



Great Nature Hikes Within An Hour of Naples

Presentation by Paul Pacter

www.PaulVisits.com

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- Easy walks where you can see some flora and fauna 30-60 minutes from Naples:**
- Ten Thousand Islands Nat'l Wildlife Refuge
 - Six Mile Cypress Slough Preserve
 - CREW Bird Rookery Swamp
 - CREW Cypress Dome Trails
 - CREW Flint Pen Strand
 - CREW Marsh Trail
 - Big Cypress Bend
 - Kirby Storter Park
 - Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge

- 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.
 - Well, in summer there might occasionally be water.

- Bring:**
- Hat.
 - Sunscreen.
 - Insect repellent.
 - Water.
- About the photos:**
- I took them all.
- Download PDF:**
www.paulvisits.com



Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge

- Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge**
- Where:** Visit by boat trip is best.
By car: US-41, 11 mi E of Collier Blvd.
- Daily:** Free.
- What:** 35,000 acres.
Mangrove islands.
Countless plants, wildlife.
1-mile hiking trail, observation tower.



Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge

Marsh Trail →

← P 11 mi E of Collier Blvd

Hiking 1.2 mi x 2 = 2.4 mi

You can see why it's best to go by boat
Tours from Marco Is and Everglades City



Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge

Start of Marsh Trail 1.2 miles.
First 1000' paved. Then gravel.

Do Not Forget!



Ten Thousand Islands NWR Red Mangroves



Mangroves thrive in salt water by filtering out the salt.

Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge

Roseate Spoonbill Anhinga Cormorant



Gator

All of the bushy trees are mangroves

Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge Observation Tower



Same place at 10,000 Islands March 2020 to May 2021.

True Story: On April 6, 2022 I was sitting on this bench when...



Notice the tilapia or turtle in its mouth

10,000 Islands NWR Brown Pelicans



Resident year-round (not migratory) in South Florida.

Cormorant Eating A Fish



Limpkin

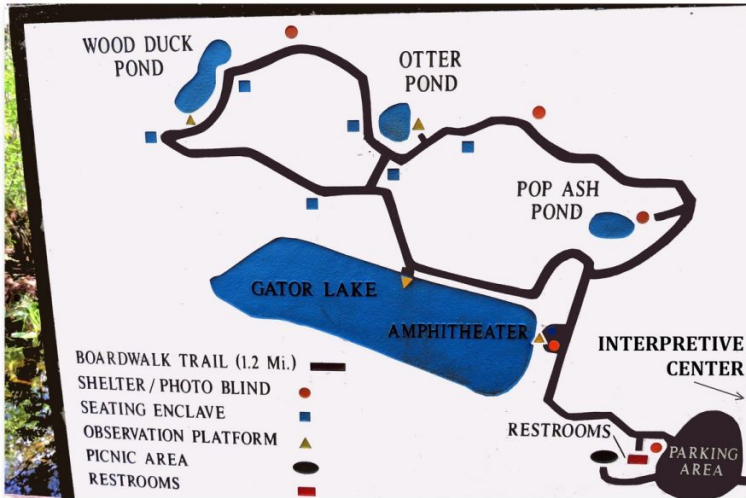
Their diet is dominated by apple snails. This one is at Collier-Seminole State Park next to Ten Thousand Islands.





Six-mile Cypress Slough ("Sloo") Preserve
Website: www.leegov.com/parks/parks/sixmilecypress
Lee County Park off Daniels Pkwy: I-75 Exit 131.

- 3,500 acres of protected wetlands.
- 11 miles long. 1/3 mile wide.
- 1.2 mile boardwalk over the water. Accessible.
- Four viewing platforms onto lakes.



