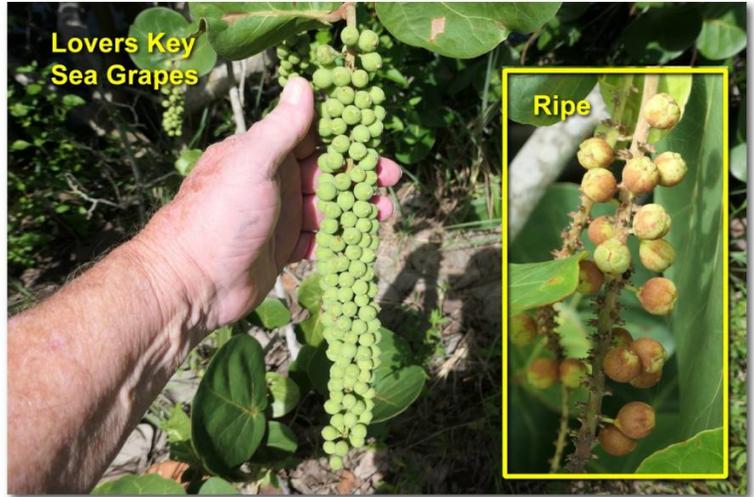


### Lovers Key - Prickly Pear Fruit



Both fruit and pads are edible after carefully scraping spines. Raw (salads) or cooked. Can buy in Latino food shops. Mexican: Nopales.

### Lovers Key Sea Grapes



Ripe

### Dolphins - Lovers Key



### Lovers Key Passion Flower aka Apricot Vine aka Maypops Tennessee State Flower



### Agave - Black Island Trails



### Lovers Key - Spanish Bayonet



### Starfish (Sea Star) from Black Island waters. They live only in salt water.



Black Island Trail and Eagle Trail are each about 2½ miles long. But each has a few shortcuts. And a few resting shelters.



In addition to trails, Lovers Key Has a Two-Mile Long Beach!  
Free tram to get you to the more remote end.

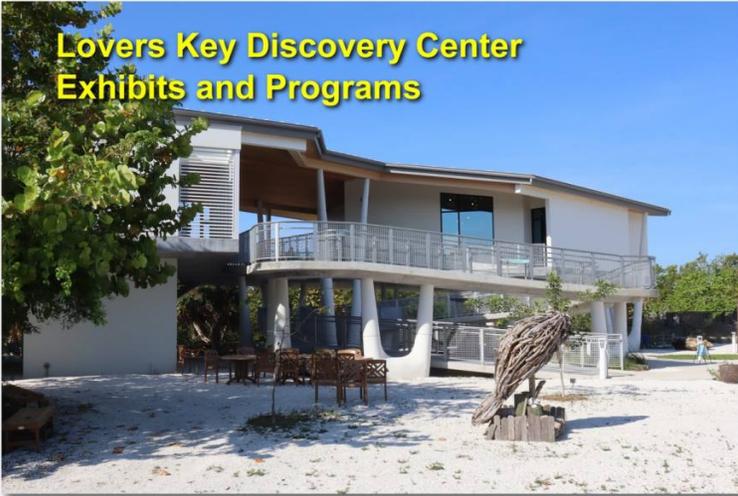


## Osprey at Lovers Key



This nest is near beach parking lot

## Lovers Key Discovery Center Exhibits and Programs



## Freedom Park Naples



## Freedom Park (Collier County)

**Website:** [www.collierparks.com/](http://www.collierparks.com/)

**Where:** 1515 Golden Gate Pkwy Just East of Goodlette.

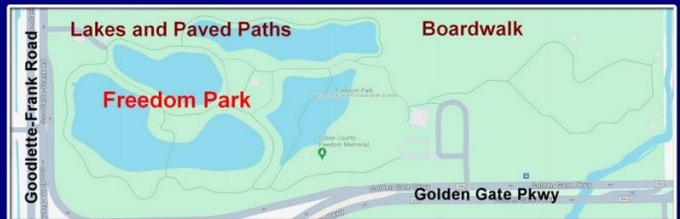
**When:** Daily 8am to Sunset.

