

# Easy Nature Hikes In or Near Naples

Presentation by  
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 - Naples
- 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.

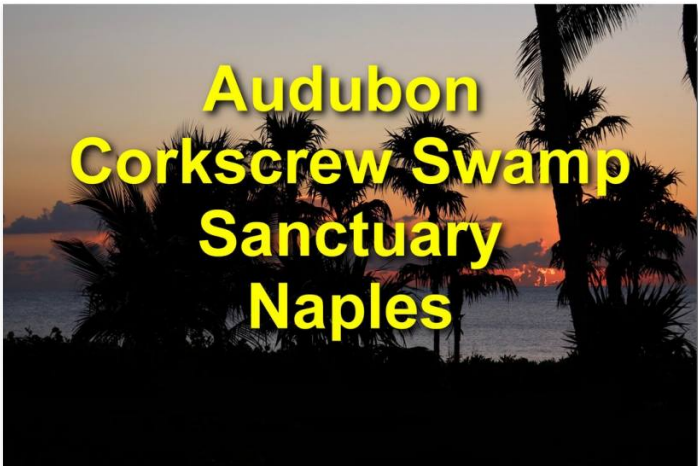
**Suggestions for all:**

- 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 Spm In Season*

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

**Visitors Center:** Exhibits, shop, cafe (seasonal).

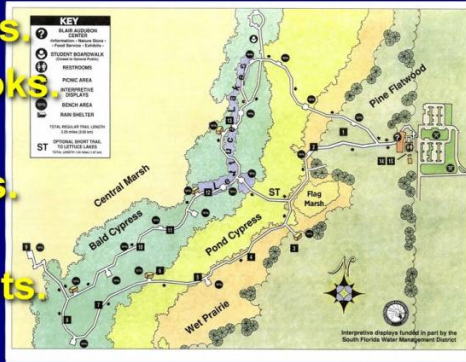
**Managed Wetlands:** 13,000 acres.

**Boardwalk:** 2.2 miles of boardwalk through pine flatwood, wet prairie, marsh, and the largest old growth Bald Cypress forest in North America. Alligators, otters, deer, cottonmouth snakes, turtles, wading birds, owls, songbirds, raccoons, etc.




## 2.2 Miles of Boardwalk

- Benches
- Overlooks
- Rain shelters
- Several shortcuts



## 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 - May  
*Cypress Needles Are Green - Summer*



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



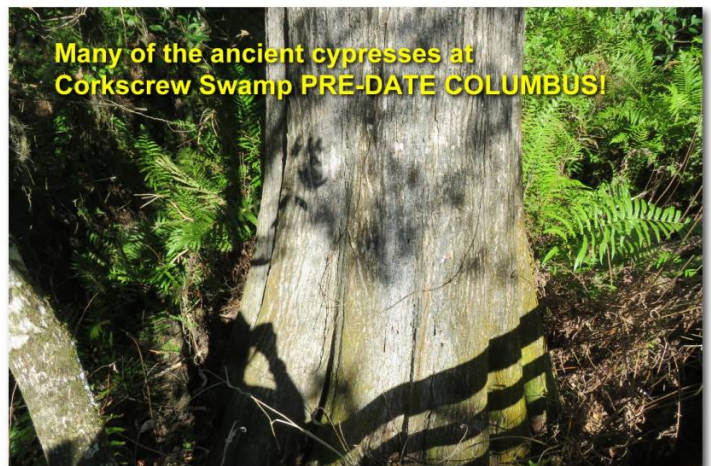
Cypress is a conifer. But its needles change color and fall off each autumn.



Two kinds of cypress trees:  
**Pond cypress** 40-80' tall, Max 20' wide, tapered shape.  
**Bald cypress** 70-130' tall, 20-30' wide, Oval shape.



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



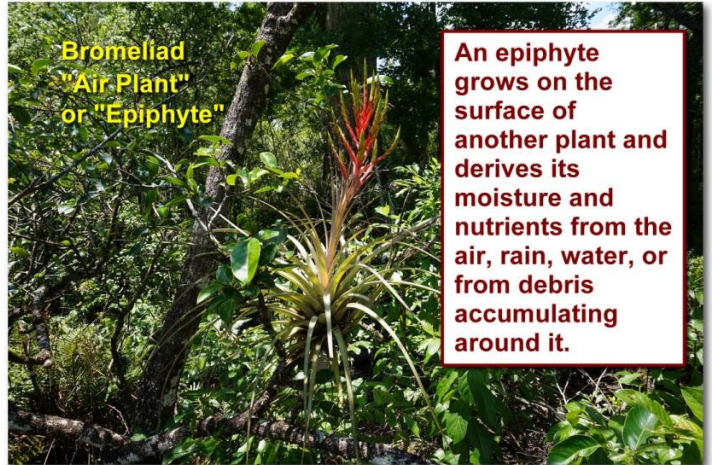
Virginia Iris



Scarlet Hibiscus



Pickerelweed



**Bromeliad  
"Air Plant"  
or "Epiphyte"**

**An epiphyte  
grows on the  
surface of  
another plant and  
derives its  
moisture and  
nutrients from the  
air, rain, water, or  
from 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



