

ARK & TENT



Uniting people & animals...through travel

info@arkandtent.com

Home

Articles Index

Travel Articles

World Beat

Helping Hands

Pet Projects

Field Notes

Trips & Tours

Reader's Corner

Newsletter

About Us

SWAMP THINGS

A Visit to Central Florida's Circle B Bar Reserve

By Erin Caslavka

Photos by Jon Deinzer



Admittedly, most folks don't think of swamps and marshlands when they envision Central Florida. Instead, their thoughts likely turn to visions of nearby Orlando and its theme parks, or maybe even the coast, with its balmy breezes and *laissez faire* way of life. But turn your attention inwards just wee bit and you'll find a "discovery center" just waiting to be discovered.

Polk's Nature Discovery Center is a part of the Polk County Environmental Lands Program. Located in Lakeland, Florida, the center's motto is "protecting the environment though education." To that end, they provide a host of outdoor activities geared towards an understanding and appreciation of the local flora and fauna that make their home within the confines of the area - formally known as the Circle B Bar Reserve.

As I learned on a recent visit to the reserve (a one-time cattle ranch), the area supports an array of wildlife within its 1,267 acres. Located on the northwest shore of Lake Hancock, the forested wetlands provide perch sites for the bald eagles and ospreys that hunt along the lakeshore.

Entering the reserve, we drove down a road beneath shady oak trees hosting air plants such as resurrection fern and the showy tendrils of Spanish moss. We met our guide at the Nature Discovery Center, where we found out that every month a variety of planned presentations (led by staff and volunteers) are offered to the public. Some of the titles posted in their events calendar included: "*Birding Guided Hike*" - take a look at the seasonally changing birds and migrants that visit Circle B each year; "*Bird Photography Workshop*" - learn techniques and details on



capturing bird photos in a professional and affordable way; “Group Horseback Ride” - bring your horse and enjoy nature out on the Circle B Bar Reserve trails; and “Sunset Nature Tour” - see Circle B as the lights go out. Tour guides will point out plants, birds and the history of the property as we travel through the marsh.

As we'd arrived early in the day, we decided to set out on foot for the farthest part of the reserve, where we'd heard that resident alligators like to bask in the sun. We set out from the center and made our way along the “Wading Bird Trail,” which intersected with the “Marsh Rabbit Run.” This trail is an easy walking or biking route that takes you out to the “Heron Hideout.” More than 150 species of birds have



been recorded on the reserve, which makes it a bird-watchers' delight. Some of the species include roseate spoonbills, with their pink-and rose-colored wings; black-bellied whistling ducks, their telltale call explaining their moniker; breeding pairs of black-necked stilts; white pelicans and wood storks. There are also local birds residing in the area, such as purple gallinules, sandhill cranes and bald eagles (one of whom was nesting they day we arrived).

Although it's difficult to see other types of animals from the confines of the footpaths, nevertheless Circle B Bar Reserve does support a variety of other wildlife. Wild turkey, the occasional otter, fox squirrels and grey foxes are some of the creatures that live within the surrounding marshlands.

Once we'd crossed over Heron Hideout, we made our way towards “Alligator Alley,” a 1-mile trail that skirts along the edge of Lake Hancock. The slightly elevated trail allowed us the chance to spot our desired attraction: for there, resting on a crest in the marshy pond, was a ‘gator’ (in local parlance) that appeared to be about 6-feet long. She (we learned it was a female from a passing staffer) wasn't doing much of anything that morning, except enjoying being large-and in-charge. But based on the conversations we had with our fellow early-morning walkers, if you're lucky you can see several of them waddling their way across the swampy grass en route to their favorite hangout.

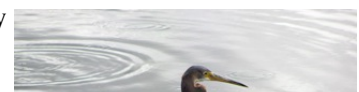


Ah, well, perhaps another time...



Continuing our circular loop around the grounds, we picked up the trail called “Shady Oaks.” At a little more than a mile, it was a nice way to wrap up the visit as we walked amongst the giant oak trees. The Seminole Indians used to make thatched roofs for their homes using palm fronds from the cabbage palms in the area, but my thoughts turned instead to the stately beauty of the oaks - their boughs standing strong and sturdy. Draped with Spanish moss that lent the old trees a look of soft femininity, I stopped for a minute and listened to the cry of a bald eagle coming in to roost. And for half-a-heartbeat, I forgot

the roar of the busy roads outside and let the serenity of the natural world envelop me.



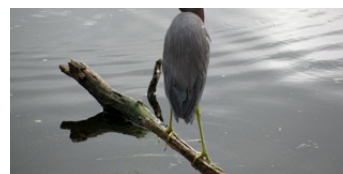
FAST FACTS

Circle B Bar Reserve/Polk's Nature Discovery Center

4399 Winter Lake Rd.

Lakeland, FL 33803

(863) 668-4673



Posted October/November 2010

[October Articles Index](#)

[Articles Archive](#)

[Site Map](#)