**Admission:** Free.

**What:** 50-acre Park with 3,500 foot boardwalk plus paved trails and 6 lookout pavilions around the lakes.

### Frequent wildlife sightings include:

- Red-shouldered hawks.
- Barred owls.
- Green herons.
- Blue herons.
- Great white egrets.
- Limpkins.
- Alligators.
- Gallinules.
- Marsh rabbits.
- Turtles and Snakes.
- Iguanas.
- Raccoons.



Freedom Park has 3,500 feet of boardwalks.  
Loop around Eastern side of Freedom Park.



Western side of the park has 4 lakes  
and 6 lookouts like this one.



One of the four lakes in Freedom Park

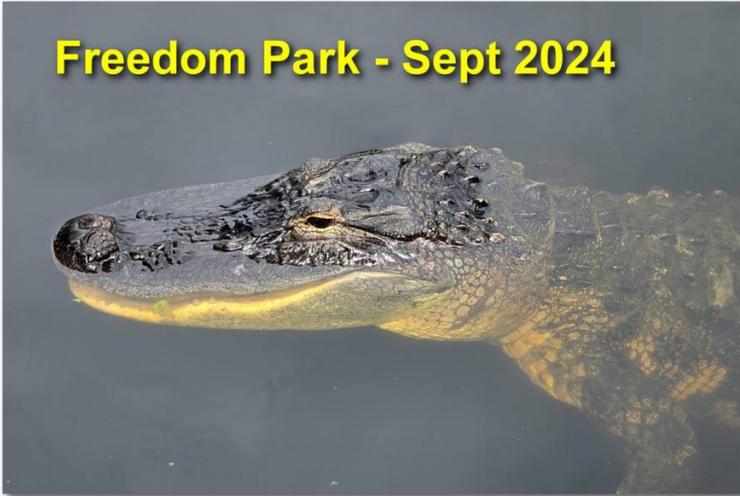


Freedom Park - December 2024



1/4 Mile from Coastland Mall

Freedom Park - Sept 2024



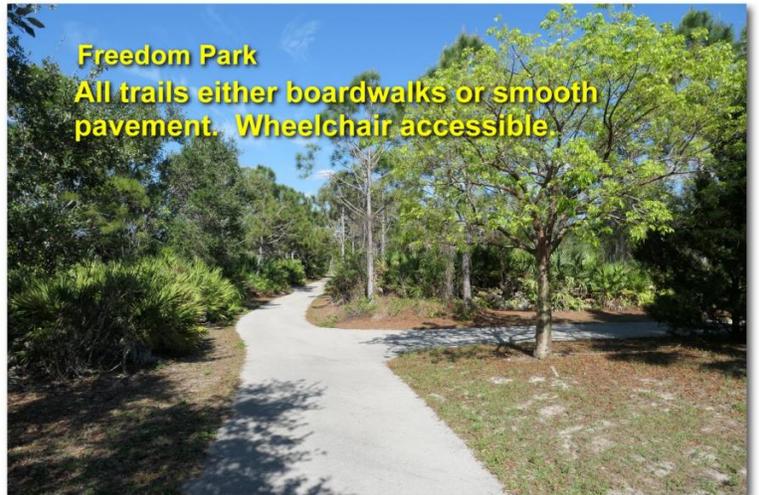
Alligator - Freedom Park



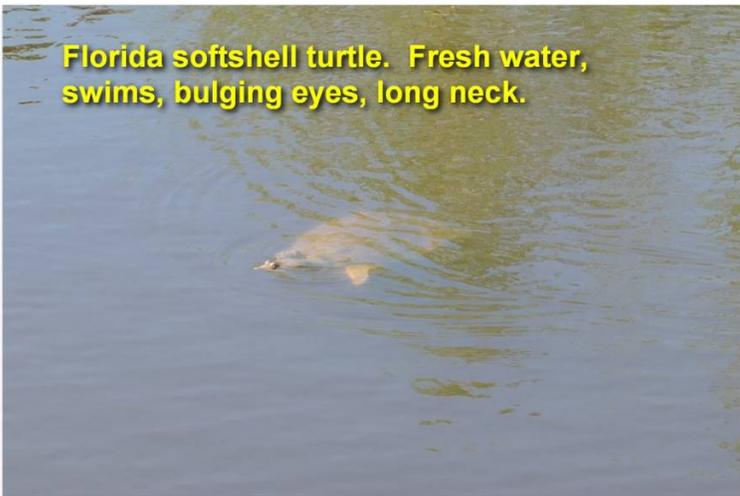
Large (3' or so) Iguana  
Freedom Park



Freedom Park  
All trails either boardwalks or smooth  
pavement. Wheelchair accessible.



Florida softshell turtle. Fresh water,  
swims, bulging eyes, long neck.



Freedom Park  
Peninsula Cooter  
Turtle





**Limpkin - Freedom Park**



**Tri-colored Heron  
Freedom Park**



**Marsh Rabbit (Short Ears)  
Freedom Park**

**Four famous prior owners of the park land**

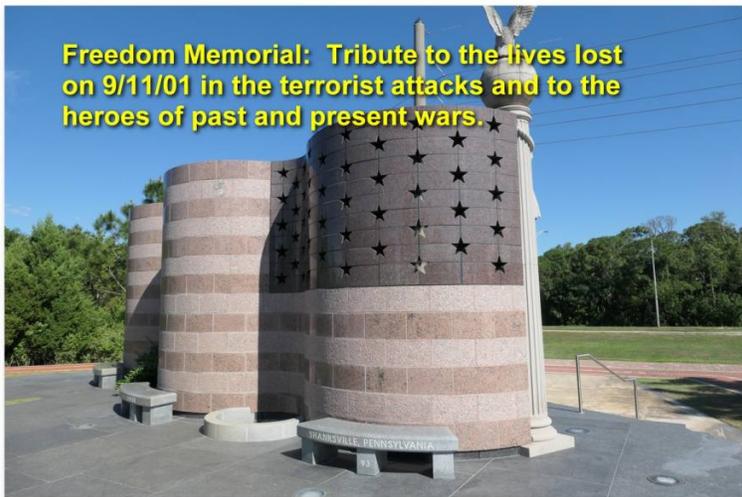
**E.W. "Ed" Crayton (1870-1938)**  
*Shaping the Naples Community*  