Five Baby Gators  
Corkscrew Swamp



Audubon Corkscrew Swamp  
Two Juvenile Alligators



Several of the Many Birds at Corkscrew Swamp



Ibis



Yellow-crowned Night Heron



Sandhill Crane



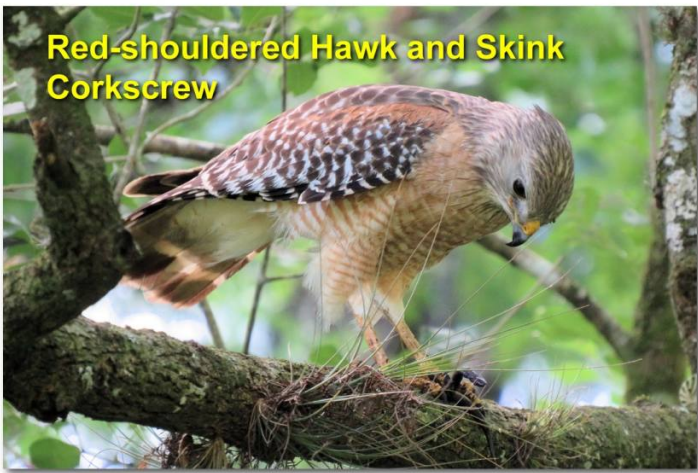
Anhinga



Roseate Spoonbill



Barred Owl



Red-shouldered Hawk and Skink  
Corkscrew



Roseate Spoonbill – Corkscrew Swamp



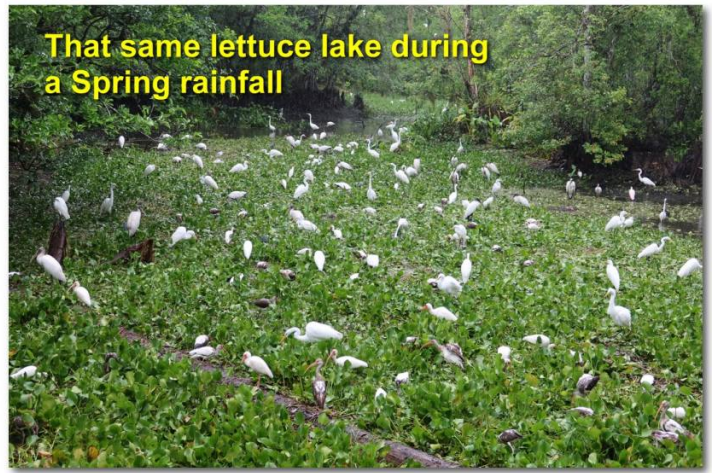
Lookout Over the Central Marsh



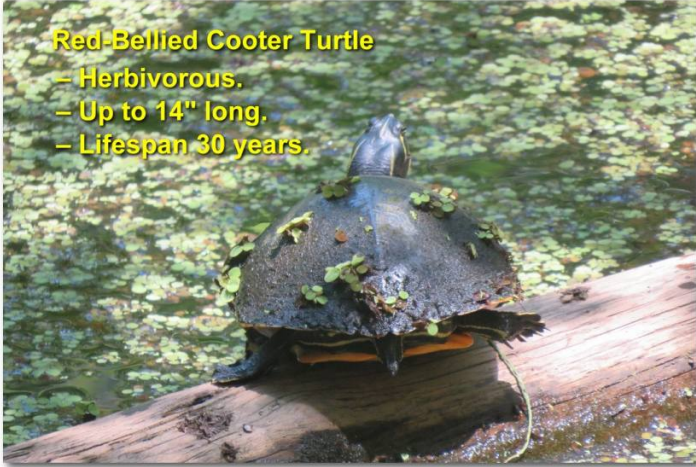
View of Marshland from Lookout  
Audubon Corkscrew: 13,000 acres = 20 sq miles.  
Wetlands. Wildlife sanctuary.



**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.



**Alligator in a Lettuce Lake**

Season to see alligators at Corkscrew is April to early July - after winter and before rainy season.



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



**Otter - Corkscrew Swamp**



**Yellow Rat Snake**



**Barred Owl  
Corkscrew  
Swamp**



Raccoon on Corkscrew Swamp Boardwalk



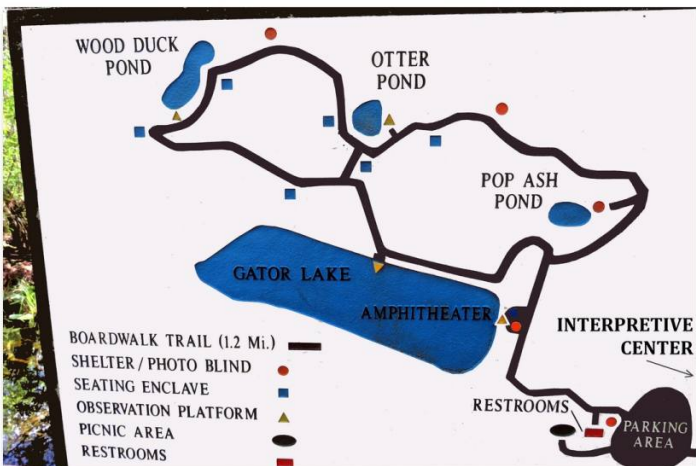
# Six-Mile Cypress Slough Preserve Fort Myers

**Six Mile Slough Preserve "Sloo"**  
**Website:** [www.leegov.com/parks/preserves/sixmilecypress](http://www.leegov.com/parks/preserves/sixmilecypress)  
**Friends of Six Mile Slough:**  
[www.sloughpreserve.org/](http://www.sloughpreserve.org/)  
**Where:** 7751 Penzance Blvd at 6 Mile Cypress Pkwy, Fort Myers, FL. 33966.  
**Get There:** I-75 Exit 131 Daniels Pkwy. West 2.7 mi to 6 Mile Cypress Pkwy. Right onto 6 Mile Cypress Pkwy. Then 1.8 mi to entrance, on right.



**Admission:** Free. Parking is \$1 per hour max \$5.  
**Trail hours:** Daily dawn to dusk.  
**Interpretive Center:** Tues-Sun 10-4. Closed Mondays. *But trails still open.*  
**Guided nature walks:**  
 – Twice daily Jan-Mar.  
 – Daily Apr, Nov, Dec.  
 – Approx. once a week in other months.  
**Check website of Friends.**

**What's there:**  
 – 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.  
 – 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.



### Great Egret Six Mile Cypress Slough

Slough = Fresh water wet swampy ground.



### Six-Mile Cypress Slough - Young Ibis

At around age 2, feathers turn pure white

### Butterflies in the Slough

Many interpretive signs along the walk

The Slough is home to various water loving trees and shrubs. Some butterflies and caterpillars rely on these plants for food and shelter.

