

# *Vicki Penziner-Matson Field Trip*

## *Florida Peninsula*

*17-26 March 2017*

[URL: <http://www.earlham.edu/vicki-penziner-matson-field-trips/> ]



### **Trip Summary**

*The Vicki Penziner-Matson Fund supported this years (2017) Spring Break, natural history field expedition to the central peninsula of Florida. Wendy Tori, Jose I. Pareja, and John Iverson led the trip. Wendy's and John's knowledge of and enthusiasm about the Natural History of the area was contagious! "Reptiling" and birding experiences were amazing! Jose's group dynamic leadership was an added bonus.*



### ***Our first stop...***

*We took off on a beautiful Friday afternoon. Everyone was on time and ready to go. We split up into vans and jumped in the cars –John and Sheila led, student Erin Lewis' van followed and Wendy and Jose's van brought up the rear of the caravan...After a night stopover in Chattanooga, we began our early ride to our destination: Florida - Hart Springs County Park. On our way there, during our first picnic stop (Georgia), we got our first*



*taste of what the trip was going to look like: setting lunch for the group, searching under/in logs, taking pictures of the flora/fauna of the region, and more. The mild-temperatures and exotic vegetation hinted to us that we'd moved biogeographically. The presence of citrus trees, "Spanish Moss", Mediterranean geckos ,and live oaks trees in our way down to Florida confirmed it.*



### ***Hart Springs...***

*Upon arrival to Hart Springs, we setup tents, got our snorkeling gear, and dove into the water. Some of us took a short hike around the park and into the*

*forest, using Hart Springs' unique boardwalk system to the Suwannee river. It was excellent! We saw our first White Ibis, our first Suwannee Cooter turtle, and for some, our first Barred Owl. We ended up our day with a delicious meal of "Burritos" cooked by John, Sheila, Jose and Wendy.*



***The following morning we woke up to the dawn chorus of Florida birds and joined Wendy in a fascinating Bird walk around the camp site...***

*This was a fantastic way to start the morning, from spotting turkey vultures, red-shouldered hawks, and swallow-tailed-kite, to capturing some striking displays of cedar waxwings, and blue-headed vireos, to hearing the calls and seeing both chipping sparrows and Northern Parulas.*



*Back to camp after our morning bird walk, we had some breakfast and packed our tents. We headed to our next destination, Kelly Park, where we spent two nights so that we would be close to Wekiwa Park*

*to join the Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA) group operation censusing turtles in different Florida Springs. On our way to Kelly Park, we stopped to do some seining, that is, looking at the diversity of organisms that live in heavy vegetated streams.*



### **The North American Freshwater Turtle Research Group (NAFTRG)...**

*Eric Munscher, a known acquaintance of John's, invited us to join him and the NAFTRG to census turtles in Wekiwa spring. The NAFTRG group was formed in 1999 "as a long-term monitoring effort for important protected habitats including freshwater springs in Florida, Texas, and a lake system in Tennessee." (TSA 2017). Our group had the opportunity to meet the team and join them in their efforts to catch, tag,*



*measure and release all turtles in Wekiwa spring. We started at 8am and finished at 2pm. For a*



*number of our students this was their first time snorkeling. For most, this was the first time capturing turtles and observing the Florida diversity under water. The forest around our processing center was filled with wintering birds and early arrivals including warblers and vireos, among other usual suspects. The perfect day – warmth, swimming, crystal clear waters and learning about nature with true naturalists. Lunch was welcomed and unstructured exploration of the trails in Wekiwa Springs was a treat. After a very full day of natural history we ended the night with a*

*nice cooked meal, and topped that with some s'mores around the fire. For some us, our first s'mores as well.*

### **Alligators, Ocean and....the Florida Scrub Jay**

*We broke camp and left behind our first shy gopher tortoise who wouldn't leave his burrow under the cement perimeter of the swimming pool. We worked our way east to the Atlantic coast at the Canaveral National Seashore/ Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. On our way there we*



*stopped to look for some alligators and boy were we in for a surprise. Beyond discovering new*



*habitats (mangrove swamps, inland waterways, beach communities, etc.) and their associated fauna (lots of herons, egrets, shorebirds, roseate spoonbill, alligators, etc.) we hit a spot Tosohatchee Wildlife Management Area where many **mother** and yearling alligators were observed. Canaveral National Seashore was great and for some of us, spotting the Florida Scrub Jay was a reward. The group relished a few hours on the beach in the warm 85 degrees sun (with Laughing Gulls and Brown Pelicans passing by), swimming, collecting some shells, building sand castles, and just enjoying being tumbled in the waves. We headed to Manatee Hammock right on the coast (see below) for the night. Swimming and seeing the Atlantic Ocean was a first for some of us.*



