



FootNotes *



* Newsletter of the Highlanders Chapter,
Florida Trail Association
January – February 2019
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Mission of the Florida Trail Association

The Florida Trail Association develops, maintains, protects and promotes a network of hiking trails throughout the state, including the unique Florida National Scenic Trail. Together with our partners we provide opportunities for the public to hike, engage in outdoor recreation, participate in environmental education and contribute to meaningful volunteer work.

Highlanders Nature Notes – The Elusive Swallow-tailed Kite



Source: Luke Seitz, Macaulay Library

One afternoon in late May of 2018 I was sitting on my back porch in Eustis enjoying the cool breeze, unusual for that time of year. I saw the usual cast of bird characters including Northern Cardinals, Brown Thrasher, Osprey, Chimney Swifts, Mourning Dove, Blue Jays, Great-crested Flycatchers, Fish Crows, Black Vulture, even a Red-tailed Hawk. Then, just as I

was getting ready to go inside, a single Swallow-tailed Kite (*Elanoides forficatus*) flew directly over my head and out over my neighbor's roof where it soared for a few seconds and was gone. It was the first and only time I ever saw one in my neighborhood. I live near Eustis High School in an unremarkable residential neighborhood that has no special bird-attracting features (that I can tell anyway). If someone else had said they saw one here I would have been skeptical.

I have seen them on several occasions in other parts of the county, usually out of town in the more rural areas and closer to the Ocala National Forest. Both of the references below list them as "uncommon" and one even says that there are only about 1,000 mating pairs in the U.S. and that their range has decreased from its historical coverage. Now they are mostly limited to Florida, the gulf coast states, and the coastal parts of Georgia and South Carolina. I saw a group of about 6-8 soaring over CR 48 in Howey-in-the-Hills right outside of Mission Inn on June 13, 2018 as I was driving to Tampa. This was the largest group I've seen thus far (mostly seeing single birds and the occasional pair), though they have been known to congregate in much larger groups. I've been told you can find big groups in southern Sumter County.

They are fascinating to watch as they gracefully soar on the thermal up-drafts, much like the vultures, though a lot more beautiful in their contrasting black and white plumage. They eat mostly insects, lizards, snakes, and frogs; usually taken on the wing. They bend their head slightly to pluck them from the tree canopy over which they soar. They have a long forked tail which is their defining feature. They don't really look much like a raptor with their small head and bill, making them appear more like a large song bird. They are on every sign for the "Great Florida Birding Trail" (now called the Great Florida Wildlife Trail, I believe) and I can see why someone picked this bird for that honor. They are fairly unique, eye-catching, and a pleasure to watch.

They are only present in Florida from early spring to mid-summer, when they begin their annual winter mi-

gration to South America. So keep your eyes on the skies as you travel around Lake County. You may be fortunate enough to see one or two of these magnificent birds. And if you want to get an up-close view, always keep a pair of binoculars handy!

–Mike Barnett

Sources:

Alderfer, Jonathan, Ed. National Geographic Complete Birds of North America. Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 2006.
Sibley, David Allen. The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Eastern North America. NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003.

Notes from the Chairperson – New Royal Trails/SSF Trail Reroute

I believe by now most members have heard about the new trail route that will eliminate the last major road hike in Lake County. This came about through the efforts of many people and this is the story. An 11 mile stretch of the Florida Trail in northeast Lake County connects Seminole State Forest on the south to the Ocala National Forest on the north. This connector has 5.8 miles of trail on private land and 5.2 miles of road walks. Recently, parts of this connector have been lost to private land owner restrictions and more will probably be lost in the future as this area becomes further developed.

In September 2000 Bill Taylor and a Land Manager, Gray Race, scouted a trail from the Cassia Spur trail to the Lake Norris Recreation Area. After many hours were spent in the field and in meetings, the project was rejected in 2007 because of the large number of board walks and bridges needed. In 2008 a possible route was investigated but was found unfeasible due to land owners' unwillingness to cooperate.

Through the efforts of John Grob, Florida Trail obtained 0.7 miles of trail through Boy Scout Camp La No Che. In February 2017 we completed a 2.5 mile reroute of trail on Maggie Jones Road onto Seminole

State Forest land. The Seminole State Rangers provided assistance with this reroute.