 A successful land developer in Ohio and St. Petersburg, Ed Crayton acquired 4,000 acres of land most of what is now the City of Naples from Walter Haldeman in 1912. Four years later he subdivided some of the land, including the Freedom Park property, into the Naples Improvement Company's Little Farms Subdivision. Back Bay was renamed Crayton Cove in honor of Ed Crayton.

**Ed Frank (1900-1981)**  
*From swamp boggers to shopping, reconnecting here of Collier County's popular pastimes.*  
 An age 12, Ed Frank worked as an apprentice mechanic in 1917. At age 25, he opened The Ed Frank Garage on 5th Avenue South. He is perhaps best known as "the creator of the swamp bogger" (see right). Ed Frank acquired the northern-most portion of Freedom Park in 1920.

**Stephen F. Briggs (1889-1976)**  
**Beatrice "Bea" Briggs (1893-1979)**  
*A healthy Naples for humans and wildlife*  
 Stephen Briggs, co-founder of the Briggs and Stratton Motor Company, and his wife Bea became seasonal Naples residents in 1935. In 1947, Stephen co-founded the Naples Yacht Club. Bea was instrumental in the creation and growth of Naples Community Hospital, and both Stephen and Bea were noted supporters of The Conservancy - now known as The Conservancy of Southwest Florida. In 1943, the Briggses purchased a portion of Freedom Park from Lindsay Crayton, and in 1944 the northern-most portion from Ed Frank.