**Eastern Tiger Swallowtail**  
*Papilio glaucus*  
This butterfly looks a lot like a monarch. The bold angled black line across the hindwing is a great way to tell them apart. After mating, females oviposit in their eggs. You have to wait two adult Cooters without food to have caterpillars between the hatched coter and the next phase.

**Ruddy Daggerying**  
*Merganser atreus*  
Although infrequently seen, the striking orange color and dark stripes of the ruddy daggerying make it hard to miss! When this butterfly lays eggs down with its wings closed, it looks just like a dead leaf.

**White Peacock**  
*Aesopie jessupii*  
White peacock butterflies have dark eye spots on their wings like peacocks have on the ends of their tail feathers. If you are likely to see this butterfly along the edge of Gator Lake. Look for the orange and black stripes on the hindwing of the peacock.

**Palamedes Swallowtail**  
*Papilio palamedes*  
These large, graceful fliers use a host tree rather than a flowering plant. They search for swamp bays growing in the heart of the Slough. The get full sized influences of butterflies in a slough get very hungry swallowtails.

**Swamp Fly**  
More than 100 species of Palamedes Swallowtails deposit eggs on the winged fly. Look for the caterpillars of Palamedes Swallowtail on the trees from March through October.

**Carolina Yellow**  
More than 100 species of Carolina Yellow trees can be seen along the edge of the Slough. Look closely for many butterflies and caterpillars and these trees.

**Stronger Fig**  
More than 100 species of Stronger Fig trees can be seen along the edge of the Slough. Look closely for many butterflies and caterpillars and these trees.

**Swamp Fly**  
More than 100 species of Palamedes Swallowtails deposit eggs on the winged fly. Look for the caterpillars of Palamedes Swallowtail on the trees from March through October.

**Carolina Yellow**  
More than 100 species of Carolina Yellow trees can be seen along the edge of the Slough. Look closely for many butterflies and caterpillars and these trees.



### Gator Lake

Man-made in the 1970s



### Six-Mile Cypress Slough Preserve Gator Lake



### Six Mile Cypress Slough is a birder's and photographer's paradise

Each pond has a viewing platform



### Another Viewing Platform On Gator Lake



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

"Stumpy"



The white blotches on many trees are lichen



Most of the slough is covered in water year round



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



Six-Mile Cypress Slough Preserve  
Alligator at Wood Duck Pond

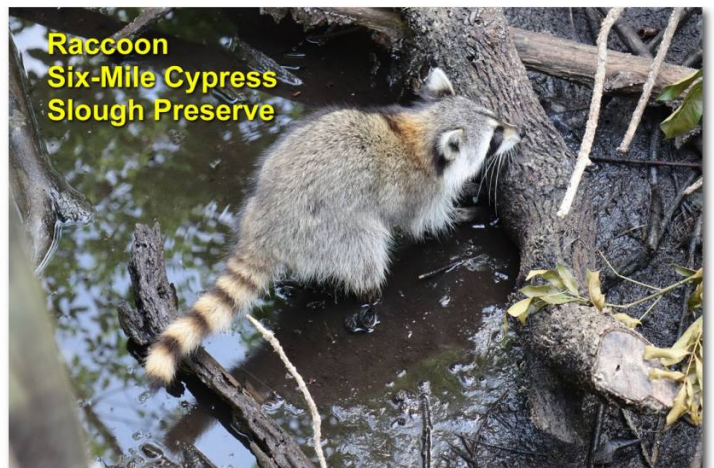


Six-Mile Cypress Slough Preserve  
Juvenile Alligator Sunning - Wood Duck Pond

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



Baby Gator Floating  
On a Lily Pad  
Six-mile Cypress Slough



Raccoon  
Six-Mile Cypress  
Slough Preserve





Three Red-bellied Cooter Turtles  
Six-mile Cypress



Gar

Heavily armored. Sharp teeth.

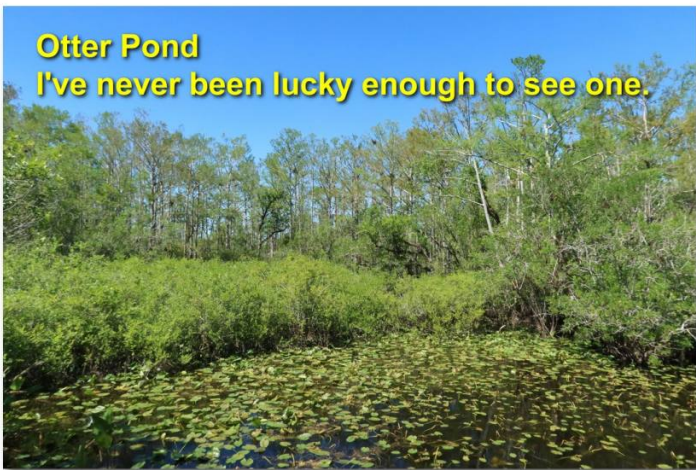


Eastern Pondhawk Dragonfly

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



Yellow-crowned Night Heron  
Sleeps in Trees  
During the Day



Otter Pond  
I've never been 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...

Cormorants  
on the raft



American Alligator



Alligator at Gator Lake



# 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.

**When:** 6:30 am to 10:00 pm 7 days.  
**What:** 2.5 miles of asphalt, mulch, and boardwalk trails with water access along the Gordon River, in the heart of Naples, Florida. Ideal for walkers, hikers, runners, cyclists, kayakers, birders.  
**2004 vote by Collier County residents to acquire most of the land.**  
At southern end, can continue down North Rd (behind Airport) to connect to new Baker Park.



