

## Mark your calendars...

- Feb 2—Water Education Festival at Jacksonville Museum of Science and History. For more information, contact Felicia Boyd at WAVDu-val@sjrwmd.com.
- Feb 5—River Region East Science Fair (First Coast Technical College, St Augustine). Contact Mark Lewis at 904-819-7529 to volunteer!
- More on back page!

## New Year's Resolutions

I don't usually make New Year's Resolutions, but this year is different. I'm not sure why, but I'm finally actually doing some things that I've said for some time that I "should" get around to do. Last year, I finally prepared a living will. This year, I'm taking steps to reduce my consumption of plastics. I realized some months ago that I have LOTS of canvas bags (collected from various conferences, meetings, etc.) and that I really should use them for something other than taking up space in a suitcase in my closet. I have transferred the bags to the back of my car, and am getting better and better at remembering to take them into stores with me before I am ready to check out with a cart full of items. The grocery store baggers seem quite accustomed to folks using canvas bags, although the clerks in some of the other stores are somewhat thrown for a loop by this! Check out the article on page 2 to find ways you can help our environment!

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## Upcoming Master Naturalist classes

University of Florida-trained instructors are offering the following Master Naturalist Programs in the area this spring. Registration for each course is \$225. The registration fee includes manuals, field trip fees etc. Schedules vary depending on the instructor, but each course consists of 40 hours of class and field time. To find out more information about the Master Naturalist program or to register, go to [www.masternaturalist.org](http://www.masternaturalist.org).

### Inside this issue:

- Reducing environmental "footprints" 2  
Don't release your pet 3

Course	Location	Dates
Uplands Module	Nassau County	2/4—2/29/08
Coastal Module	Volusia County	2/11—3/17/08
Coastal Module	St Johns/Flagler County	3/12—4/2/08
Coastal Module	Volusia County	4/18—5/23/08

## Reducing our environmental “footprints”

### Global climate change.

### Renewable energy.

### Waste reduction.

These are a few topics that are making news headlines around the world. Many of us are inclined to think that we as individuals cannot have a positive impact when it comes to environmental issues, however there are many simple things that each of us can do that really can “make a difference.”

- Did you know that consumers in the US use over 380 billion plastic bags each year? Many of these bags end up in our marine environment, where they can be mistaken for food by marine animals including sea turtles. Follow the lead of those cities (and now nations!) that are outlawing flimsy plastic bags. Take reusable bags to the store when you shop.
- According to the US EPA and US Department of Energy, compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) can use 75% less energy than standard incandescent bulbs, and last 10 times longer. They also produce 75% less heat. Consider changing to CFLs. They are available in a variety of wattages, styles and shapes. However, be aware that these bulbs do contain a small amount of mercury and should be disposed of properly (contact your local solid waste department to find out their recommendations). If every household in the US replaced 5 lights in their homes with CFL’s, this would prevent greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to those of 10 million cars.
- Do you have a floodlight that comes on at dusk and goes off at dawn? Consider replacing it with a motion-detector activated light—you’ll save energy and money and reduce the amount of light pollution in your neighborhood!
- According to the St Johns River Water Management District, the average Floridian uses 120-150 gallons of water per day (about 3600-4500 gallons per month!). Look at your water bill. Make a pledge to yourself to lower your household water consumption by 1000 gallons a month—that’s only about 33 gallons per day, and it will save you (in St Johns County) over \$26 per month while conserving our precious water resources. We use 30 gallons in one bath, 6 flushes of older toilets, 10 minutes of running a faucet, 3 minutes of watering our lawns, less than one load of laundry, or one run of the dishwasher. A leaky toilet can waste 200 gallons per day. How can you cut back your water use? Consider installing a rain barrel to collect water for irrigation, car washing and other non-drinking uses. See <http://www.swfwmd.state.fl.us/conservation/rainbarrel/make-a-rain-barrel.html> for instructions on making your own rain barrel.
- Using compost in your yard can reduce the need to apply water, pesticides and fertilizers. If you make your own compost, you will reduce the amount of material you are sending to your local landfill. Contact your local extension office (find it at <http://www.solutionsforyourlife.com>) to find out more about composting.

All of the above steps can be done with minimal cost. The following are pricier suggestions, but ones that will save even more resources:

- Install solar energy panels to reduce your consumption of fossil fuels. Check out the website for the Florida Solar Energy Center at <http://www.fsec.ucf.edu/en/>. The Center offers monthly tours, and the website contains a wealth of information (you may want to start by selecting “consumer” on the website).
- Replace appliances with those that have the “Energy Star” certification. If you are remodeling or constructing a home, look for Energy Star certified windows.