**Julius "Junkie" Fleischmann (1900-1968)**  
*From Vacationer to Naples Visionary*  
 Julius K. Fleischmann, whose grandfather established Fleischmann Yacht, came to Naples from Cincinnati as a winter visitor in 1946. This first visit led to his many notable projects throughout the city, such as the Third Street South Shopping District. Fleischmann revived legendary Henry Hehrings' artwork in 1952, renaming it Caribbean Gardens from The Naples Zoo. He added animal attractions to the Gardens, and his "Vadewille Ducks" television appearances on the Ed Sullivan Show and Paris' famous Champs Elysees put Naples on the international map. Julius Fleischmann acquired the Freedom Park property in 1960. Collier County then acquired the land from his heirs in 2004.

**CONSERVATION COLLECTOR**



**Freedom Memorial: Tribute to the lives lost on 9/11/01 in the terrorist attacks and to the heroes of past and present wars.**



**Naples Preserve  
Naples**

**Naples Preserve Website:**  
[www.naplesgov.com/parksrec/page/naples-preserve](http://www.naplesgov.com/parksrec/page/naples-preserve)

**Where:** 1690 Tamiami Trail N, Naples, FL 34102

**Get There:** US-41 just south of Crossland Mall.

**When:** Boardwalk dawn to dusk. Eco-center daily, 8am to 5pm.

**Admission:** Free.



**The Naples Preserve**

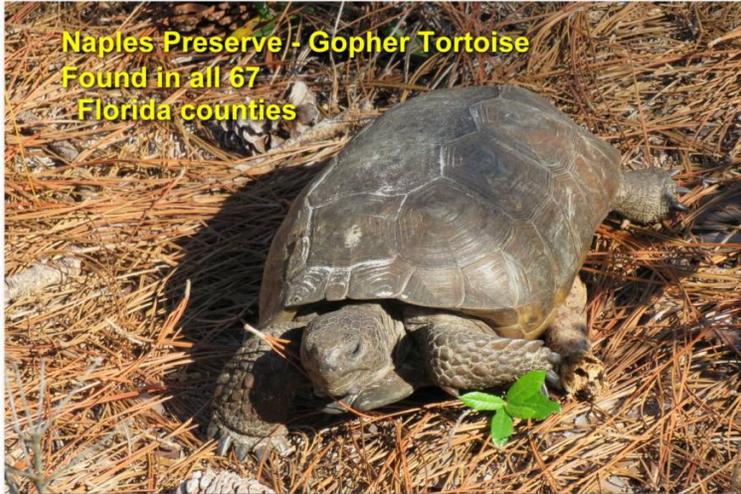
**What:** 9-1/2 acres at the corner of US-41 and Fleischmann Blvd.

**Right in the heart of Naples!**

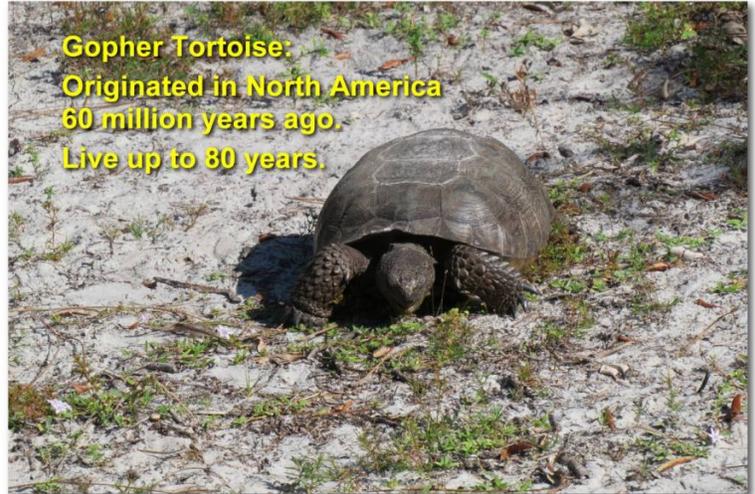
- **Nature Walk:** 0.4 mile-long boardwalk through dry scrub and flatwoods. You will likely see many gopher tortoises.
- **Hedges Family Eco-Center:** Exhibits. Programs. Conservation info.



