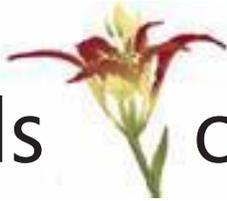

Newsletter of the
Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve



January - February 2012

Chairman's Message

By: Barb Hoffman

We have been so grateful to Paul Cozzie (Head of Pinellas County Parks) and Mary Campbell (Head of Pinellas County IFAS) for allowing IFAS staff to move their offices into Brooker Creek Preserve Environmental Education Center and conduct business from there. This has not only "kept the doors open" but also continued natural history education and sustainability programs at the preserve. IFAS has additionally added a new full time staff position to the education team, and has contracted with Sensing Nature to provide a year's worth of fantastic programs for the public.

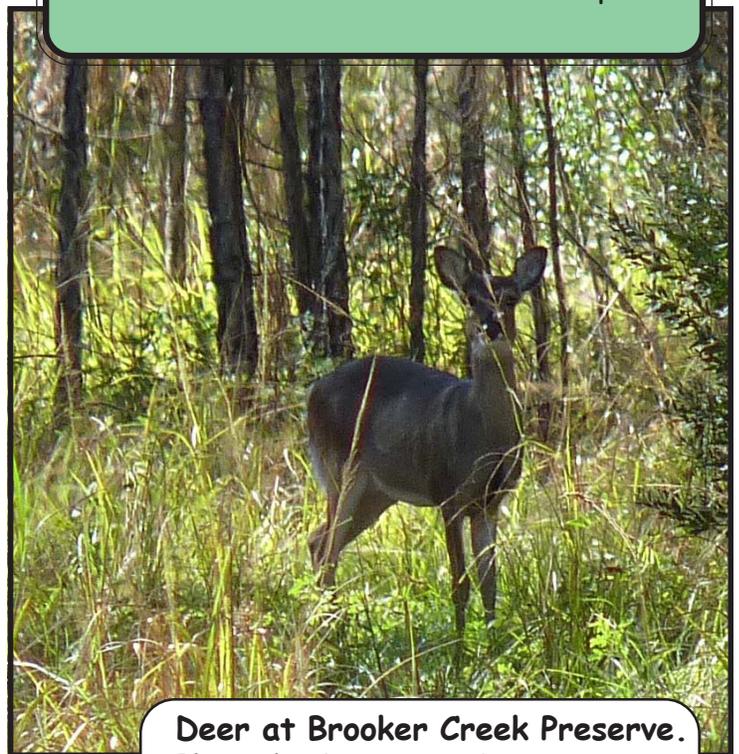
We also are appreciative to the Pinellas County school system for moving the 4th grade environmental program to Brooker, another great kudo for education.

Because so much attention has been placed on public education at the Preserve through these resources, the Board and I feel that the education portion of the Preserve is doing well. Therefore, perhaps the attention of the Friends should move to another area that is sorely in need of help - Preserve land management.

Over 33% of the Preserve is composed of pine flatwoods, an environment that requires frequent fires for good health. All plants and animals that compose the pine flatwoods community are adapted to fires, and many cannot live without it. Without fire, hardwoods and palmettos can overgrow and overpopulate,
(continued page 2)

Chairman's Message

| | |
|--|------|
| by Barbara Hoffman | p. 1 |
| Annual Meeting Honors | p. 2 |
| East Lake Sunrise Rotary Club grant | p. 2 |
| Winter Birds at Brooker Creek by Craig Huegel | p. 2 |
| Hike Anclote Spur Jan. 22 | p. 4 |
| Final Adopt-A-Mile Trash Pickup. | p. 4 |
| Volunteers Needed | p. 4 |
| Certified Butterfly Sanctuary.. | p. 5 |
| Pam's Gardening Tip | p. 5 |
| News from the Wildflower Garden by Pam Brown | p. 5 |
| Butterfly Encounter Sponsors . . | p. 6 |
| Mission Statements | p. 7 |
| Contacts | p. 7 |



Deer at Brooker Creek Preserve.
Photo by Lorraine Margeson

usurping space and sunlight from lower-growing vegetation that are important food sources for wildlife. Without fire, some wildflower seeds cannot even germinate. Unfortunately, most of the Preserve is in dire need of fire. For more fires to occur, more equipment and human resources are required. This takes money, and that's where the Friends come in.