Gordon River Greenway Trail is Partly Boardwalk and Partly Asphalt



Many Sun - Rain - Rest Shelters Along the Greenway



Mulch Trail  
1/4-Mile Side Loop Off Main Trail

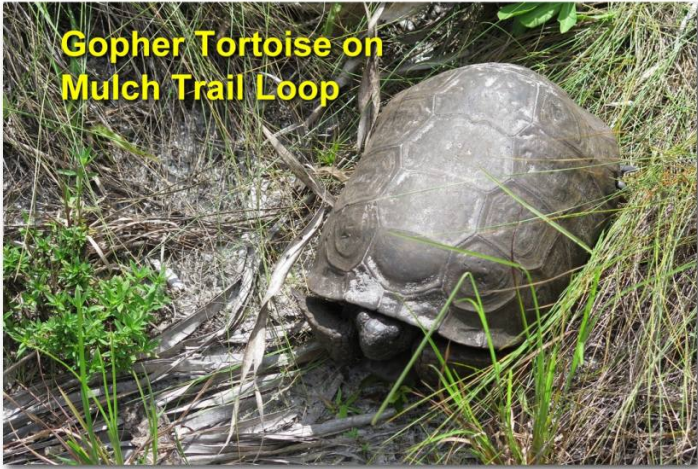
May get muddy after a rain



**Greenway - Mulch Trail Pond (2024)**  
**Roseate Spoonbills, Woodstorks, Ibis, Egrets**



**Gordon River Greenway**  
**Mulch Trail Pond - Dry Season**



**Gopher Tortoise on**  
**Mulch Trail Loop**



**Gordon River Greenway - Wildflowers**

**Mimosa**

**Evening Primrose**



**Gordon River Greenway**  
**Baccharis aka Sea Myrtle aka Saltbush**



**Gordon River Greenway**  
**Leather Ferns**

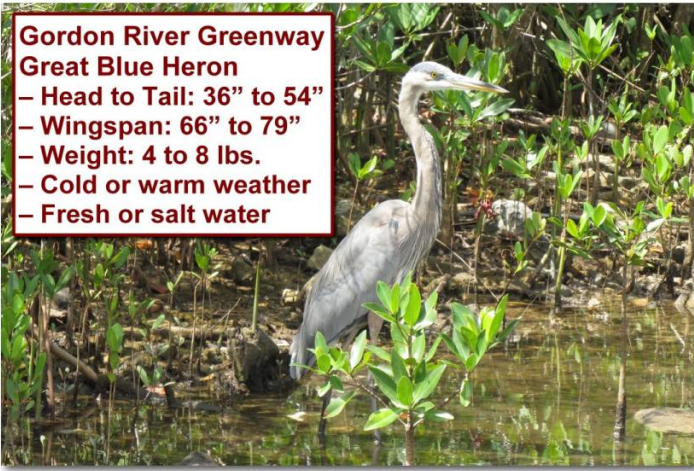


**The boardwalks go over**  
**marshes that are wet year round**  
**(more so, of course in rainy season)**



**Gordon River Greenway**  
**Green Heron**  
**Adult 17"**  
**Short Neck**

**Gordon River Greenway  
Great Blue Heron**  
– Head to Tail: 36” to 54”  
– Wingspan: 66” to 79”  
– Weight: 4 to 8 lbs.  
– Cold or warm weather  
– Fresh or salt water



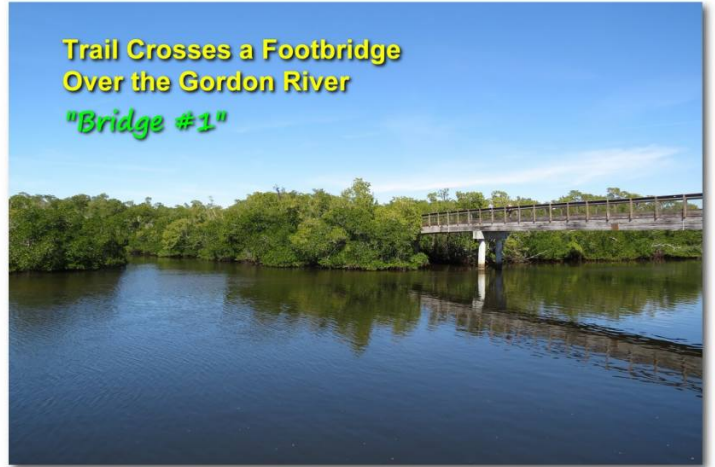
**Gordon River Greenway  
Mangroves**



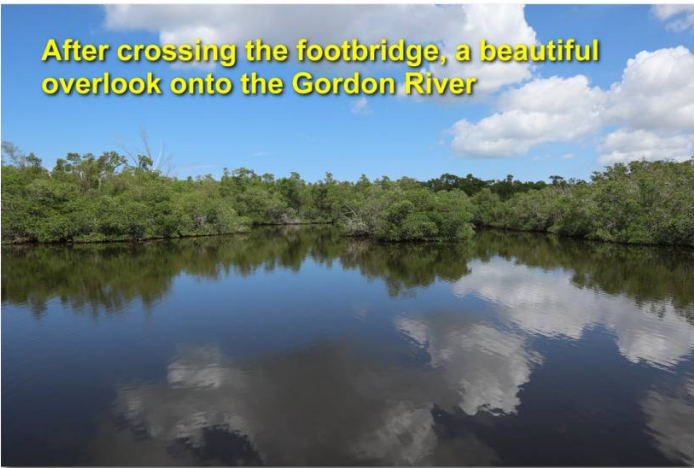
**Gordon River Greenway  
Bushy Bluestem Grass**



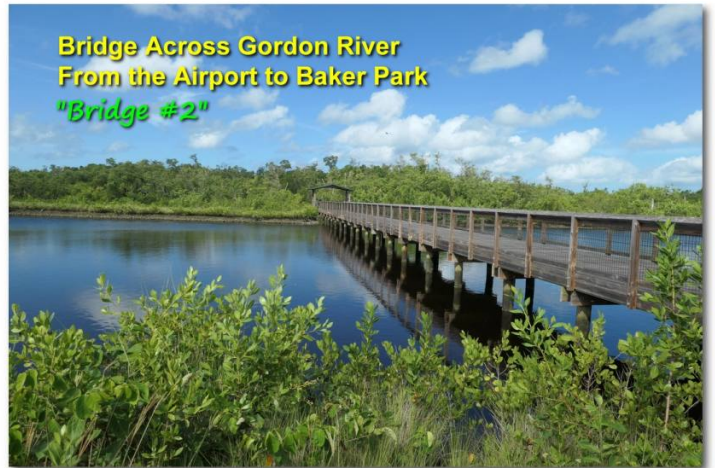
**Trail Crosses a Footbridge  
Over the Gordon River**  
"Bridge #1"



