



Corkscrew  
Swamp Sanctuary

## Along the Boardwalk

November, 2008

[www.corkscrew.audubon.org](http://www.corkscrew.audubon.org)

### Aerial battle begins in north end

The land management staff at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary had to break out the big guns Tuesday, October 21, in its battle against invasive exotic plants.

An emergency situation required a special helicopter to aerially treat an infestation of a relatively new exotic species: Popcorn Sedge (*Scleria lacustris*), also known as Wright's Nutrush and Lakeshore Nut-sedge.



Corkscrew, infestations were treated at the fish farm and in several acres in the north marsh.

Seedlings emerge and establish during spring when marshes are dry. Juvenile plants adapt readily to the influx of water during the rainy summer months. As late summer water levels rise, emergent plants flower and grow to heights of six to seven feet.

In autumn mature plants sprawl across the water as nutlets ripen and disperse, leaving vast wetlands at risk.

Water birds and airboats are suspected in aiding dispersal of the shiny nutlets. Nutlets may also float through drainage systems, leaving vast marshes of southern Florida at risk.

The plant is an annual, but quantity of nutlets on each plant ensure viable seed banks for reoccurrence in the spring.

Popcorn Sedge is an introduced plant of increasing ecological concern with the potential to be highly invasive. First found in Florida in 1988, its distribution has grown substantially in recent years. Its native range is the African and Central American tropics and the West Indies.

Areas most vulnerable to invasion are freshwater marshes characterized by seasonal water level fluctuations. At

Have a Happy Thanksgiving



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Remember, set clocks back Nov. 2

### New staff ready to go

My name is Debbie Lotter, and I am so excited to be a part of the Education Department at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary.

This really is a dream job for me. I love the outdoors, animals, and working with children.

I have lived in Naples for 30 years. Before Corkscrew, I worked in the printing industry as a graphic designer.

My husband Darrell and I have two boys: Ryan, a freshman at Gulf Coast High, and Zachary, who's almost 3.

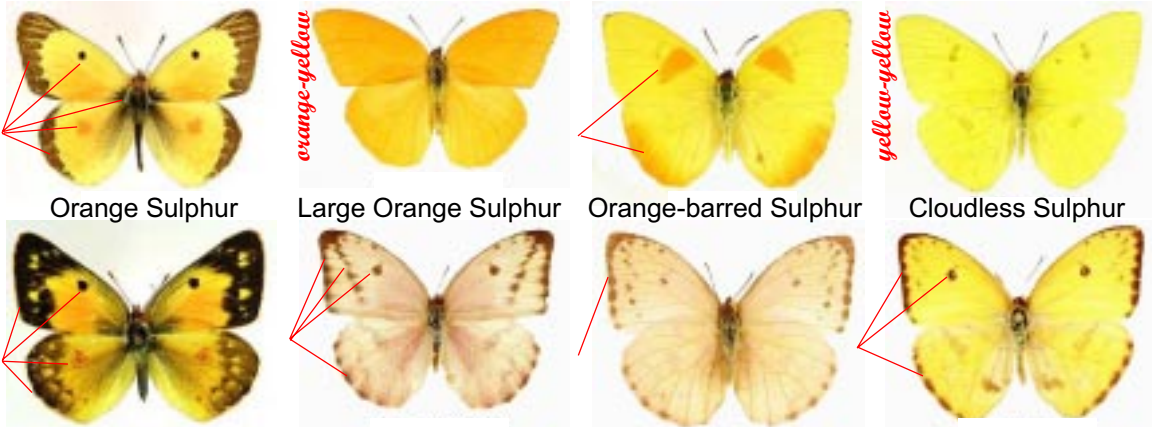
I would like to thank everyone here at Corkscrew for welcoming me. I feel lucky to be working with such a great group of people.



### Quick ID Guide: Four commonly seen yellow sulphur butterflies

Size is not a distinguishing feature. The Large Orange, Orange-barred, and Cloudless Sulphurs are all about 1-1/4" and the Orange sulphur is just under 1".

Look for general color (orange-yellow vs. bright yellow), difference shades of color, dark borders on wings, and dots on wings.



Males in top row, females in bottom row; all drawings from [www.nearctica.com/butter/index.htm](http://www.nearctica.com/butter/index.htm)

### Bird Trivia

What's the difference between a pigeon and a dove?

Discover the answer at [www.collieraudubon.org/birding.html](http://www.collieraudubon.org/birding.html)

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## In Case a Visitor Asks

### Why are raccoons active during the day? Are they dangerous?

Raccoons are frequently seen on the boardwalk during the day. After such a sighting, visitors often ask, "I thought raccoons were only active at night and the only ones out in the day were rabid. Is it safe here?"

Raccoons are wild animals, and like all wild animals, from small snakes to big bears, they should be regarded with caution and treated with respect. But they are not inherently dangerous.

Raccoons in peopled areas are most active at night because that's when they encounter the fewest obstacles and pos-

sible predators. But it's different in the swamp where the big predators like alligators, panthers, and bobcats are most active and most efficient at night. That is not a safe environment for a raccoon.

Raccoons prefer not to encounter anything bigger than they are.

When that's not a choice, they opt for the least threatening environment, which is the boardwalk and away from alligators in the water, and for the least threatening big animals, which are people. That environment is the boardwalk during the day.



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## October Sightings



A White-winged Dove rests in a pine near the Blair Center back porch (October 21).



Narrow-leaf Sunflowers bloom in profusion near the wildlife crossing (October 7).



A female American Redstart looks for insects in a Red Maple (October 17).