Alligator sunning on a platform on Gator Lake, Six Mile Cypress Slough



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



Six-Mile Cypress Slough Preserve
Alligator at Wood Duck Pond

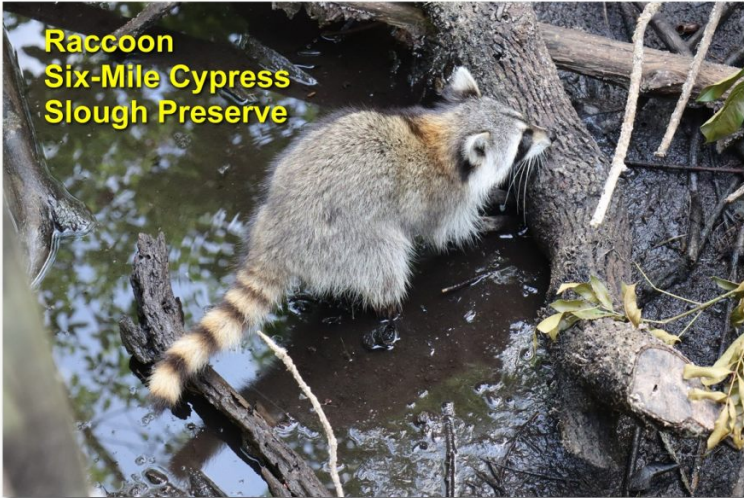


Six-Mile Cypress Slough Preserve
Juvenile Alligator Sunning - Wood Duck Pond



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



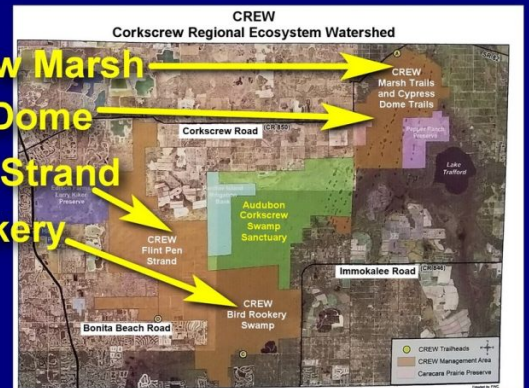
**About 5 million alligators in USA.
1.25 million in Florida.
Fresh water. Natatorial.
Cold blooded.**

**Corkscrew Regional
Ecosystem
Watershed (CREW)**



CREW Land and Water Trust

**Corkscrew Marsh
Cypress Dome
Flint Pen Strand
Bird Rookery**



**CREW Bird
Rookery Swamp**



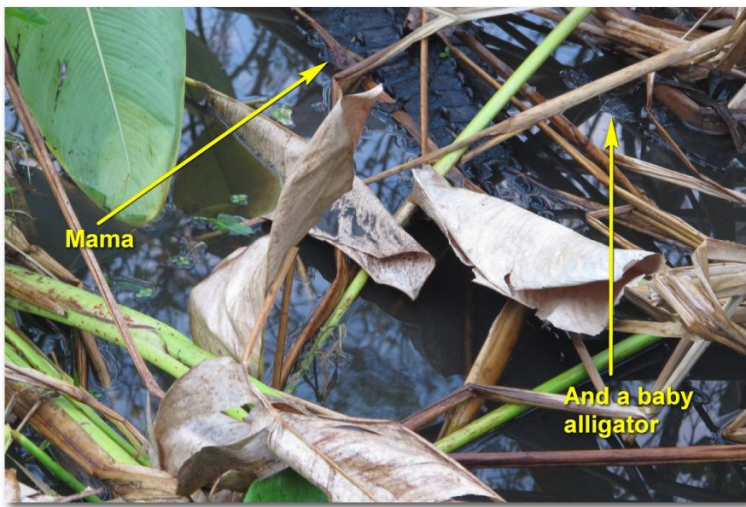
**Crew Bird Rookery Swamp Trail
(CREW = Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem
Watershed)**

Website: <https://crewtrust.org/bird-rookery-swamp-trail/>

Where: 1295 Shady Hollow Blvd W, Naples 34120. Off Immokalee Rd 11 mi E of I-75.

Get There: Immokalee Road then left (shortly past County Fair Grounds) on Shady Hollow Blvd. On the right shortly after Shady Hollow becomes gravel.