**After crossing the footbridge, a beautiful  
overlook onto the Gordon River**



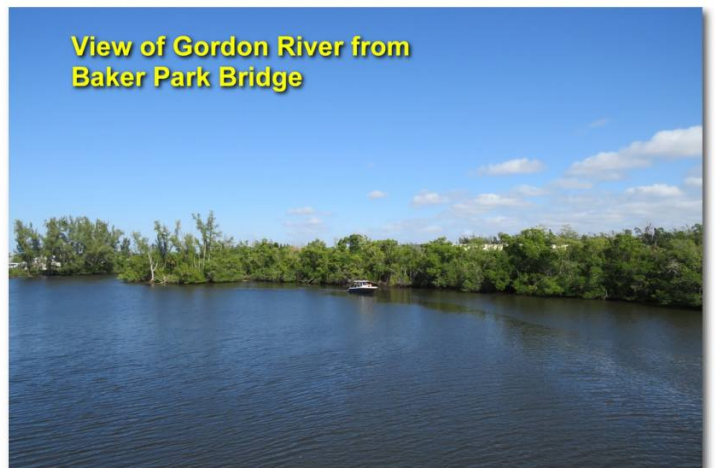
**Bridge Across Gordon River  
From the Airport to Baker Park**  
"Bridge #2"



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



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



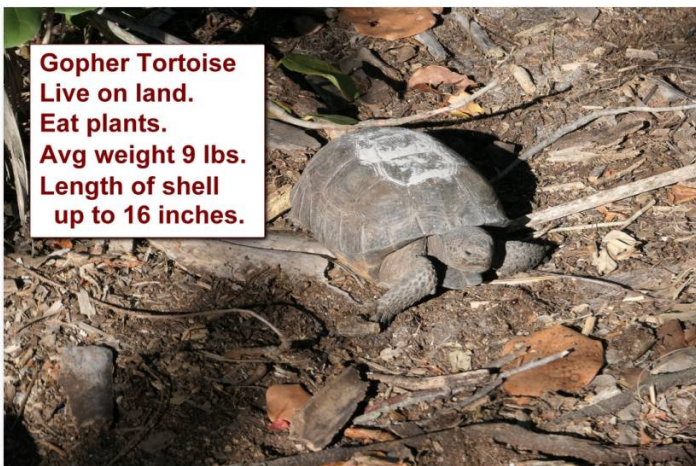
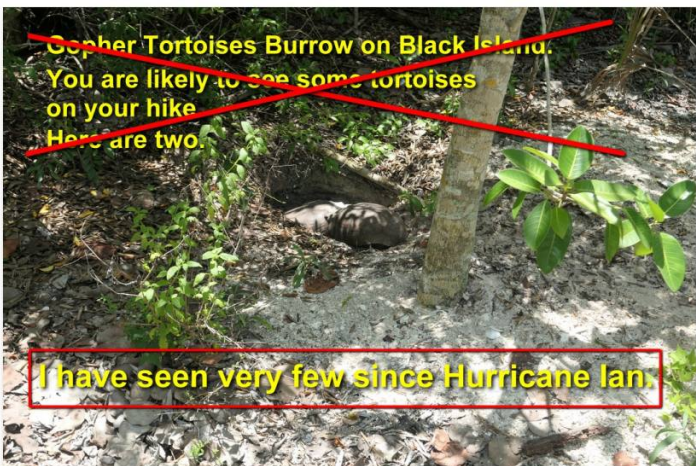


**Lovers Key State Park – Trails and Beaches**  
**Website:** [www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/lovers-key-state-park](http://www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/lovers-key-state-park)  
**Where:** 8700 Estero Blvd, Fort Myers Beach, FL 33931.  
**Get There:** West on Bonita Beach Rd 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.







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



**Prickly Pear Cactus and Its Flower**

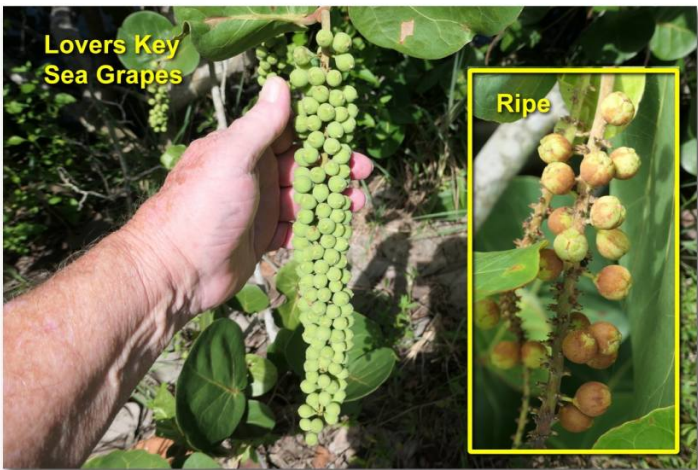


**Lovers Key - Prickly Pear Fruit**

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



**Lovers Key Silver Buttonwood**



**Lovers Key Sea Grapes**

Ripe



**Coontie aka Arrowroot aka Wild Sago**  
Toxic to humans, dogs, and livestock if eaten raw.



**Lovers Key State Park Eagle Trail**



**Dolphins - Lovers Key**



**Crab – Black Island Trails**



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



**Morning Glory – Black Island Trails**



**White Morning Glory – Black Island Trails**



**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.**



**Castor Seeds on Black Island. Hull and seeds are poisonous to humans, animals, insects. The main toxin is "ricin".**



**"The outer coating (hull) may cause nausea; vomiting; diaharrea; abdominal pain; dehydration; shock; blood cell destruction; severe fluid and chemical disturbances; liver, kidney, and pancreas damage; and death." Wikipedia**



**In addition to trails, Lovers Key Has a Two-Mile Long Beach!  
Free tram to get 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**

**Website:** <https://www.colliercountyfl.gov>

Then click on:

Parks and Beaches



**Where:** 1515 Golden Gate Pkwy, Naples. Just east of the intersection of Golden Gate Parkway and Goodlette-Frank Road.

**When:** Daily 7am to sunset. Education Center 9am to 10pm Mon-Sat.

**Admission:** Free.

**What: 50 acre wetlands.**

- 3,500-foot boardwalk over the eastern side of the park.
- Plus trails and six lookout pavilions around the lakes in the western side of the park.
- 2,500 square foot Education Center.
- Freedom Memorial – tribute to the lives lost on 9/11/01 in the terrorist attacks and to the heroes of past and present wars.