*The following morning we visited Blue Springs State Park. We spent some time watching the enchanting Manatees - for many of us this was another first. In the afternoon, we headed to Alexander Springs to enjoy a time swimming and searching for some more turtles, and after dark we headed out for a night hike to see the nocturnal wildlife of the spring.*

### ***Fire Ecology, woodpeckers and canoeing...***

*The next few days were spent in the Ocala National Forest in the center of the Florida Peninsula. We canoed the Juniper Spring Run and visited the mature Longleaf Pine habitats. We learned about fire ecology and its importance in the history and current management of these forests. We got to see some busy Pine warblers and experience the thrill of finding and seeing the endangered endemic Red-cockaded Woodpecker, one of their most famous associate species due to its obligatory relationship to the longleaf pine and on its way to becoming even more endangered due to habitat destruction.*



### ***Manatee Springs...***

*Our last Florida expedition was spent at Manatee Springs State Park where we joined NAFTRG group again to help with their turtle census. Some of us went on a walk to the boardwalk running from inside the park to the edge of the Suwannee River – what a wonderful path. We were able to see a pileated woodpecker drilling a hole on a dead tree ... he kept busy like no one was looking (except us and a group of curious black*

*vultures).*

### ***Heading back home...***

*We woke up to our last morning in Florida. After taking down camp and packing the vans, we headed north toward Georgia. We spent the night in High Falls State Park, just a few miles of Interstate 75 south of Atlanta. We managed to include a group hike down its waterfall trail and ended our night with a campfire where we remembered all the amazing adventures we had shared during the last week.*

*The Spring Break natural history field trip was a great success and an amazing experience to share with such a wonderful group. The travel and experience produced not only a great respite from the hard work on campus, it provided experiences and inspiration that will affect all of the participants in their future studies, teaching and enjoyment of nature.*

*Safe travels to all... and don't hesitate to walk out into the woods explore when you get the chance and rediscover your sense of wonder...*

*Jose I. Pareja, Wendy Tori, and John Iverson*

*...For NATURAL History Detail see next page, at the end of the document we also share drawings from Julia Freeman (EC '19, Biology) of our trip*

Natural History Detail.

**Amphibian and Reptiles**

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <i>American Alligator</i><br><i>Loggerhead musk turtle</i><br><i>Common musk turtle</i><br><i>Florida softshell turtle</i><br><i>Gopher tortoise</i><br><i>Florida redbelly turtle</i><br><i>Florida peninsular cooter</i><br><i>Suwannee cooter</i><br><i>Yellow bellied slider</i><br><i>Red-eared slider</i> | <i>Southeastern five-lined skink</i><br><i>House Gecko</i><br><i>Mediterranean gecko</i><br><i>Southern Toad</i><br><i>Florida water snake</i><br><i>Brown water snake</i><br><i>Redback Salamander</i><br><i>Red-bellied Snake</i> | <i>Gray Tree frogs</i><br><i>Green Treefrog</i><br><i>Squirrel Tree frog</i><br><i>Spring Peeper</i><br><i>Pig frog</i><br><i>Green anole</i><br><i>Brown anole</i><br><i>Brown-headed Skink</i><br><i>Little brown skink</i> |
|---|---|---|

**Mammals**

*Nine-banded armadillo, Gray Squirrel, Raccoon, Eastern spotted skunk, River otter, Manatee, White-tailed deer*

**Plants**

|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <u>Trees</u>   |  |   |
| <i>Slash pine</i><br><i>Longleaf pine</i><br><i>Sand pine</i><br><i>Southern red oak</i><br><i>Turkey oak</i><br><i>Live oak</i><br><i>Water oak</i> | <i>Red maple</i><br><i>Redbud</i><br><i>Bald cypress</i><br><i>Sweetbay</i><br><i>Southern magnolia</i><br><i>Pond cypress</i><br><i>White mangrove</i><br><i>Southern red cedar</i> | <i>Saw-palmetto</i><br><i>Royal Palm</i><br><i>Sweetgum</i><br><i>Red mangrove</i>  |
| <u>Wildflowers and other small plants</u>  |  |   |
| <i>Tropical sage</i><br><i>Gaillardia</i><br><i>Lupine</i><br><i>Florida violet</i><br><i>Phlox</i><br><u>Wiregrass</u>                              | <i>Celestial lily</i><br><i>Coral bean</i><br><i>Quaker lady</i><br><i>Spanish moss</i><br><i>Gopher apple</i>   | <i>Southern needleleaf bromeliad (Tillandsia)</i><br><i>Deer moss</i><br><i>Resurrection fern</i><br><i>Prickly pear cactus</i> |