As we move forward to maturing into a more formal and structured organization, we clearly see a very palatable and paramount need - that of keeping the Preserve ecologically healthy. This will be our goal not only for the year, but for the Friends evolution as well.

Barb

**Friends of Brooker Creek
3940 Keystone Road, Tarpon Springs,
FL 34688. Please use this on any
correspondence.**

Three Friends Members Honored at the Annual Meeting

Three of our members were honored at the annual meeting for going above and beyond the call of duty for well over a year. All three were awarded with a beautiful plaque featuring photos of Brooker Creek wildflowers and a \$20 gift certificate to the Friends Gift Shop. The recipients were:

Cathy Ordiway - for her continued, dedicated work on our website

Cathy Vogelsong - for her fantastic layout and design of our newsletter

Dr. Craig Huegel - for the idea and implementation of the Off the Beaten Path hike series

Many thanks to members, Karl & Kathleen Nichter, for donating their gorgeous photographs for the plaques!

Friends Awarded Grant from East Lake Sunrise Rotary Club!

The Friends are elated to receive a \$1,000 grant from the East Lake Sunrise Rotary to help defray costs of starting up the Gift Shop. The grant money will be awarded to the Friends at the Rotary's Car Show, their big fundraiser, in April. Woohoo!



Winter Birds at Brooker Creek Preserve

By: Craig N. Huegel

On Friday December 23, more than a dozen top-notch birders descended on Brooker Creek Preserve for the annual Christmas Bird Count. Organized by Don Margeson, I was paired with Paul Trunk and Don Stillwaugh and so I was fortunate enough to be there and to witness the results first hand.

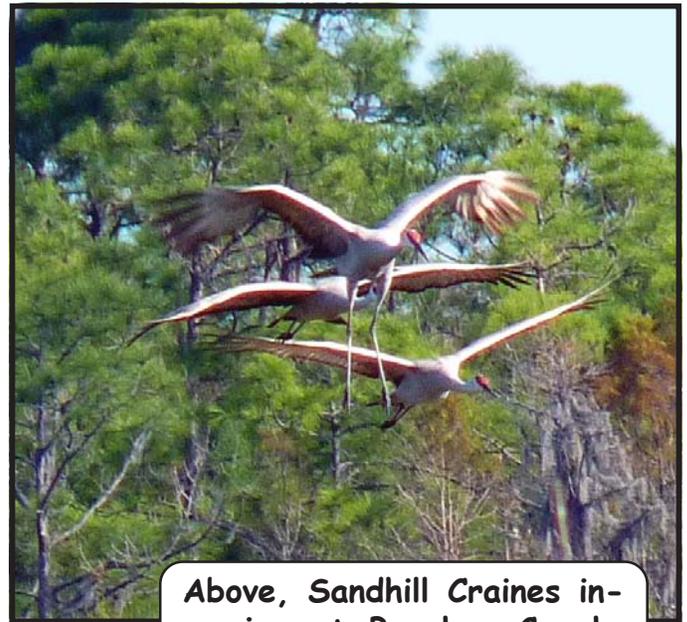
Over the course of the morning, 164 different bird species were observed. Some, like the Bachman's sparrow were relatively rare sightings, while others, such as the Northern cardinal and blue jay were everywhere. But, what was most evident from the morning was the incredible diversity of birds that make their homes in the Preserve and how significant it is, given the overall development pressure elsewhere in the County. (Continued page 3)

More than 15 years ago, the American Bird Conservancy designated Brooker Creek Preserve as an Important Bird Area and that is truer today than it was then. The bird list originally posted by County staff put the number of species at "about 160." Our one morning count of 164 included **only** birds present during the winter. It excluded the great many others that are spring and summer residents - the breeding birds. I suspect that the Preserve is home to more than 220 species at one time or another during an average year.