**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 Education Center**



**Freedom Park has 3,500 feet of boardwalks.**



**Boardwalk loop around eastern side of Freedom Park.**



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



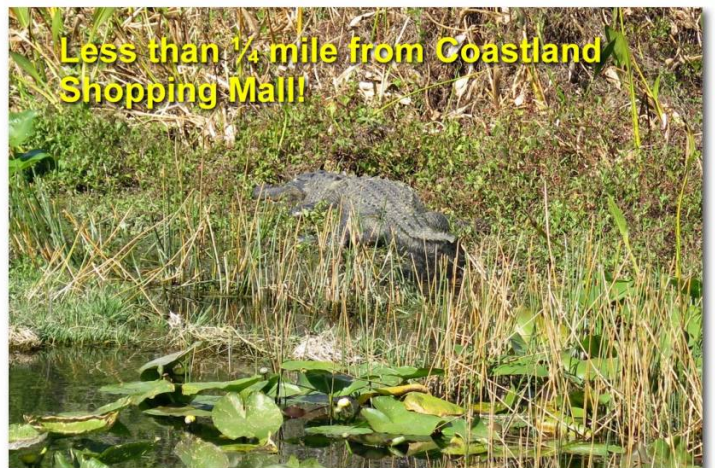
**One of the four lakes in Freedom Park**



**Freedom Park**



**Less than 1/4 mile from Coastland Shopping Mall!**





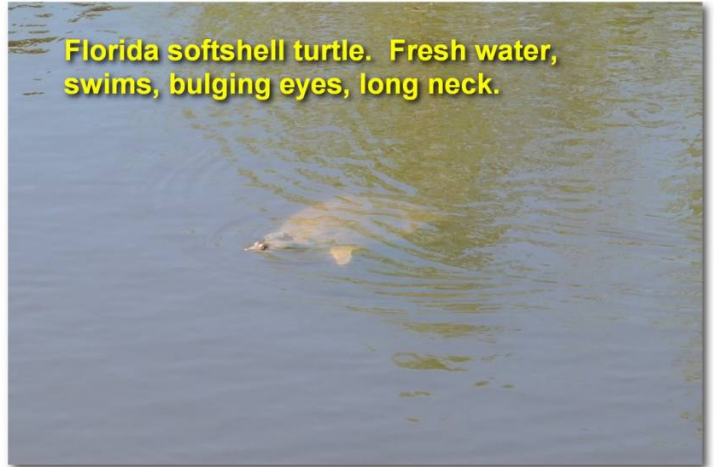
Alligator - Freedom Park



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



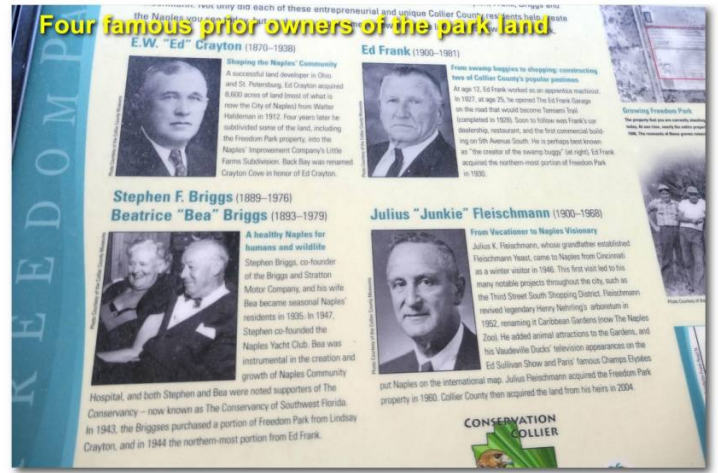
Tri-colored Heron  
Freedom Park



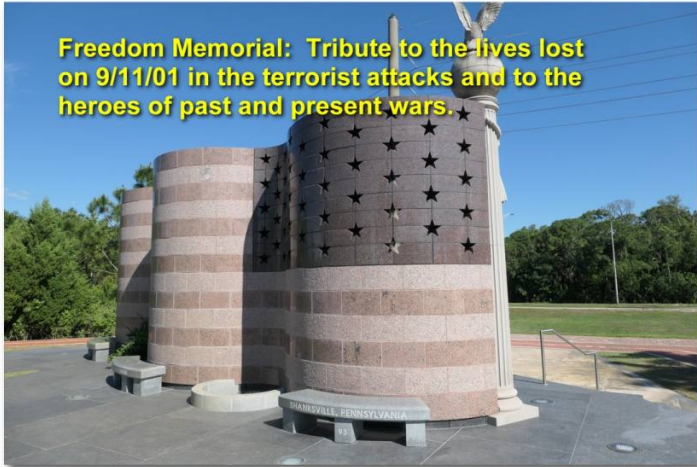
Marsh Rabbit (Short Ears)  
Freedom Park



Much of the boardwalk goes over wetlands



Four famous prior owners of the park land



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



Steel from the World Trade Center. Dedicated to innocent civilians and first responders who died in the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.



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 down 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.
- **Pollinator (Butterfly) Garden:** Temporarily closed for renovations.