In September 2017 Florida Trail was contacted by Ralph Risch, Seminole State Forest ranger, with an idea that would nearly eliminate the road walk if permission to pass through 800 feet of the "Orianne Center for Indigo Snake Conservation" property could be obtained. Michelle Hoffman, Center Curator, was receptive to this proposal. An agreement between Kelly Russell, US Forest Service in Florida, Shawn Thomas, Florida National Scenic Trail Supervisor, Central Florida Zoo, property owner of the Orianne Center and the Orianne Center Board was completed.

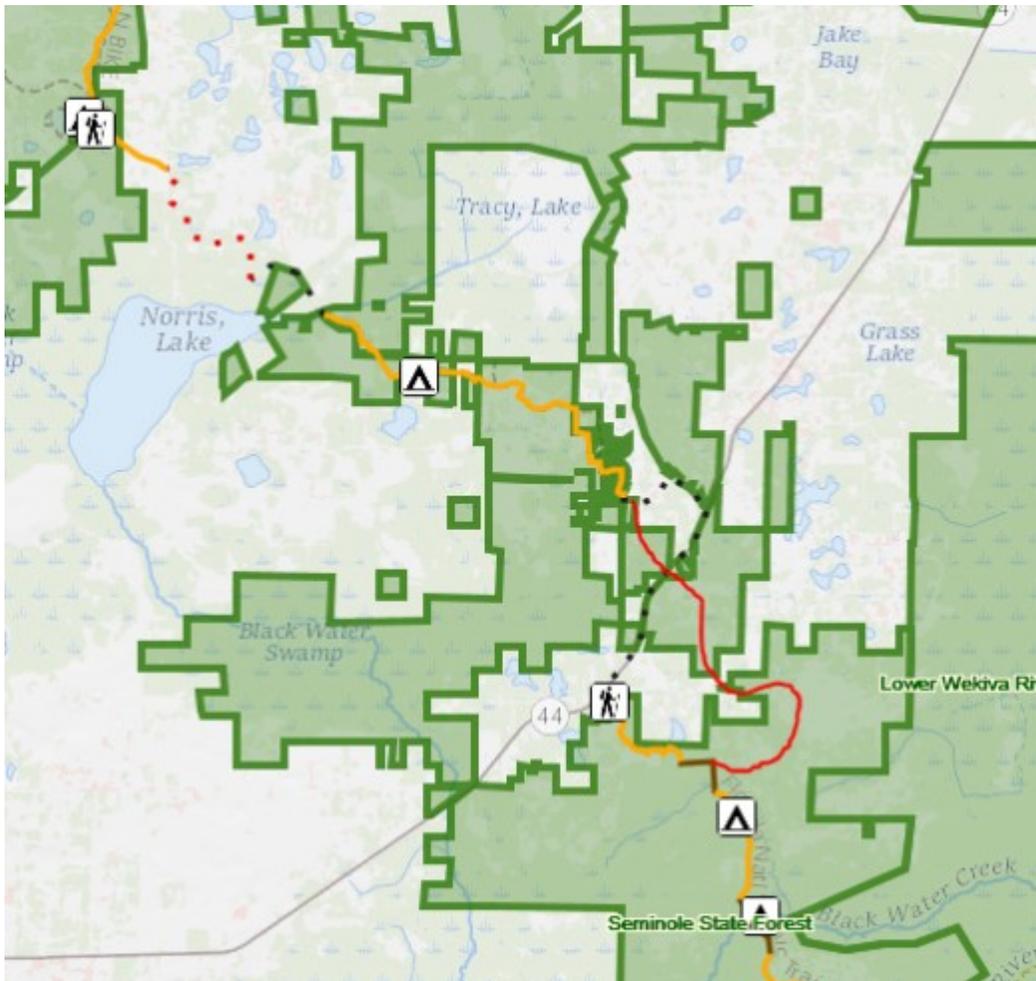
A portion of the agreement required construction of a privacy fence between the Orianne Center property and the Florida Trail. Through the efforts of the Florida Trail and the Highlanders' work crews this privacy fence was built. Most of this reroute has been hiked by Kelly Weiner, Florida Trail Staff, Ralph Risch and Francis and Bobbi Keenan who submitted a proposed route to Joe Bishop, Seminole State Forest Supervisor. He completed the approval process with the Florida Forest Service in September 2018.