Brooker Creek Preserve is significant for several reasons. Perhaps most importantly, it is simply large enough to house that many species. While many birds, like Northern cardinals and mockingbirds, are content with the isolated fragments of habitat that occur in developed landscapes, a good many others need more expansive wild lands. At more than 8,500 acres, Brooker Creek has ample space that is remote and the habitat is not fragmented into little slivers.

Secondly, its size includes a huge diversity of habitat types. As we did our portion of the count last Friday, we walked through open and forested wetlands, pine flatwoods, upland oak

hammocks and brushy fields. Each of these areas holds unique species that require this type of habitat structure. No part of the Preserve is void of



Above, Sandhill Cranes incoming at Brooker Creek. Below left, tree swallows. Photos by Lorraine Margeson

habitat value and none are truly more important than others. It is the sum of the parts that make it such an important birding area.

There are a great many field guides that can get you started in the fascinating hobby of bird watching. I would simply recommend getting a field guide directed specifically at Florida or the Eastern United States. There are enough birds to learn here without getting confused by the western species that never (or very rarely) show up in Florida. Don't invest in the ultimate binoculars to start with, but don't get a pair that is difficult to use. You can get a good pair of binoculars for less than \$100. Finally, you will "see" far more birds if you can recognize them by call, and it's not as difficult as you might surmise. There are many really good bird call CD's and DVD's on the market to help you along. With some time and practice, these will add to your enjoyment and increase the number of birds you will detect as you hike about.

While the weather is cool, get out and enjoy the trails of Brooker Creek Preserve and, while you are out, see if you can't observe some of the winter birds which are present here only for the next few months.

Off the Beaten Path: Hike to Anclote Spur

Please join us for our nature-based fundraising hike series, *Off the Beaten Path!*

One hike remains in this series of four hikes that take place in beautiful areas tucked away within Brooker Creek Preserve in sites that are closed to the public.

Jan. 22, 2012 - **Anclote Spur** - this site was once part of the preserve but is now a preserve in itself. We will start at the "Three Lakes" region of the Preserve, off East Lake Road, and walk cross-country through upland oak hammock cypress forest to a secluded spot near the Anclote River.

At this point in time, the limit of 20 people has been reached and we are starting a Waiting List. Reserve your spot on the waiting list by emailing fobcp@tampabay.rr.com. **Cost:** \$25 fee per hike with a 10% discount for members of Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve.

Questions? Email fobcp@tampabay.rr.com or call 727-934-2680.

Barb Hoffman and Dr. Craig Huegel in a wet part of the last Off the Beaten Path hike.



Hank Dykstal, Brenda Klindt, Toby Brandenburgh, and leader, Ken Rowe.

Final Trash Pick-up for Adopt-a-Mile

On Saturday, Dec. 10, Friends board member, Ken Rowe, led his crew of willing volunteers on the final trash pick-up for the Adopt-a-Mile program. The adopted mile along Keystone Road which bisects part of the Preserve now has been included as part of the minimum security prison road crew program. Friends member, Toby Brandenburgh, says, "So if I wanted to continue to participate in picking up trash along that particular stretch of road, I'd have to trade in the way cool, trendy orange vest for the orange jumpsuit? Hmm... I think I'll stick to the occasional, as-needed volunteer duty!" Yes, Toby, we have been replaced by a different sort of volunteer crew, but Ken Rowe would like to continue the adventure and is looking into perhaps doing so.

Volunteers Needed to Work the Ed Center Main Desk

Volunteers are greatly needed to "man" the main desk at the Ed Center on the first, third and the occasional fifth Saturday mornings. All volunteers get to wear cool Brooker Creek Preserve t-shirts and talk to the public about Brooker Creek. Also, because our gift shop is run completely by volunteers and staff is not allowed to sell items, it is essential that volunteers be there to keep the gift shop open and running. If you are interested in spending a few hours a month at the Ed Center, please contact Vestina Crayton at 453-6967.



Wildflower Garden now a Certified Butterfly Sanctuary!