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## Volunteer of the Year

### Audubon of Florida honors Jack Wheeler as its 2008 Volunteer of the Year

Audubon of Florida named Jack Wheeler as its 2008 Volunteer of the Year at the Audubon Assembly at the end of October.

A 15-year volunteer, Jack is active in and out of the public eye. He is first and foremost a boardwalk naturalist where every Friday he greets visitors and answers their questions.

He also acts as the de facto captain of the Friday volunteers, hosting breakfasts at his house each fall and spring to welcome back Friday volunteers and then bid them a safe trip north.

On Friday afternoons when the visitor load allows, he patrols the boardwalk picking up trash and debris so that



the swamp will be as pristine as possible for visitors to enjoy. Some of the tools used to reach items off of the boardwalk are ones that he designed and created.

Jack has also been instrumental in helping build an infrastructure for a myriad of programs.

When the Blair Audubon Center first opened, he worked to convert the old admissions building into the Parker Library and Sanctuary office spaces.

He constructed work benches, learning stations, a dip-netting platform, and display tables for the second grade Collier County schools' Insect Adventure program.

When portions of the boardwalk need repair, adjustment, or replacement, he is there with tools.

During the spring dry-down, he is one of the volunteers who climbs over the railing and into the swamp to retrieve items that don't belong there.

When special projects arise, Jack is there to help. Sometimes it's with a router and generator to install plaques along the boardwalk, and sometimes it's just to consult with and assist staff and volunteers with their own projects.

Jack Wheeler is Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary's Renaissance man, always there with a smile and always giving generously of his time and talents to help people, programs, and the natural environment. He is Audubon's indispensable Jack-of-all trades.

## River Otter *Lutra canadensis*

A River Otter is essentially a semi-aquatic weasel like fishers, martens, and mink. It has a long, slender body; a short neck, face, and legs; and a long, thick, tapering tail.

Like other members of the weasel family, the otter has scent glands located near its anus. These glands are used to mark home ranges with scent but are not used for defensive purposes like a skunk. Otters in the swamp mark their territory on the highest piece of land available, which is usually the boardwalk.

A special set of adaptations are ideal for its aquatic lifestyle. Its fur is dense with a waterproof, oily undercoat and an outer coat of long, stiff guard hairs, and its ears and nostrils are valved to keep out water. The webbed foot is fur covered except for the pads on the toes and sole. Both front and back feet have five toes with claws that cannot be retracted. Its powerful lungs allow it to swim up to a quarter of a mile under water at speeds up to six miles per hour before having to come up for air.

An otter's tail represents nearly a third of its total length and is used like a boat's rudder. An adult's weight can range from 10 to 30 pounds with females being smaller than and about 5% lighter than males.

The River Otter is active by day when not disturbed by human activity.

When swimming, it raises its head high and treads water to observe its surroundings. A river otter can remain submerged for five to seven minutes and can dive to a depth of 55 feet if necessary. Otters are not bound to water, however, and when occasion demands they easily travel over land from one body of water to another.

Their movements on land appear awkward where the motion almost makes them look like very large furry inch worms: the long body is arched with its four short legs loping along.

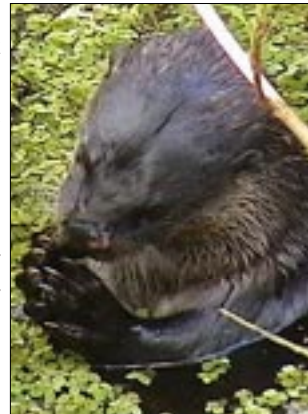


Otters are notorious wanderers in their chosen habitat, ranging over a couple of miles of a waterway. For this reason they are rarely found in the same location on a regular basis.

Vocalizations include a whistle, probably used to communicate over distances, and a shrill, chattering call, emitted during the mating season. Otters chuckle softly to siblings or mates and also chirp, snort, and growl.

Otters are not specific in their food habits, but they are purely carnivorous. Their main diet consists of fish, crustaceans, mollusks, amphibians, reptiles, invertebrates, birds, and smaller mammals.

One of the choicest morsels is crayfish, right, and where the crayfish are abundant, an otter will consume a tremendous number annually. The fish they eat are primarily slower moving rough fish rather than the quicker game fish, so they don't compete with people.



The den varies with the locality and availability of sites. Most otters locate their dens in excavations close to water under tree roots, rock piles, logs, or thickets. In the swamp, the hollow bases of cypress trees are especially popular. A typical den consists of a hole leading into the den with the main entrance below water level and sometimes a second opening on land. Otters may occupy two dens, one as a temporary resting den and the other as a permanent nesting den.

Males are sexually mature at two years of age but do not generally mate until they are four years of age, and females rarely breed before two years. Males may mate with more than one female if the females' territories overlap that of the male. Males typically engage in fierce combat during the mating season. Mating usually occurs in the water. Delayed implantation results in the gestation period extending to as much as 270 days.

Typically, there is one litter per year. Litter size varies from one to five, with two about average. The female at the

bottom of the center column had four in her litter. Females may mate again as soon as 20 days following birth, which means that female otters may remain continuously pregnant once they reach sexual maturity.

The female establishes the natal den shortly before giving birth. Newborns are about 275 mm in total length and weigh about 130 g. They are fully furred, but the eyes are closed for the first 22-35 days and none of the teeth are erupted. The young first enter the water at about seven weeks, get the adult waterproof fur after about three months, are weaned around 18 weeks, and stay with the mother for about a year. The male, evicted while the young are small, returns to help care for them when they are half-grown. The young disperse in fall or winter before the arrival of the next litter.