**Naples Preserve  
0.4 Mile Boardwalk**



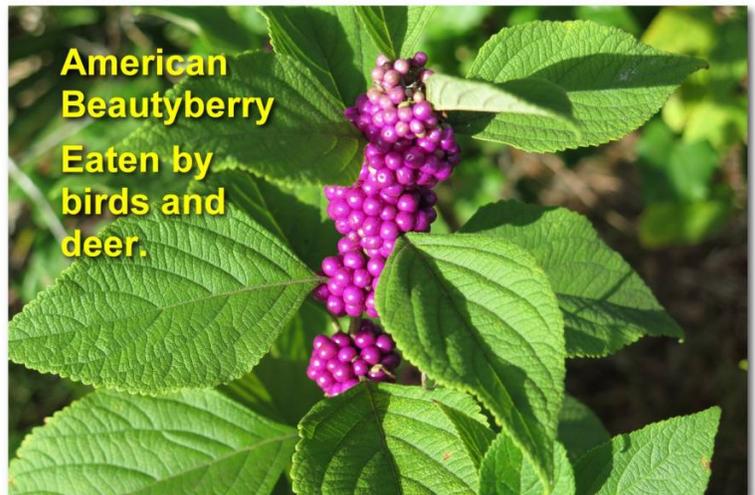
**Naples Preserve - Gopher Tortoise  
Found in all 67  
Florida counties**



**Gopher Tortoise:  
Originated in North America  
60 million years ago.  
Live up to 80 years.**



**Gopher tortoises dig burrows up to  
33 feet long. Shared with rodents,  
snakes, frogs, mice, various insects.**



**American  
Beautyberry  
Eaten by  
birds and  
deer.**



**Chapman's Blazing Star  
A kind of aster.  
Naples Preserve.  
September**



**Rivers Road  
Preserve  
Naples**

**Rivers Road Preserve**  
**Conservation Collier (taxpayer-funded county land preservation agency)**

**Website:** [www.collier.gov/Resident-Resources/Conservation-Collier](http://www.collier.gov/Resident-Resources/Conservation-Collier)

**Where:** 2021 Rivers Rd, Naples, FL 34120

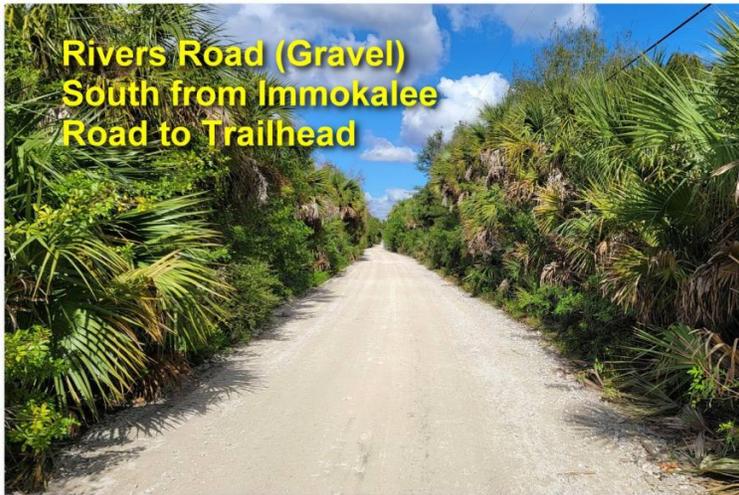
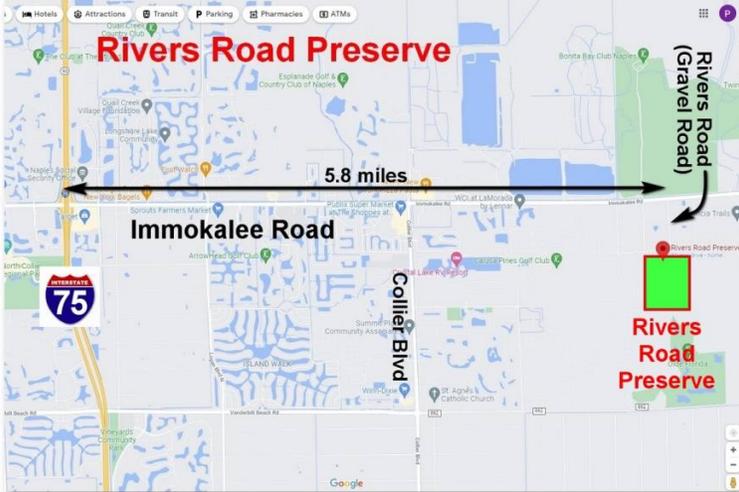
**Get There:** Immokalee Road 5.8 miles east of I-75. Turn south on Rivers Road (gravel road) to end.