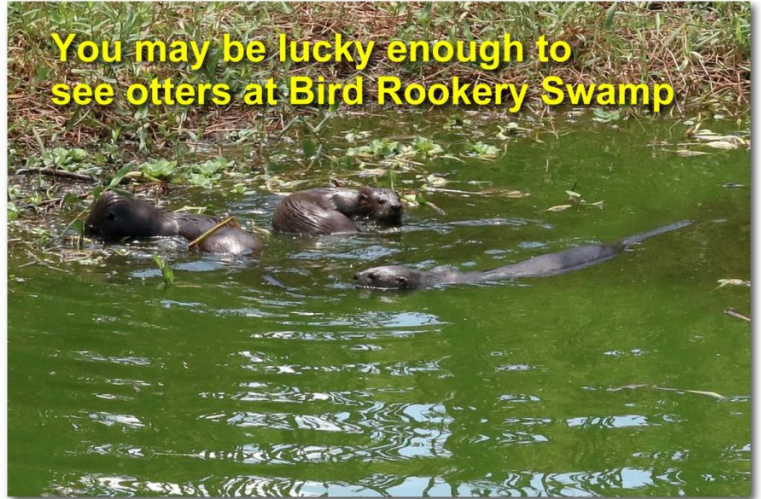


Be alert! This family has to get past the gator to reach the parking lot.

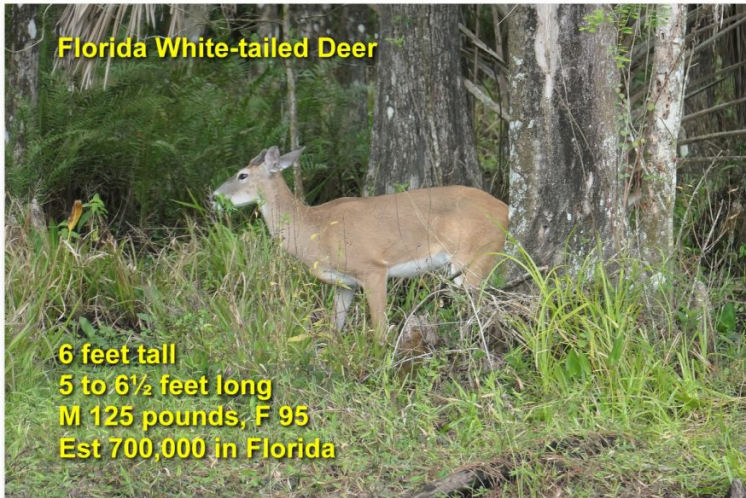
They made it without incident. So did some bikers who came just after.



Scarlet Hibiscus - Beautiful Florida Wildflower



You may be lucky enough to see otters at Bird Rookery Swamp



Florida White-tailed Deer

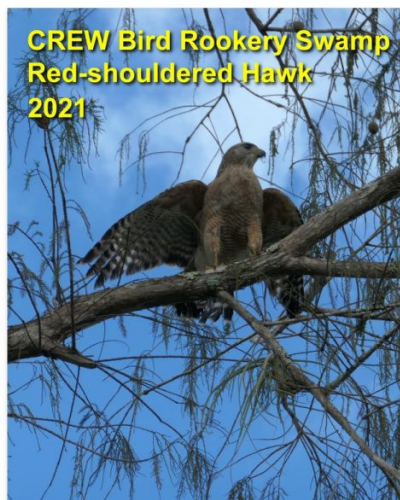
6 feet tall
5 to 6½ feet long
M 125 pounds, F 95
Est 700,000 in Florida



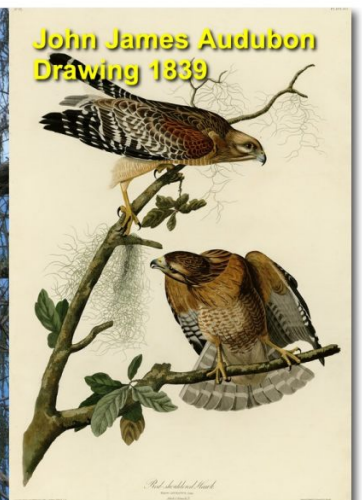
This Place Really Is a Rookery (Bird Colony)
3 Wood Storks 4 Ibises