## Don't release your pets!

Some pets, especially those that must be kept in an aquarium or terrarium, may eventually outgrow their tank/cage, or may become too difficult to maintain. If this is the case, please do not release that animal into the wild. It is not only illegal to release non-native animals in the state of Florida, but it is potentially harmful to native plants and animals. Instead of releasing your pet, Habitattitude, a national partnership between the pet industry joint advisory council, Sea Grant, US Fish and Wildlife Service and local partners makes the following suggestions:

- Contact a local retailer and ask for advice; you may be able to return the pet to the store.
- Contact local hobbyist clubs (e.g. herpetological societies—for snake and turtle lovers)—a club member may be willing to take your pet and give it a home.
- Contact local zoos or aquaria to see if they are willing to take your pet. Be aware that quarantine restrictions may prevent these facilities from being able to do so.
- Contact a veterinarian or pet retailer for humane disposal options.
- Check the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission website for pet amnesty day dates and locations or for registered pet adopters ([www.myfwc.com](http://www.myfwc.com)).

According to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), over 400 non-native fish and wildlife species have been documented in the state. The greatest pathway by which non-native fish and wildlife species find their way into Florida's habitats is through escape or release by pet owners. Thirty four species are now on the FWC's exotic fishes list as reproducing in Florida's freshwater lakes, rivers, and canals, and 21 of these are considered to be permanent residents, some of which have been here for many years. Since 1999, 16 non-native marine fish species have been documented in Florida coastal waters. With one possible exception, all of these fish are imported in the marine aquarium trade and these wild populations are probably the result of accidental or deliberate release by aquarium hobbyists. Lionfish are known to be breeding off the coast of Northeast Florida and North Carolina and their population has expanded throughout the western Atlantic.

Of the 48 species of non-native reptiles found in Florida, 38 are confirmed to be breeding. These include red-eared slider turtles, green anoles, Nile monitor lizards, Burmese pythons and spectacled Caiman, all of which are or have been commonly sold in pet stores. Burmese pythons are found in the Florida Everglades where they can prey on native wildlife as well as pets like dogs and cats, and are large enough to injure people. Nile monitor lizards in Cape Coral pose a threat to the Florida burrowing owl, which is a protected species. Non-native breeding birds in the state include several species of parrot. Monk parakeets build large colonial nests that can damage electrical power poles and cause power outages. The Cuban treefrog, known to be established and preying on native frog species in Florida, is sold in pet stores in the state.

Before purchasing a pet, please make sure that you will be able to take care of it for its entire lifespan. Here are some questions to research:

1. How long will this pet live?
2. How large (and how quickly) will it grow?
3. What type of housing/space will it require?
4. What type(s) of food will it require and where can I purchase that food?
5. How expensive will this pet be to maintain?
6. How well will this pet interact with other pets already in my home? How compatible is this pet with children?
7. Do I have to have a permit in order to own this pet? Are there other legal requirements associated with this type of pet?



Burmese python found in the Florida Everglades.



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### More “Mark your calendars”

- February 13—Matanzas Inlet Workshop, Whitney Lab. Sponsored by GTMNERR. RSVP by Feb 11 to [Diana.Eissing@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:Diana.Eissing@dep.state.fl.us).
- February 18—NE Florida Regional Science Fair, UNF. Judges can sign up at [www.nefrsef.org](http://www.nefrsef.org).
- February 23—GardenFest, 9 am—3 pm; Duval Extension Office, 1010 N McDuff Ave, Jacksonville. Contact Evie at [EPankok@coj.net](mailto:EPankok@coj.net)
- February 27-28—Sustainable Water Resources Symposium, Gainesville, FL. For more information, see <http://www.treeo.ufl.edu/conferences/water/>
- March 10-14—“Exploring our Environment—from the ocean to the river” adult day camp. For more information, contact Maia at 904-209-0430 or [mpmcg@ufl.edu](mailto:mpmcg@ufl.edu).
- April 10-13—Florida’s Birding & FotoFest, Ponte Vedra Beach. See [www.getaway4nature.com](http://www.getaway4nature.com) for more information.

Please check the calendars at <http://calendar.ifas.ufl.edu> for other environmental education programs around the state.

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