**Admission:** 6:00 am–8:00 pm Daily. Free.

**What:** 97-acre preserve. 1.7 miles of easy wooded hiking trails with benches. Picnic table near parking. No restrooms.

**West Trail:** Starts at parking near bulletin board. Loop.

**East Trail:** Starts across Rivers Road. Loop. Goes past lake.



**Rivers Road (Gravel)  
South from Immokalee  
Road to Trailhead**



**Rivers Road Preserve  
Start of West Trail**



**Rivers Road Preserve  
West Trail**



**Rivers Road Preserve  
West Trail**



### Rivers Road Preserve Wildlife Camera

[www.fstopfoundation.org](http://www.fstopfoundation.org)

Mission: Create a positive effect on conservation through photography

Wildlife monitoring photos taken at Rivers Road Preserve

Fstop Foundation:

- Florida Panther.
- Bobcat.
- White-tailed Deer.

The image contains three small photographs of wildlife. The top photo shows a Florida Panther in a grassy area, dated 13 JUN 2018 06:53 pm. The middle photo shows a Bobcat in a wooded area, dated 12 JUN 2018 11:52 am. The bottom photo shows a White-tailed Deer in a grassy area, dated 27 MAY 2018 08:48 am.



### Rivers Road Preserve West Trail



### Rivers Road Preserve

A sign we don't often see.

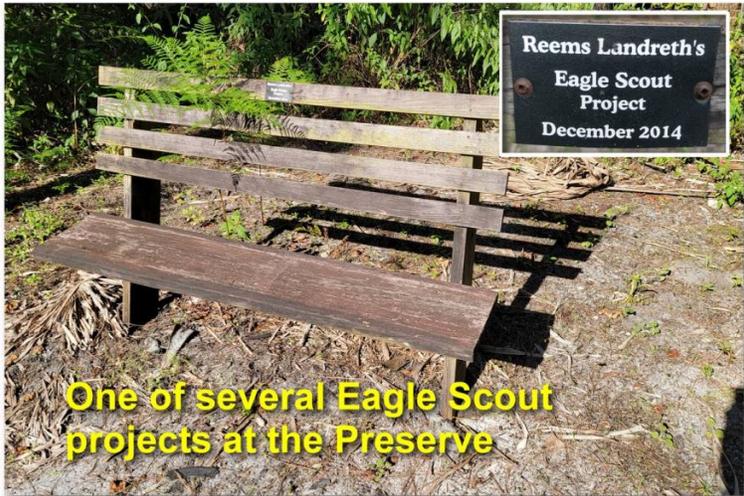
PLEASE  
CLEAN UP  
AFTER  
YOUR  
HORSE  
THANK YOU



### Rivers Road Preserve Entrance to East Trail



### Rivers Road Preserve East Trail



### One of several Eagle Scout projects at the Preserve



### Red Fire-Ant Mound Beware: Harsh Itchy Stings Do Not Step On!

One red fire ant mound has, on average, between 100,000 and 500,000 worker ants under one queen. Mound also contains eggs, larvae, and pupae of developing ants.

**Air Potatoes**  
**Invasive weed**  
**Fast-growing**  
**Noxious**  
**Inedible**



**Rivers Road Preserve**  
**East Trail - Lake**



**Rivers Road Preserve**  
**East Trail - Lake**

What's on the  
 other side of  
 the fence?