CREW Bird Rookery Swamp
Great Blue Heron
Lunch



CREW Bird Rookery Swamp
Red-shouldered Hawk
2021



John James Audubon
Drawing 1839



CREW Flint Pen Strand

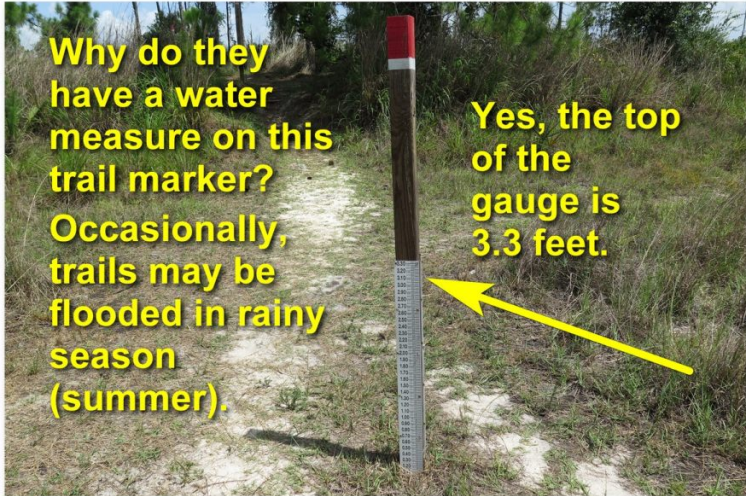
Crew Flint Pen Strand
 (CREW = Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed)
Website: <https://crewtrust.org/flint-pen-strand-2/>
Where: 15970 Bonita Beach Rd, Bonita Springs, FL 34135.
Get There: I-75 Exit 116 Bonita Beach Rd. East 3.7 miles. Left on Vincent Rd (Gravel). Parking on left.

When: One hour before sunrise to one hour after sunset.
Admission: Free.
What: 14,000 acres of hiking trails and more. Trails:

Red	1.5 mi
Blue	0.25 mi
Yellow S.	3.0 mi
Yellow N.	2.9 mi
Orange	2.9 mi
Purple	6.2 mi
TOTAL	16.75 mi



Trails are well marked



Why do they have a water measure on this trail marker? Occasionally, trails may be flooded in rainy season (summer).

Yes, the top of the gauge is 3.3 feet.



August 2020 Red



Orange Trail Flooded Sept 6, 2022 (3 weeks before Jan)



Slash Pine
 A "slash" is a swamp overgrown with trees and bushes, aka Southern Florida Pine.

This is a hard pine. Used for construction lumber



Kehl Canal in Flint Pen Strand. Dug in 1960s as drainage for ill-fated Sun Coast Acres development.



Resident of a pond along the Purple Trail



Flint Pen Strand - Tickseed Florida State Wildflower



CREW Marsh Trails

CREW Marsh Trail
 (CREW = Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed)
Website: <https://crewtrust.org/crew-marsh-trails/>
Where: 4600 Corkscrew Rd, Immokalee, FL 34142
Get There: I-75 to Corkscrew Rd Exit 123, then east on CR850 Corkscrew Rd 17.4 miles.



CREW Marsh Trails
Trees burned by fire



Controlled Burns Maintain Forest Health.

- Thin out undergrowth and flammable dead leaves and limbs to prevent a destructive wildfire.
- Reduce insect population.
- Destroy invasive plants.
- Return nutrients to the soil – much faster than decomposition.
- Let in sunlight for natural growth.

Sawgrass Marsh Observation Tower



CREW Marsh Trails
Woodpecker Holes



CREW Cypress Dome Trails



Crew Cypress Dome Hiking Trails (CREW = Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed)

Website: crewtrust.org/cypress-dome-trails/

Where: 3980 CR 850 (Corkscrew Road), Immokalee, FL 34142.

Get There: I-75 Exit 123 Corkscrew Rd. East on Corkscrew 14 miles.

When: One hour before sunrise to one hour after sunset.

Admission: Free. Donation box.