As you can see, this has been a long process requiring the cooperation of many persons. Progress is difficult. All we have left to do is build the trail. I have recently hiked a portion of this new trail and it is a beautiful hike. This section of trail will be easy to construct. In other areas we will need to construct bridges and boardwalks requiring more work but nothing we cannot do.

An accompanying map shows the new reroute. The dotted lines are present or previous road walks. The reroutes are in red.

I wish to give recognition to Francis Keenan who provided extensive information for this article.

– Bill Leach, Highlanders Chapter Chair



Christmas Lunch at PEAR Park on December 15, 2018
(photos by Judy Leavers)



Conservationist of the Year Award Presented to Mike Barnett

On December 2, 2018, Mike Barnett was given the Conservationist of the Year Award by the Oklawaha Valley Audubon Society. The presentation was made at a joint Christmas luncheon of the Audubon Society, the FL Native Plants Society and Trout Lake Nature Center.

My association with Mike Barnett has been through the FL Trail Association. Mike has been a member since 1986. FL Trail Association is a state organization that built and maintains the FL National Scenic Trail. Our trail is one of eleven in the US that is designated as a "National Scenic Trail." The FL Trail runs from the Everglades to the Panhandle, about 1,300 miles. It goes through the Ocala National Forest and the Seminole State Forest. Look for the orange blazes.

When the Highlanders Chapter of FTA was formed as a sub-chapter in 1998, Mike was our first Chapter Chair. Until that time, we had all been members of the Central FL Chapter, FTA. While Chapter Chair he always opened our meeting with a quote from a noted naturalist. During his many years as a member he has given numerous programs on nature. Presently he writes an article on nature for each issue of our bi-monthly Newsletter.

Mike has encouraged our FTA members to take part in the Backyard Bird Count. This event takes place every Presidents' birthday weekend and continues for four days. It is not necessary to go to a special place or time, you just record what you see in your backyard. He does this each year.

Mike has taken a wetlands course towards the FL Certified Naturalist program. When his schedule permits, he would like to take the other two courses.

I have always known that Mike loved native plants. Mike and his wife Nancy have a certified Backyard Wildlife Habitat. This designation is obtained through the National Wildlife Federation. Their yard provides food, water, cover and a place to raise young. Their native plants, shrubs, and trees are necessary to provide food. Fortunately, their home is near a lake for water. Native vegetation can also provide cover and

places for wildlife to raise their young. It is important that the land be cared for thoughtfully and as naturally as possible.

In his house Mike has a table reserved for the interesting things he finds outdoors. When children or adults visit, they can handle & discuss these things. He also has an extensive library collection of books he uses in his own research.

Mike's profession for the last two decades has been with Cornerstone Hospice where he works as a grief counselor. He describes his job as one that provides "the most rewarding experiences of my life." He is now the Director of several hospice camps: Camp Bridges (for kids 6 to 11), Adventure Camp, a two-day event for older children and Family Camp for children and parents. Participants in each camp and learn about the outdoors.

Mike Barnett also heads up a Family Nature Club through his church. He sets up a table at most local festivals and has invited our hiking friends to join their walks. Patty Fletcher knows "Mr. Mike" through the Family Nature Club. He begins every nature walk by saying a quote related to nature, and then he asks if anyone wants to share what they are thankful for. At least one child always says "nature." He brings bug spray and binoculars for anyone to use. He arranges a camping weekend once a year for those who can attend.

In summary, Mike Barnett loves the outdoors and wants to protect it. He spends his time educating those of us who can make a difference. I cannot imagine anyone who is more deserving of the award of Conservationist of the Year than Mike Barnett.