**Edun Lake Au Naturel Swimming**  
**and Sunbathing** [www.edunlake.org](http://www.edunlake.org)

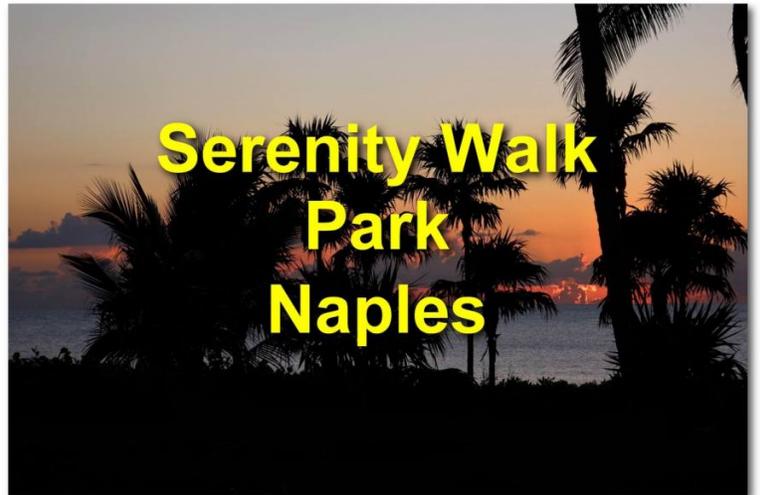


What is Edun spelled  
 backwards?

**We Rivers Road Preserve hikers**  
**just keep walking on the trail. Trail**  
**loops back to here and on back to**  
**the Trailhead and Parking.**



**Serenity Walk**  
**Park**  
**Naples**



**Serenity Walk Park**

**Website:** [www.collierparks.com/collier\\_park/serenity-walk-park/](http://www.collierparks.com/collier_park/serenity-walk-park/)

**Where:** 8962 Collier Blvd, Naples, FL 34114.

**Get there:** I-75 Exit 101 Collier Blvd CR-951. South 2.5 miles. On right.

**Admission:** Daily 7am to dusk. Free.

**What:** One-mile loop flat walking trail.

**Problematic:** Only five parking spaces.



# Serenity Walk Park One-Mile Loop Trail



Serenity Walk Park  
99-acre Collier County Park Preserve



# Eagle Lakes Park East Naples

## Eagle Lakes Community Park

### Website:

[https://www.collierparks.com/collier\\_park/donna-fiala-eagle-lakes-community-park/](https://www.collierparks.com/collier_park/donna-fiala-eagle-lakes-community-park/)

**Where:** 11565 Tamiami Trail East, Naples.

**Get There:** US-41 just north of Collier Blvd.

**When:** Mon-Sun 8 am-10 pm.

**Admission:** Free.

**What:** 2-1/2 miles of walking trails and ponds with alligators (sometimes).

- 2.5 Mile Nature Trail.
- 1 Mile (paved) Pathway for Walking/Running.
- Aquatic Complex (fee).
- Community Center.
- Fitness Center (fee).
- Meeting Room.
- Lighted Baseball and Softball Fields.
- 2 Lighted Soccer/Football Fields.
- Lighted Basketball Court.
- Picnic Shelter.
- Lighted Playground.



Red lines = 2.5 miles of walking and bike trails

## Eagle Lakes Community Park



## Eagle Lakes Community Park





**Eagle Lakes Community Park  
Alligator**



**Eagle Lakes Community Park  
Anhinga**



**Eagle Lakes  
Community Park  
Blue Heron**



**Eagle Lakes Community Park**



**Eagle Lakes Community Park  
Cormorants**

 Six-mile Cypress	<p><b>THE END</b>  <b>Easy Nature Hikes          In or Near Naples</b>  <a href="mailto:ppacter@gmail.com">ppacter@gmail.com</a>  <a href="http://www.paulvisits.com">www.paulvisits.com</a>          © Copyright Paul Pacter          All Rights Reserved</p>	 Gordon River
 Corkscrew Swamp		 Naples Preserve
 Eagle Lakes Park	 Lovers Key State Park	 Rivers Road
 Freedom Park		 Serenity Walk