CREW Cypress Dome Hiking Trails - Immokalee

CREW Cypress Dome
Corkscrew Road
14 Miles East of I-75 Exit 123



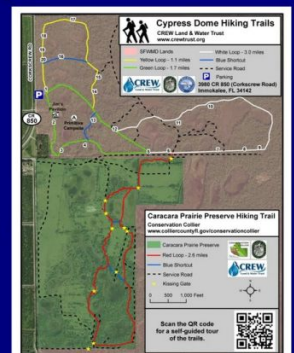
What: 5.8 miles of well-marked, flat hiking trails. Three loops:

Green: 1.1 miles.

Blue: 1.7 miles.

White: 3.0 miles.

Connects to Caracara Preserve Hiking Trail (Red, 2.6 miles), which is owned by Conservation Collier.





The Hiking Trails Are Well Marked
Either On Poles or On Trees



Might Be a Bit Wet



Even More Than a Bit Wet in Rainy Season
Proper Shoes + Bug Spray



**Big Cypress Bend
Fakahatchee Strand
Preserve State Park**

Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park
Largest State Park in Florida (175 parks).
Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk is one
feature of the Park.

- Currently, the Boardwalk is 2.3-mile round trip walk from parking at US-41.
- An additional 1.6 mile Boardwalk is planned.
- Eventually will be a 2.7 mile loop.

Map on next slide...

Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk

When the planned boardwalk is completed, will be a 2.7-mile loop.

Part of the yellow is planned as a canopy walk.

Existing 1.15 mi boardwalk
 2.3 miles round trip
 Planned 1.6 mi boardwalk

Big Cypress Bend – More Info

Website:
<https://www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/fakahatchee-strand-preserve-state-park>

Where: US-41, Copeland, FL.

Get There: US-41 East 17 miles from Collier Blvd. 7 miles West of SR-29.

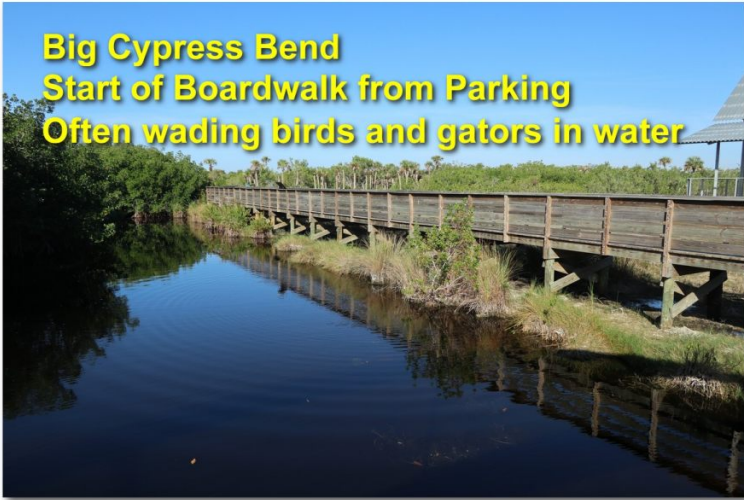
When: 8am to sunset.

Admission: \$3.



**Big Cypress Bend
Bridge from Parking to Visitor Center**

Big Cypress Bend
Start of Boardwalk from Parking
Often wading birds and gators in water



Big Cypress Bend



Florida Spotted Gar (Fish)



Sunning Under the Boardwalk



Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk



After first Boardwalk is a gravel path around part of Green Heron Lake.



Green Heron Lake
Big Cypress Bend



Snowy Egret at Green Heron Lake



Mama and 2 baby gators



I got much too close taking this photo. Didn't see babies.

New boardwalk opened November 2025. Replaces part destroyed by Ian, which was closed for 3 years.



Pond at end of new (2025) boardwalk. Lots of wildlife: Alligators, birds, etc.



Tricolored Heron

Blue Heron

Two Gators

Big Cypress Bend Pond



Barred Owl Looking Down on the Pond



Kirby Storter Park
Big Cypress
National Preserve



Kirby Storter Park
Part of Big Cypress National Preserve.
On Us-41: 37 miles East of Collier Blvd.
Admission: Free, dawn to dusk.
Half-mile boardwalk through sawgrass prairie, cypress swamp, alligator hole.
– Gators dig hole for deep water in dry season.
– Most of boardwalk temporarily closed!
Wildlife: Includes birds, snakes, fish, turtles, and alligators.