Many thanks to Friends member, Lois Weber, for doing the necessary paperwork to apply for our garden to become a certified butterfly sanctuary. We received a beautiful certificate from the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs that states:

The Florida Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc. presents this Official Butterfly Sanctuary Certificate to Brooker Creek Preserve who has followed the guidelines in establishing and maintaining this garden. Given this 5th day of September, 2011 - Signed by FFGC President , Jan Sillik

In addition, the FFGC Chairperson for Bees, Birds, and Butterflies stated in her letter, "I went onto the Brooker Creek Preserve website. What a beautiful place and the work the volunteers do. I'm honored to give your butterfly certificate for the Preserve."



News from the Wildflower Garden

By: Pam Brown

In November there were four of us planting a few additional wildflowers and weeding. The spectacular narrow-leaf sunflowers and shooting stars were just finishing blooming. The garden is looking better and better due to the work of the volunteers who are helping to maintain it. Our addition of many more wildflowers should provide quite a bloom show for next season.

We also want to create a native shrub demonstration area adjacent to the wildflower garden to showcase shrubs that are especially good for planting in home landscapes. There is a real need for help preparing the location before we can start to plant.

We have decided to take a break for December since the last Saturday is New Years Eve. Come the last Saturday in January we will once again be hard at work. Please consider coming out to help from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. There will be breakfast snacks, coffee and juice. Bring your tools and gloves. Hope to see you there!

Pam's Gardening Tip of the Month

By: Pam Brown

When purchasing hand pruning tools, quality, fit and price should be considered. I always tell people to purchase the best tools they can afford. A ten dollar pair of hand pruners will do the job for a while, but will probably fail over time. A more expensive pair might fit your hand better, cause less hand fatigue and last for many years. My favorite is the Felco #7 with a rotating handle, but Corona, Fiskars, Craftsman and others all produce good pruners. Try the pair in your hand before you purchase them to make sure you like the fit, ease of operation and weight. The right pair can help make the chore of pruning more joy than job.



Felco #7 pruners

Many thanks for our generous sponsors for the
Butterfly Encounter at the Fall Wildflower Festival!!



Butterfly Encounter

~ sponsored by ~

Progress Energy

&

Laurie Angyn

Anonymous

Carrie Root, Ph.D.

Carson Family Care Center

**Evan Earle, Jr., Marion Yongue, Ruth & Evan Earle, Sr.,
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In Honor of Lois Weber & Alice Changstrom



Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve - Mission Statement

The mission of the Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve is to provide public support for the Preserve through fund raising, volunteer programs, and education to ensure that the Preserve remains a natural wilderness for future generations.

Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve - Land Use Position Statement

The Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve support land uses within the boundaries of Brooker Creek Preserve which have a main purpose that furthers the preservation, conservation, restoration or protection of the land and resources of the Brooker Creek Preserve.

Current mission statement of the Parks Department - it is at least three years old and does not reflect the many changes in staffing and resources over that time. The newly formed Parks and Conservation Resources Department has not yet developed mission/vision statements.

The mission of the Pinellas County Park Department is to provide a continuing program of acquisition, development, maintenance, and protection of park areas for healthful outdoor activities.

Friends of Brooker Creek website:

www.FriendsOfBrookerCreekPreserve.org

To contact The Friends:

Email: fobcp@tampabay.rr.com

Phone: (727) 934-2680 (please leave a message and your phone number for a return call)

Brooker Creek Preserve:

Phone: (727) 453-6900

Website: www.brookercreekpreserve.org

The Brooker Creek Preserve Environmental Education Center is located at 3940 Keystone Road, Tarpon Springs, Florida, 34688.

Phone: (727) 453-6800

Center Hours: Thurs. - Sat. 9 am - 4 pm

Preserve Hiking Trails open 7 days a week (except for day after Thanksgiving and Dec. 25), 7:00 am to sunset.

Horse Trails open 7 days a week, all year, sunrise to sunset.

Friends Trail is now open. The bridge is fixed and ready for hikers!

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Vice Chair: Cathie Foster

Vice Chair: Allyn Childress

Secretary: Chuck Parsons

Treasurer: Carson Morrow

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Land Use Chair: Dr. Craig Huegel

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Birdman & Historian: Ken Rowe

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This newsletter is published every other month. Please submit articles to Newsletter Editor Dr. Craig Huegel (727) 422-6583 or email Huegelc55@aol.com

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