– *Mary Ellen Milton*



2018 Food Drive (photo by Mary Ellen Milton)

About ten years ago Arlene Beal suggested to the chapter that the annual Christmas party include a charity food drive. The chapter approved the idea with enthusiasm, and since then Bill and Mary Ellen Milton have organized the effort. This year the drive was especially successful, netting 284 pounds of food plus a donation check for \$30.00. In the photo below Bill stands with four volunteers at the Leesburg Food Bank.



Highlanders Activities for January and February 2019

Saturday, January 5, 2019

Work Hike Seminole State Forest Orange and Blue Trails: Meet in Cassia at the Brantley Branch Road entrance before 9:00 AM. Please be on time as we will be shuttling to another area to work. Please let us know if you plan to attend so that we can plan teams and equipment. Bring insect spray, hats, lunch, etc. and lots of water (must carry 2 quarts water). If you have further questions call or email: Bobbi Keenan bobbiszoo@yahoo.com 352-787-8654 **28.890749 -81.461616**

Tuesday, January 15, 2019

Work Hike Seminole State Forest Yellow Trail: Meet in Cassia at the Brantley Branch Road entrance before 9:00 AM. Please be on time as we will be shuttling to another area to work. Please let us know if you plan to attend so that we can plan teams and equipment. Bring insect spray, hats, lunch, etc. and lots of water (must carry two quarts water). If you have further questions call or email: Bobbi Keenan bobbiszoo@yahoo.com 352-787-8654 **28.890749 -81.461616**

Thursday, January 17, 2019

Highlanders Chapter General Meeting: **Note: Date Change.** We are meeting on the Third Thursday's throughout this year due to the conflicts with the library schedule. We are also meeting one hour earlier at 5:00 PM. We meet at the Leesburg Public Library 100 East Main Street in the meeting rooms at the front of the library. Meeting starts at 5:00 PM. Please bring your aluminum cans to recycle in non-dripping plastic bags and a snack to share. Open to the Public. Program: To be determined. **28.811093 -81.874858**

Saturday, February 9, 2019

Work Hike Flat Island Preserve: Meet before 9:00 AM at 2388 Owens Rd, Leesburg, FL 34748. Please let us know if you plan to attend so that we can plan teams and equipment. Bring insect spray, hats, lunch, etc. and

lots of water (must carry two quarts water). If you have further questions call or email: Bobbi Keenan bobbis-zoo@yahoo.com 352-787-8654 **28.778647, -81.900262**

Saturday, February 16, 2019

Annual Chili Party at Trimble Park: 11 AM or before. We will eat about 12 Noon. We need Chili in Crock Pots, a few salads, bread or crackers and desserts. We will have hot beverages. Bring a lawn chair. It is a great place to just relax & visit. Trimble Park is located in the Tangerine Area off Hwy 441, south of Mt. Dora. The park is between Lake Beauclair and Lake Carlton. We will be in Pavilion #1 which is near the wooden docks. Highlanders Chapter. No Pets. For more information contact Arlene Beal, bealak59@gmail.com or 612-202-5224 or Mary Ellen Milton mem32735@aol.com or 352-669-3628. **28.769171 -81.656442**

Tuesday, February 19, 2019

Work Hike, Ocala National Forest: Meet before 9AM in the parking lot on the West side of Hwy 19 that is 2 1/2 miles North of the turn off that goes to Alexander Springs (Hwy 445). We will be working on the section between CR445 and Buck Lake. Please be on time as we will be shuttling to another area to work. Please bring water, insect spray, hats, lunch, etc. If you have further questions call or email bobbis-zoo@yahoo.com 352-787-8654 Bring hat, gloves, sunscreen, bug repellent, lunch, and lots of water. **29.073869 -81.629407**

Thursday, February 21, 2019

Highlanders Chapter General Meeting: **Note: Date Change**. We are meeting on the Third Thursday's throughout this year due to the conflicts with the library schedule. We are also meeting one hour earlier at 5:00 PM. We meet at the Leesburg Public Library 100 East Main Street in the meeting rooms at the front of the library. Meeting starts at 5:00 PM. Please bring your aluminum cans to recycle in non-dripping plastic bags and a snack to share. Open to the Public. Program: To be determined. **28.811093 -81.874858**

Additional Highlanders Hikes

Highlanders Activity Leaders who live in The Villages typically lead hikes on Wednesdays. All chapter members and guests are invited to participate in these activities. Leaders post notices of activities the weekend prior to the hike. To view new and old postings go to www.groups.yahoo.com/group/thevillageshikingclub . Once accessed, click on "Conversations" under the banner.