Map of Big Cypress National Preserve



Kirby Storter Park Beginning of Boardwalk

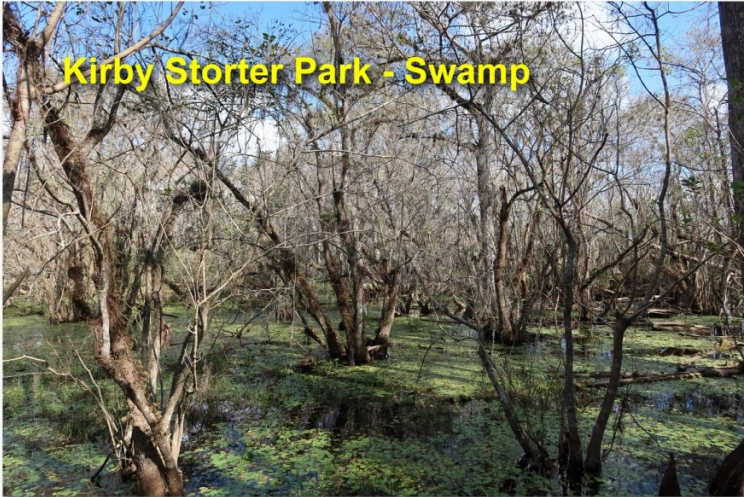


Kirby Storter Park

In October 2024, fire destroyed part of the Kirby Storter boardwalk. Part has now reopened, but the damaged part is not yet rebuilt.



Kirby Storter Park - Swamp



Kirby Storter Park Alligator Hole



Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge



Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge Website:

www.fws.gov/refuge/florida_panther/

Where: 20 miles east of Naples. I-75 just north of State Road 29 (Exit 80).

Get There: I-75 Exit 80 (SR-29) 21 miles east of Collier Blvd. Then 1/2 mile north on SR-29.

Admission: Free.

When: Daily sunrise to sunset.

Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge



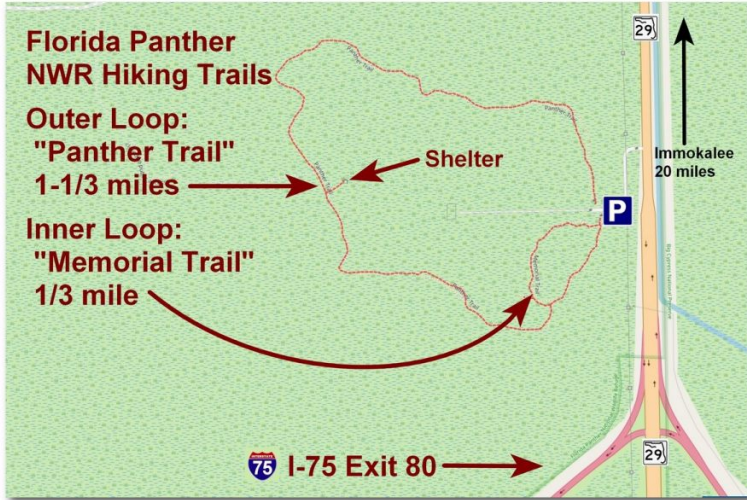
What: 26,400-acre refuge to protect panther habitat. Public access only on two trails in one corner. 12-16 Florida panthers den and roam there. Plus otters, alligators, birds.

Two Hiking Trails:

- Small Loop: 0.3 miles.
- Outer Loop: 1.3 miles.

There are only around 250 Florida panthers in the wild in all of Florida. (In 1970s there were only 20.)