**Naples Preserve Eco-Center**



**Naples Preserve**



**Naples Preserve  
Pine Flatwoods**



**Naples Preserve  
0.4 Mile Boardwalk**



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



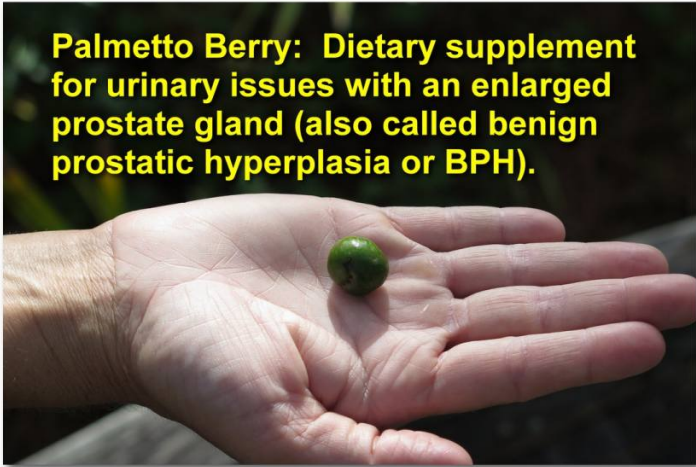
**Gopher Tortoise:  
Originated in North America  
60 million years ago.  
Live up to 80 years.**



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



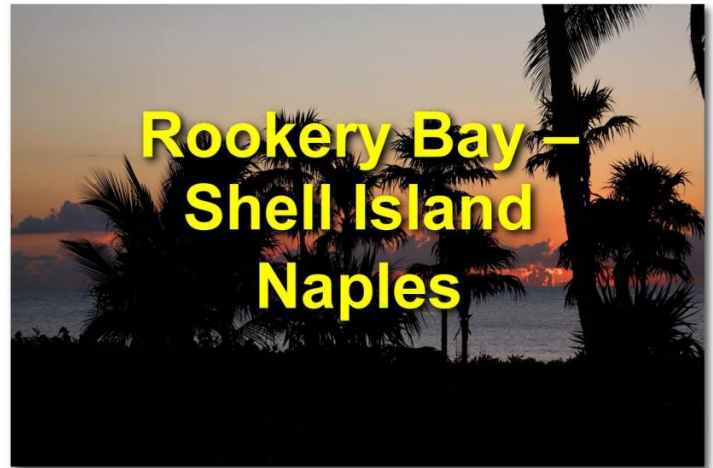
**American  
Beautyberry  
Eaten by  
birds and  
deer.**



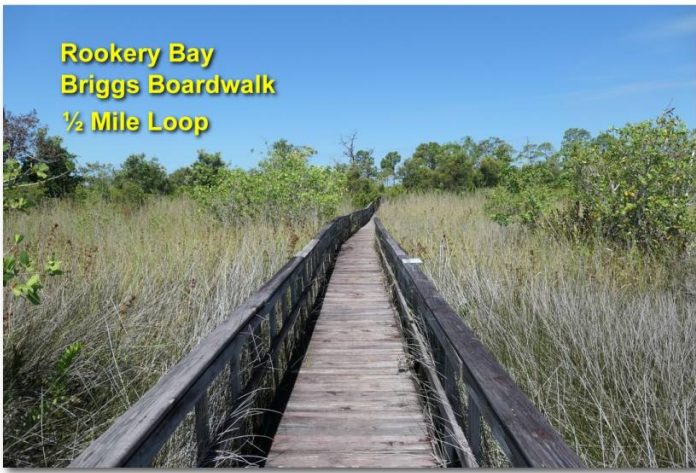
Some believe that saw palmetto berry extract is a remedy for enlarged prostate. Harvest season August to November. Cash crop in Florida. License required.

2021

2019



**Rookery Bay  
Briggs Boardwalk  
½ Mile Loop**



**Rookery Bay - Shell Island**



**Rookery Bay Controlled Burn - May 2024**



**Burn maintains forest health:**  
– Thins out undergrowth – prevents wildfires.  
– Reduces insect population.  
– Destroys invasive plants.  
– Adds nutrients to soil.  
– Lets in sunlight – natural growth.

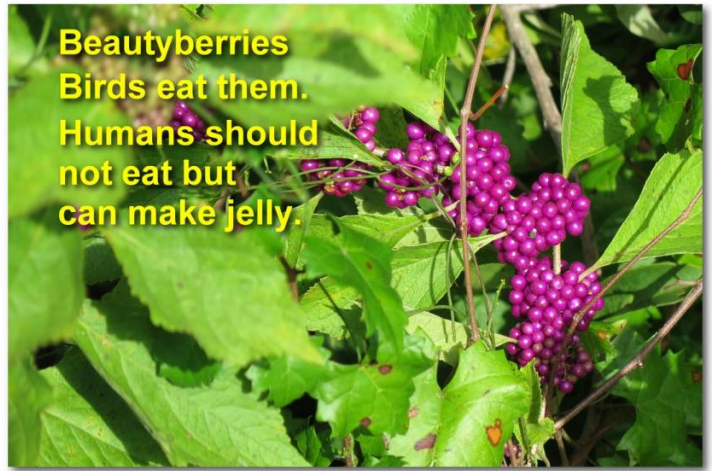
**Rookery Bay  
Dahoon Holly**



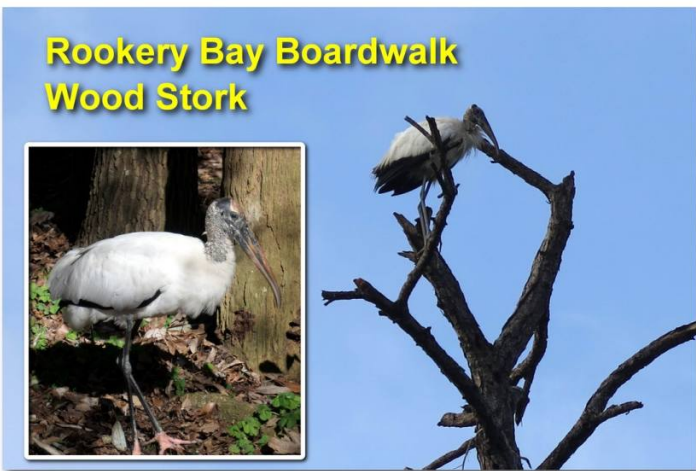
**Florida Myrsine  
aka Colicwood  
Native Only in Florida among 50 States  
Berries (aka Drupes) Not Edible**