Chapter Officers and Committee Chairs

Chapter Chair, Bill Leach, wwleach@hotmail.com or 352-728-6438
Vice Chair, Mike Tamburrino, miketamburrino@yahoo.com or 303-809-3284
Secretary, Mary Ring, momring@yahoo.com or 352-250-1426
Treasurer, Diane Roesch, cattail3638@gmail.com or 407-469-3638
Trail Coordinator, Francis Keenan, fkeenan@embarqmail.com or 352-787-8654
Activity Chairs, Mary Ellen Milton, mem32735@aol.com or 352-669-3628, Bobbi Keenan, bobbis-zoo@yahoo.com or 352-787-8654, and Mary Ring, momring@yahoo.com or 352-250-1426
Membership Chair, Mary Ellen Milton, mem32735@aol.com or 352-669-3628
Chapter Coordinator, Bobbi Keenan, bobbis-zoo@yahoo.com or 352-787-8654
Outreach Coordinator, Kathy Lamb, kalamb1950@gmail.com or 352-383-1950
Newsletter Editor and Meetup Coordinator, Wade Williston, wwillist01@gmail.com or 407-584-7431
Program Chair, Ginger Leach, gingerleach@hotmail.com or 352-728-6438
Chapter Council Representatives, John Grob, johndgrob@gmail.com or 352-750-0341 & Mike Tamburrino, miketamburrino@yahoo.com or 303-809-3284

Webmasters, Bobbi & Francis Keenan, bobbiszoo@yahoo.com, fkeenan@embarqmail.com or 352-787-8654

Chapter Photographers, Judy Leavers, jvleavers@yahoo.com or 352-360-1717 & Diane Dammiller, Dammiller@aol.com or 407-832-1214

Grant Writer, Dee Bender, deebender829@gmail.com or 352-460-7085

Quartermaster and Archivist/Historian, Christine Pena, pena2081@comcast.net or 908-499-2215

Media PR Coordinator, Glenda Moore, gmaemoore@yahoo.com or 352-324-2570

Calendar Editor, Jane Williams, glenandjane@eastlink.ca or 352-633-3248

Memorial Committee Chair, Stuart Force, stuart.force@comcast.net or 352-303-5623

Recycling Coordinator, Bill Leach, wwleach@hotmail.com or 352-728-643

Trailmasters and Activity Leaders

Trailmasters: Arlene Beal, Sandy Bell, Dee Bender, Gene Bouley, Richard Devine, Stuart Force, Dennis and Melodie Hardy, Karen Harrington, Francis Keenan, Kathy Lamb, Bill and Ginger Leach, Jon and Judy Leavers, Mary Ellen Milton, Tom Mowbray, Steve and Bernice Nemeth, Mary Ring, Diane Roesch, Mike Tamburrino, Jane Williams, Wade Williston, and Bruce Zollner.

Activity Leaders: Mike Barnett, Arlene Beal, Gene Bouley, Diane and Ken Dammiller, John Grob, Dennis and Melodie Hardy, Brad Hoopes, Bobbi and Francis Keenan, Jon Leavers, Bill and Mary Ellen Milton, Steve Nemeth, Diane Paul, Bob and Suzanne Sippey, Mike Tamburrino, Don Valcheff, Wade Williston, and Bruce Zollner.

Links

Florida Trail Association: <http://www.floridatrail.org>
Highlanders Chapter, FTA: <http://www.highlanders.floridatrail.org>
Meetup for Highlanders: <https://www.meetup.com/Florida-Trail-Association-Central-Florida-Chapter/>
Highlanders Photos: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/highlandersfta/albums/>
Previous Newsletters: <http://highlanders.floridatrail.org/NewsletterArchives.htm>



Mike Barnett being given the Conservationist of the Year Award