**Birds**

Canada goose  
Wood duck  
Mallard  
Blue-winged teal  
Lesser scaup  
Wild turkey  
Pied-billed grebe  
Double-crested cormorant  
Anhinga  
Northern Gannet  
Brown pelican  
Great blue heron  
Little blue heron  
Green heron  
Black-crowned night heron  
Great egret  
Snowy egret  
Tricolored heron  
Reddish egret  
Cattle egret  
White ibis  
Glossy ibis  
Roseate spoonbill  
Black vulture  
Turkey vulture  
Osprey  
Swallow-tailed kite  
Bald eagle  
Northern harrier  
Cooper's hawk  
Red-shouldered hawk

White-eyed vireo  
Blue-headed vireo  
Red-eyed vireo  
Blue jay  
Red-tailed hawk  
Common gallinule  
American coot  
Sandhill crane  
Greater yellowlegs  
Willet  
Lesser yellowlegs  
Sanderling  
Bonaparte's gull  
Laughing gull  
Ring-billed gull  
Sanderling  
Rock pigeon  
Mourning dove  
Barred owl  
Chimney swift  
Belted kingfisher  
Red-bellied woodpecker  
Downy woodpecker  
Red-cockaded woodpecker  
Pileated woodpecker  
American kestrel  
Eastern phoebe  
Great crested Flycatcher  
Florida scrub jay  
American crow  
Fish crow

Tree swallow  
Carolina chickadee  
Tufted titmouse  
Carolina wren  
Ruby-crowned kinglet  
Blue-grey gnatcatcher  
Eastern bluebird  
Hermit thrush  
American robin  
Gray catbird  
Northern mockingbird  
Brown thrasher  
European starling  
Cedar waxwing  
Northern parula  
Yellow-rumped warbler  
Yellow-throated warbler  
Palm warbler  
Black and white warbler  
Louisiana waterthrush  
Chipping sparrow  
Song sparrow  
White-throated sparrow  
Northern Cardinal  
Red-winged blackbird  
Eastern Meadowlark  
Common grackle  
Boat-tailed grackle  
Brown-headed cowbird  
House sparrow





## ***THANK YOU NOTES***

Thank you very much for this amazing trip. I have learned so many invaluable things about nature and myself. I hope that other students can enjoy this opportunity in the future. It has changed the way I see life. ***Irving Barrera '20, Mexico.***

I thought this trip was a very good way to connect to nature. I thought it was amazing to have the opportunity to go on a walk with someone like John Iverson because he made me see that there is so much to look for if you know how to look for it. On a normal day if I go on a walk, I don't usually think about how much is around me, but this experience showed me just how much life there is. I don't think that I will ever be able to see the world in the way I used to before this experience. In addition to changing the way I think about everything around me, this trip also provided me with a lot of completely new experiences that I would have never been able to do. ***Aiden Newman '19, United States***

As a Fourth Year Human Development and Social Relations (HDSR) major and Outdoor Education Designation student, I feel so fortunate and honored to participate on this natural history trip to Florida, sponsored by the Vicki Penziner-Matson fund because this experiential based program successfully created a new space for community, inquiry, and learning, which was sincerely impactful and transformative for each of us. I embarrassingly admit, as a two time August Wilderness leader, I had my hesitations and could not have predicted the depths of the impact. I was reminded, yet again, how shared experiences have the sheer power to spark curiosity, self reflection, learning and teaching among students from various academic, cultural and social backgrounds. I must tip my hat and show gratitude especially to Wendy, Jose, Sheila and John for collectively setting the tone of the trip. They were able to balance a structured and directed program with a spontaneous and relaxed 9 days of Spring break. This trip opened my eyes to a new breed, if you will, of Outdoor Education that I will continue to reflect on and be influenced by as an environmental educator and life-long learner. ***Lily Fishleder '17, HDSR New York, NY***

Thank you so much for this amazing opportunity! I really enjoyed learning about and engaging with the natural world of a new ecosystem that I had never experienced before. ***Andrea Ball '18, Biology, Columbus, Ohio***

I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to join this trip. I learned to identify common Floridian species, got to snorkel for the first time, and got to hang out with people who were as

interested and enthusiastic about their surroundings as I am. Thank you for funding this trip!

