UF UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA IFAS Extension

# aqua-notes

Sea Grant Florida

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**Mark your calendars…**

- February 4: noon to 4 pm: Water Education Festival at MOSH (Jacksonville). FREE admission!
- February 14-21: Environmental Interpretation Special Topic course —St Johns Co. See www.masternaturalist.org to register or for more information
- More on back page!

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## Reminiscing and looking ahead

Another year has flown by. Next month I will start my twelfth year with the University of Florida and the Florida Sea Grant Extension Program. It is interesting to look back over the past eleven years and note that there have been some huge environmental changes (locally and statewide; some positive, some not so positive!). Thanks to the efforts of many partners, the monofilament recycling program, started by staff in Brevard County, which was a very localized effort in that part of the state in 2001 has now spread statewide, to many other states and even internationally. Lionfish, which were only occasionally spotted in the Atlantic in 2001 are now rampant throughout the western Atlantic Ocean and greater Caribbean region. Some recreational and commercial fishing regulations have tightened; others (red drum and spotted seatrout) have been relaxed (in the northeast Florida region). Some of my education partners in the region—the GTM Research Reserve, Marineland's Dolphin Adventure and UF's Whitney Lab—have education programs that are constantly developing and evolving. The best part of looking back over the past many years is realizing just how much fun I continue to have with my job here. Many thanks to all of you who have participated in my programs over the years. I hope to continue the good work for many years to come!

M. P. McGuire

Maia McGuire, PhD
Marine Extension Agent

## Exploring our Environment class scheduled for April

Are you curious about the coastal environment of NE Florida? Have you ever wished that there was a "summer camp" for adults? If so, "Exploring our Environment—from the ocean to the river" may be the perfect opportunity for you! Join biologists from the University of Florida's Sea Grant Extension Program and GTMNERR, among others, as they team up to provide hands-on learning experiences in this one-week program, April 16-20, 2012. The program combines indoor and outdoor learning opportunities and is held at the GTMNERR building in Marineland. Topics covered include beaches, sea turtles, estuaries, water quality monitoring, invasive species, coastal uplands and marine mammals. The class runs from 9am to 4pm each day. For more information or to register, go to http://exploreapril2012.eventbrite.com.

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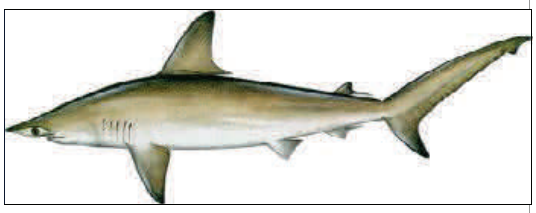
# Fishing updates

Freshwater anglers need to be aware that they may not keep any bass caught in the Rodman Reservoir until the Rodman Reservoir Drawdown Project ends (on or before March 15, 2012). Any bass caught must be immediately released—they cannot be kept in a livewell or on a stringer.



Effective January 1, 2012, people are no longer allowed to harvest tiger sharks, or great, scalloped or smooth hammerhead sharks from state waters. These four species join the existing list of shark species that are prohibited from harvest in the state. To find out more about shark fishing regulations in Florida, go to www.myfwc.com and type "shark regulations" in the search box.

With increasing catch-and-release fishing, there is an increased need for anglers to learn proper handling techniques so that fish that are released will have a good chance of survival. The website http://catchandrelease.org has video clips and written instructions explaining how to dehook and handle fish to maximize survival. Tips include using wet hands (not a towel or gloves) if you must handle a fish, holding the fish horizontally if it must be lifted out of the water, and releasing a fish as quickly as possible to minimize stress.

Effective February 1, there will no longer be a recreational closure for spotted seatrout harvest in northern Florida, and the recreational bag limit for northeastern Florida (waters from the Flagler-Volusia County line north) will increase from five fish to six. The commercial season for spotted seatrout will increase from three months to six months (June 1-Nov 30) in the northeast region, and to five months in the southeast region (May 1-Sept 30). These changes are being implemented because the 2010 stock assessment showed that spotted seatrout populations statewide are increasing to levels above the management goal, and that the population in the northeast region of the state is almost double the management goal level.

Red drum (also called red bass or redfish) have similarly exceeded their management goals. As a result, recreational anglers will be able to take two fish per person in the northeast and northwest regions of the state, effective February 1, 2012. The bag limit will remain at one fish per person in the southern region of the state. The management regions for red drum will be geographically the same as for spotted seatrout.

The boating and angling guide for St Johns and Flagler Counties is now available online at http://ocean.floridamarine.org/Boating_Guides/flagler_st_johns/index.html. The online version of the guide features a map that the viewer can zoom in on and scroll around. All of the information available in the print version of the guide (which had a limited release in 2009) is available online.