**Beautyberries  
Birds eat them.  
Humans should  
not eat but  
can make jelly.**



**Rookery Bay Boardwalk  
Wood Stork**



**Sabal Palm – Florida State Tree  
Can Grow to 65 Ft Height.  
aka Cabbage Palm,  
Swamp Cabbage.**

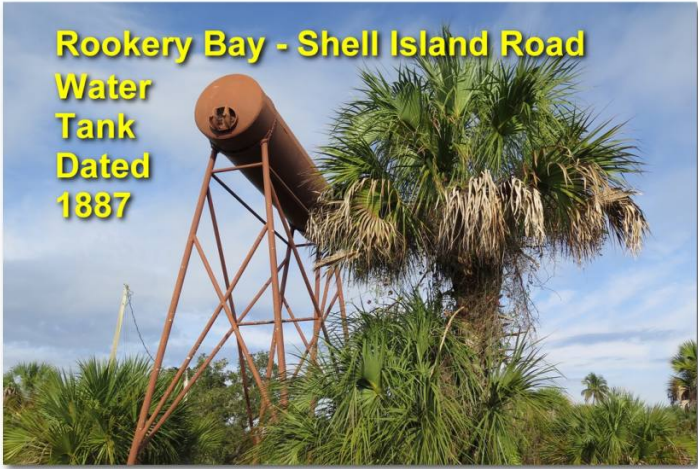




**Calusa Shell Mound**  
1700s or earlier



**Calusa Axe (Illegal to remove)**



**Rookery Bay - Shell Island Road**  
**Water Tank**  
Dated  
**1887**



**Old Graves on Shell Island**  
(Public Access Now Closed)

George Washington Kirkland  
1832 to 1901



**Old Graves on Shell Island**  
(Public Access Now Closed)

Jesse James Jones  
1900-1908



**Rookery Bay Nature Cruises**



**Rookery Bay - Shell Island**  
**Hiking Trail**

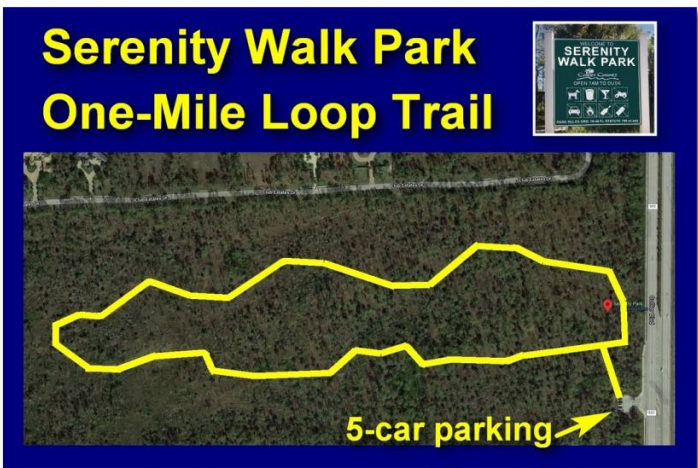


**Rookery Bay - Shell Island**  
**Trail to Rena Point**





**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.

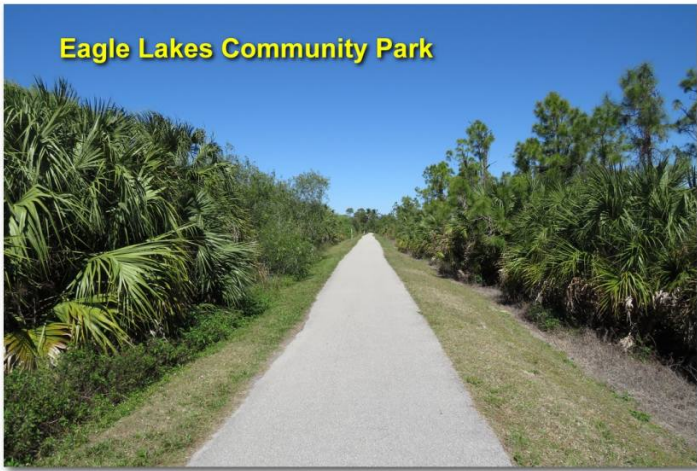




**Eagle Lakes Community Park**  
**Website:**  
[https://www.collierparks.com/collier\\_park/donna-fiala-eagle-lakes-community-park/](https://www.collierparks.com/collier_park/donna-fiala-eagle-lakes-community-park/)  
**Where:** 11565 Tamiami Trail East, Naples.  
**Get There:** US-41 just north of 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.





**Eagle Lakes Community Park  
Anhinga**



**Eagle Lakes  
Community Park  
Blue Heron**



**Eagle Lakes Community Park**



**Eagle Lakes Community Park**



**Eagle Lakes Community Park  
Cormorants**

**Paul Presentations - June and July 2024**

Baker Senior Center	
Rome Part 2	Monday June 3, 3-4:00pm
Albania	Monday, July 1, 3-4:00pm
Headquarters Library - Orange Blossom Drive	
Everglades City and Chokoloskee: The Pioneers of Collier County	Thursday, June 6, 2-3:30pm
Easy Nature Hikes in or Near Naples	Thursday, June 20, 2-3:30pm
Naples Regional Library - 650 Central Ave	
An Adventure in Rural Sardinia (Italy)	Weds, June 5, 2-3:30pm

**THE END**

**Easy Nature Hikes  
In or Near Naples**

**ppacter@gmail.com**

**www.paulvisits.com**

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Six-mile Cypress



Corkscrew Swamp



Eagle Lakes Park



Freedom Park



Gordon River



Naples Preserve



Rookery Bay



Serenity Walk



Lovers Key State Park