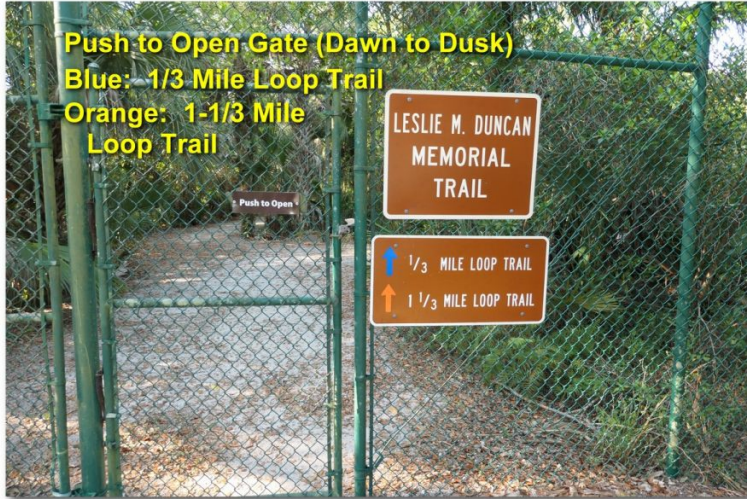


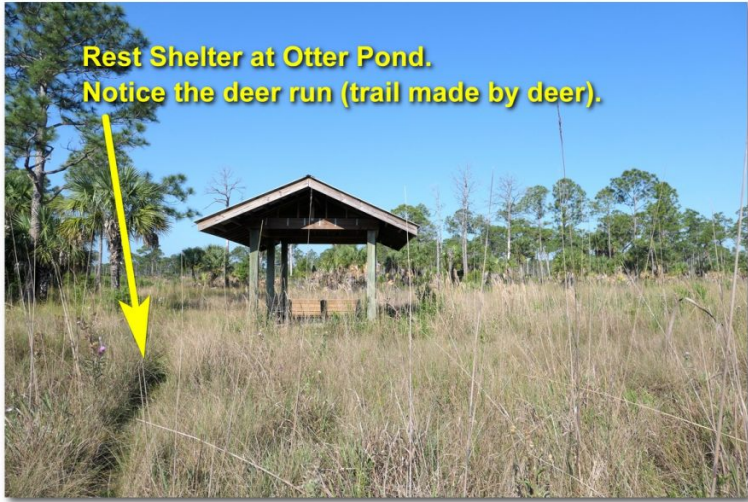


Adult Florida panther:
Unspotted.
Typically tan overall.
Underside is dull white
Tip of tail, back of ears,
and sides of muzzle blackish.



Kittens:
Gray with dark brown or
blackish spots and five
bands around the tail.
Spots fade as kittens grow older.

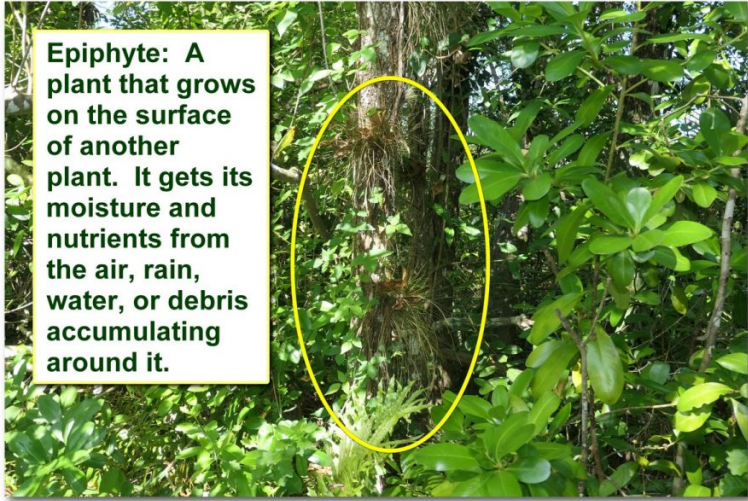






Rest Shelter at Otter Pond.
Notice the deer run (trail made by deer).



Coral Bean Shrub
Some medicinal use.
Not edible.



Epiphyte: A plant that grows on the surface of another plant. It gets its moisture and nutrients from the air, rain, water, or debris accumulating around it.

 Big Cypress Bend	<p>THE END</p> <p>I hope you enjoyed these great hikes near Naples</p> <p>ppacter@gmail.com</p> <p>www.paulvisits.com</p> <p>© Copyright Paul Pacter All Rights Reserved</p>	 Florida Panther NWR
 CREW Cypress Dome		 Kirby Storter Park
 CREW Flint Pen Strand		 CREW Bird Rookery
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 Six-Mile Cypress Slough Preserve		