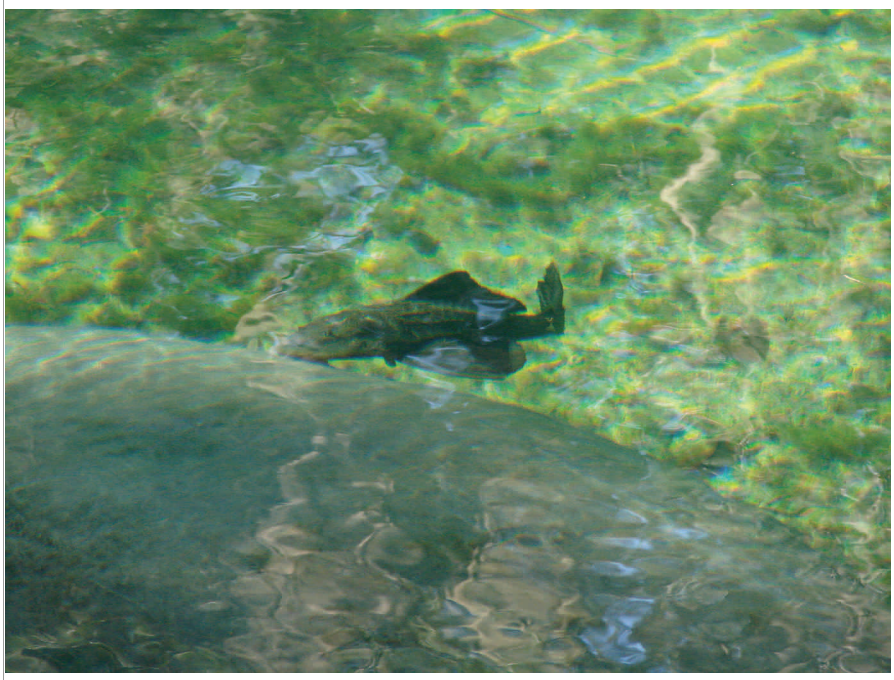
Image credit: Diane Peebles. Source: http://myfwc.com

# Manatees

Many people have asked me when they should go to Blue Spring State Park to see manatees. The short answer is, "Now!" In the winter months, when the water temperature of the St Johns River drops below 68°F (about 20°C), manatees need to get to warmer water. The water coming out of Blue Spring is a constant 72°F year-round, so many manatees seek refuge in the spring run, which feeds into the St Johns River. When the manatees head to the spring is determined by when the winter air temperatures start to get colder. They will continue to stay in or near the spring until winter ends and the river warms up. We have had a relatively warm 2011-12 winter season so far, but the freezing nights in early January made for great manatee viewing when Mayport Elementary's 3rd grade classes visited the park on January 10th.

So how can you tell if there are manatees at the park? You could call, but remember that the rangers are busy checking in park visitors and may not be able to grab the phone. You can check the real-time water temperature at the USGS website (waterdata.usgs.gov/usa/nwis/uv?site_no02236000) and see what the water temperature is in the St Johns River near DeLand. OR, you can check out the live web-cams that are now installed at the park! To do this, go to http://www.savethemanatee.org/savethemanateecam.html. In addition to underwater or above water live camera feeds, the site has archived video clips of manatees (and alligators) in the park.

Blue Spring State Park has been working to remove some of the invasive sailfin catfish from the spring run. This is being done in conjunction with research projects that are investigating the biology of these non-native fish, as well as attempting to determine whether or not the fish pose a harassment or other threat to the manatees. The fish, which eat algae, can often be seen sucking on to the manatee's skin. It is assumed that they are feeding on algae that grows on some of the manatees' backs. While some manatees appear not to be bothered by this attention, some manatees seem to try to knock the fish off, by rolling and brushing against the sandy bottom of the spring run.



A sailfin catfish "sucking on" to the back of a manatee at Blue Spring State Park.

We're now on Facebook—check out facebook.com/NEFLSeaGrant and "like" it to keep informed about coastal topics in the region. Don't have a Facebook account? That's OK—you can view the page without one :)

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## More "Mark your calendars"

- February 17– March 23: Coastal Systems Master Naturalist Program—Volusia Co. See www.masternaturalist.org to register or for more information
- February 24-25: Environmental Expo, beach cleanup and Osceola Elementary 5K Turtle Trot (St Augustine Beach). See www.turtletrot.com for more information.
- February 25-March 3: National Invasive Species Awareness Week. Look for events on the calendar at www.floridainvasives.org.
- February 28: Coastal Wildlife Conservation Initiative—northeast partnership meeting (10 am to 12:30 pm at Fort Clinch State Park). See http://myfwc.com/conservation/special-initiatives/cwci/ for more information.
- February 29: 4-6 pm: Educator Aquatic Species Collection permit workshop, St Augustine Beach. See http://aquaticcollections.eventbrite.com for more information.
- March 3: Great Air Potato Roundup. Various sites in the northeast Florida coastal region. See calendar at www.floridainvasives.org or contact Emily Montgomery at Emily.Montgomery@dep.state.fl.us for more information.
- March 7-21: Wildlife Monitoring Special Topic course (offered through Florida Master Naturalist Program)—Nassau Co. See www.masternaturalist.org to register or for more information
- April 13—May 18: Coastal Systems Master Naturalist Program—Volusia Co. See www.masternaturalist.org to register or for more information
- April 16-20: Exploring our Environment—from the ocean to the river. See page 1.
- April 21: 10 am—4 pm—Earth Day and Ecology Fair at the Jacksonville Landing.
- April 21-22: Washington Oaks State Park Earth Day (Flagler County)
- April 25-29: Florida Birding and Photo Fest, St Augustine area. See http://floridasbirdingandphotofest.com/ for more information.

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

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*The Foundation for The Gator Nation*

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