

aqua-notes

An Equal Opportunity Institution

SOLUTIONS

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150 Sawgrass Road
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Mark your calendars...

- Feb. 7th 10 am—4 pm. Water Education Festival (Jacksonville Museum of Science and History). Free admission! See www.themosh.org for details.
- More on back page!

Right whale etiquette



Readers may have seen some media coverage (including some great photographs) about a right whale that was spotted off Flagler and Volusia Counties on January 19 and 20. Unfortunately, the media was very focused on the fact that the photographer is a well-known surfer, leading to the impression that he may have taken photographs in the water. Given that they also mentioned that the whale was only 100 yards offshore, that caused some concern because by law people in/on the water have to stay 500 yards away from right whales. Fortunately, the photographer was actually on the beach, not in the water, so no laws were broken and nobody (human or whale) was in danger. However, there have been occasions where surfers, kayakers or paddleboarders have approached whales off our beaches. Please remember to respect the laws and help protect yourself and this critically endangered species.

M. P. McGuire

Maia McGuire, PhD
Marine Extension Agent

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Invasive Species Awareness Walk (Palm Coast)

As part of National Invasive Species Awareness Week, Flagler County will hold an Invasive Species Awareness Walk on February 27. The walk will take place along the Lehigh Trail in the city of Palm Coast. Volunteers will learn how to identify various invasive plants, then will help spot and mark them along the trail so that they can be removed. An orientation will be held at 10 am at the dirt parking lot north of the tennis courts on Belle Terre Parkway. Following the orientation, groups will depart for various locations, walk the trail and note/mark invasive plant locations. No prior knowledge about invasive plants is needed—group leaders will help confirm identifications. Volunteers are welcome to walk as much or as little as they want. This will be an opportunity to enjoy the paved Lehigh Trail, while helping the county fight invasive plants. For more information, call Mike Lagasse, Flagler Co. Land Manager at 386-313-4064.

Air potato biological controls

The week of February 22 is National Invasive Species Awareness Week. Many locations around Florida will be holding invasive plant removal events during that time. For many years, there has been a focus on air potato roundups, but this year (2015) some sites (e.g. Gainesville, FL) are finding that there are not many air potatoes to be collected, so they are switching to other invasive plant events. Over the past two years, a new biological control insect has been released throughout the state of Florida.

The air potato leaf beetle is a small, vibrant red beetle that lays eggs on the undersides of young, developing leaves. The larvae that hatch are voracious feeders on air potato leaves. Adult beetles also eat the leaves. Leaves that have been fed upon will look lacy in appearance. This weakens the plant, and may result in the plant not putting much energy into “potato” production.

The beetles are native to Asia. Before they were permitted to be released, they were heavily tested by offering them a variety of food items (starting with plants most closely-related to the invasive air potato) to ensure that the beetles would not end up feeding on something other than air potatoes. The beetles have been released in various locations around the state, they do seem to successfully survive the winters (presumably in a dormant state) and they do seem to be spreading quite quickly from their release locations.

Air potato plants die back in the winter months, then tend to sprout and begin their vigorous growth in about April or May. If people find large areas of air potatoes that do not show evidence of beetle damage (i.e. no lacy leaves), they can request free beetles from the Florida Department of Agriculture. Request forms and much more information about the beetles can be found at the UF/IFAS Extension’s air potato biological control website:

<http://bcrc1.ifas.ufl.edu/airpotatobiologicalcontrol.shtml>



Air potato. Photo credit: Thomas Wright, UF/IFAS



This air potato leaf beetle was found on air potatoes growing near the Flagler County Extension Office last fall.



What is this...?

I'm a huge fan of mystery novels, so it's not surprising that one of my favorite things to do is to help people solve "beach mysteries." If you've spent much time beachcombing, you have almost certainly picked up some object that you were unable to identify. Below are some of my favorite identification questions. You can find more unusual items (and their identities!) at <http://stjohns.ifas.ufl.edu/sea/mystery.htm>.



This is the lower jaw of a drum fish (given the location where it was found, it's likely from a black drum). Adult drums feed on hard-shelled animals (like crabs, shrimp, and clams). They have rounded, flat teeth (the dark circular objects in the photo) on their upper and lower jaws that they use to crush their hard prey.

The by-the-wind sailor (*Velella velella*) and its circular relative, blue buttons (*Porpita porpita*) are related to the Portuguese man-of-war jellyfish. None of these animals is actually a true jelly—they are all jelly relatives called siphonophores. They are all comprised of colonies of animals, each of which is specialized for a particular function. Some are responsible for catching food, others for reproduction, and others for defense. The blue stuff in the photo is the living animal portion. Unlike the man-of-war, *Velella* and *Porpita* do not have powerful enough stinging cells to harm us.



The ball on the left can often be found on the beach, especially after strong winds or storms have moved through the area. It is actually a very stressed sea cucumber. Often you will notice white threads extending from one end of the animal. These are called Cuvierian tubules, and are often expelled by the sea cucumber to distract potential predators. In this case, they were probably expelled as part of the stress response to being tumbled up onto the beach by the waves.

If you are interested in learning more about weird and wonderful beach finds, you might want to consider taking the week-long "Exploring our Environment—from the ocean to the river" class for adults. It will be held from April 6-10 in the town of Marineland, FL. For more information, or to register, go to <http://oceantoriver.eventbrite.com>.

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”

- Feb 6-8—Birds of a Feather Fest (Palm Coast area). See <https://www.palmcoastgov.com/events/birding-fest>
- Feb 22-28—National Invasive Species Awareness Week. Look for air potato roundup events or other invasive plant removals at some local parks (most will occur on Feb 28).
- Mar 6-Apr 24—Coastal Master Naturalist class, Volusia County. See www.masternaturalist.org for more information or to register.
- Apr 6-10—“Exploring our Environment—from the ocean to the river.” (see page 1)
- Apr 18—Earth Day Events: Anastasia State Park (10 am—3 pm), Jacksonville Landing
- Apr 22-26: Florida's Birding & Photo Fest, St. Augustine. <http://floridasbirdingandphotofest.com>

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

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