***Katie Jacobs '20, Biochemistry, Cincinnati, Ohio***

After getting to explore desert ecosystems in Arizona, I really enjoyed getting an up-close look at the fire-adapted and spring ecosystems of Florida. I loved learning about how the individual species fit together and getting to experience John and Wendy's passion and knowledge.

***Julia Freeman '19, Biology, Chicago, Illinois***

The canoe run was my favorite part of the trip. It was serene to be surrounded by lush vegetation as we floated down the spring. I also really enjoyed snorkeling to catch turtles and learning about the turtle research. ***Cora Johnson '19, Environmental Science, Indiana***

I am so grateful for all the opportunities you have made available for so many people through this fund! This trip was filled with too many memorable moments to contain, from the perspective- bringing experience of being tumbled in the waves of the mighty Atlantic Ocean to the glee of having an armadillo zip right between my feet to the special privilege of having turtles handed up to me in a canoe during a research survey. Thank you for this incredible time of being drawn out into my fuller curious self and into the wonder that is this beloved planet and the beings we dwell on it with! ***Celia Carr '19, Religion, Wisconsin***

This trip made me a better person as I realized that happiness comes from appreciating the nature and people around you not from fancy choices that money can buy. I am extremely grateful to you for your kind donation! ***Ram Itani '17, Chemistry and Physics, Nepal***

Firstly, I would like to say thank you for your continued funding and support of these sorts of adventures. After visiting Florida with all of our amazing expedition leaders, I learned to appreciate all that is naturally available to us, and witnessed first-hand the importance of continuing to educate our younger generations about the beauty and long, grand histories of our planet's natural wonders. ***Yunjoo Shin '19, Neuroscience, South Korea***

As a student with so little experience with nature, this trip was such a life-changing experience for me. Everyday in the trip was so full of energy and excitement, and we had opportunities to learn about all kinds of animals and plants at every moment. I am so thankful for your kind donation to make this trip happen, and I hope that this trip will continue in the future, so that many more students can have this amazing learning opportunity. ***Khoa Nguyen '20, Vietnam***

Thanks, I call myself privileged for coming on this life changing natural history expedition in Florida. It was an exploration of a whole new world for me . I found my true passions on this trip, which I will carry with me forever . ***Evelyn Barragan '19, Environmental Science***

This trip was an extremely fun and unique learning experience. I got to do so many things for the first time, like snorkel and see a Red Cockaded Woodpecker! I learned so much, and I hope this trip continues in the coming years. ***Madeline Chomentowski '20, Environmental Sustainability, East Lansing, MI***

This has been a seriously incredible trip. I've learned a lot from Wendy, John, TSA, and my fellow students. The organism ID and knowledge I'm leaving with is definitely greater than when I first arrived in Florida and I'm excited to share it with my friends back at Earlham. A phrase I learned a while ago is "the slower you go the bigger your world gets," and this week provided me the ultimate opportunity to slow down and experience the world around me. Before this week I don't think I realized just how much life is in every nook and cranny. The coolest nature moment I had on this trip was at Manatee Springs. We arrived early in the morning and black vultures lined the branches everywhere. As the day warmed up, they took to the skies, one by one, until the air was teeming with hundreds of buzzards. Plus, there was a piliated woodpecker hanging out right by the trail and you could see every single detail, including its zygodactyl (meaning 2 and 2, as opposed to 3 and 1) toes. It's been a great week, and I'm excited to bring some of the wonder and light back to dreary old Richmond. ***Nick Maloney '20, Biology***

This trip was an absolutely incredible opportunity to enjoy the outdoors and see many things I otherwise would not have had the chance to experience. We found a one year old gopher tortoise which was the cutest thing I have ever seen. We also found red-cockaded woodpeckers in the longleaf pine forest which was amazing. I enjoyed learning about a place I had never been before and got a chance to take photos and snorkel with turtles. I thank you from the bottom of my heart! ***Erin Lewis '17, Biology, Boulder, Colorado***

I am so grateful I had the opportunity to go on this trip because I was able to meditate in the woods and on the shore of a beach for the first time in my life, it was life changing. I am most thankful I had my perception of the world altered, I will no longer look at insects or amphibians as disgusting. ***Jasmine Lebron '20, Biochemistry, Phoenix, Arizona***

I am very grateful that I got this opportunity to camp and snorkel for the first time and learn about species and birds. ***Shabnam Fayyaz '20, Kabul, Afghanistan***



Drawings above from Julia Freeman (Florida 2017)

Document compiled and edited by: Jose I. Pareja, Wendy P. Tori, John Iverson and Sheila Iverson