



## POINT OF INTEREST



(LEFT) ALLIGATOR NEST (RIGHT) YOUNG ALLIGATOR

THE AMERICAN ALLIGATOR, ONE OF ONLY TWO SPECIES OF ALLIGATORS WORLD-WIDE, MAKES ITS HOME IN THE WETLANDS AND WATERWAYS OF THE SOUTHEASTERN UNITED STATES. IN THE LATE 1960'S THIS FORMIDABLE REPTILE WAS PLACED ON THE ENDANGERED SPECIES LIST AS A RESULT OF OVERHUNTING AND DRASTICALLY DECLINING NUMBERS. SINCE THAT TIME THE POPULATION HAS BOUNCED BACK, AND ALLIGATORS WERE REMOVED FROM THE ENDANGERED SPECIES LIST. A SUSTAINABLE ALLIGATOR HUNTING PROGRAM WAS ESTABLISHED IN FLORIDA IN THE LATE 1980'S; A LIMITED NUMBER OF PERMITS ARE ISSUED TO APPLICANTS BASED ON A SCIENTIFICALLY DETERMINED QUOTA.

AS A TOP PREDATOR, WITH ONE OF THE STRONGEST BITES OF ANY ANIMAL, ADULT ALLIGATORS ARE KNOWN FOR THEIR ABILITY TO HUNT ANIMALS IN OR NEAR THE WATER. RESPECTING ALLIGATORS, AND THEIR NATURAL INSTINCTS, IS THE BEST WAY TO PROTECT YOU AND THE ALLIGATORS FROM HARM.

- NEVER FEED A WILD ALLIGATOR; FEEDING AN ALLIGATOR TEACHES THEM TO ASSOCIATE PEOPLE WITH FOOD.
- KEEP PETS ON A LEASH WHEN NEAR WETLANDS, INCLUDING PONDS AND LAKES.
- DO NOT DISTURB AN ALLIGATOR NEST OR YOUNG ALLIGATORS AS THE MAMA GATOR IS VERY PROTECTIVE.





## Eastern screech owls - Bird Boxes

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BIRD BOXES MAY BE SEEN IN VARIOUS LOCATIONS THROUGHOUT CHARLOTTE FLATWOODS PRESERVE. THEY WERE DESIGNED FOR CAVITY NESTING BIRDS SUCH AS GREAT CRESTED FLYCATCHERS, EASTERN BLUEBIRDS, THE SOUTHERN FLYING SQUIRREL AND THE EASTERN SCREECH OWL, WHICH IS A SMALL OWL THAT READILY NESTS IN THESE MAN-MADE HOMES. THE OWLS'S NATURAL NESTING SITES ARE TREE CAVITIES GENERALLY 6 TO 20 FEET HIGH, BUT THESE BOXES CAN MAKE A GREAT SUBSTITUTE WHEN COMPETING WITH OTHER CAVITY NESTERS FOR NATURAL CAVITIES.

SOME INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT THE EASTERN SCREECH OWL:

- THEY ARE NOCTURNAL, AND HUNT PRIMARILY DURING THE FIRST FOUR HOURS AFTER DARKNESS.
- THEIR DIET IS DIVERSE, AND CAN INCLUDE RODENTS, SMALL BIRDS, INSECTS, SNAKES, AND EVEN FISH.
- THEY ARE OFTEN MONOGAMOUS, WITH THE FEMALE STAYING WITH THE YOUNG AND THE MALE PROVIDING THE FOOD.
- IN FLORIDA, MOST SCREECH OWLS ARE BROWN IN PLUMAGE, BUT THE RED AND GREY PHASES ARE ALSO NOT UNCOMMON; ALL THREE COLOR PHASES CAN OCCUR IN THE SAME NEST.

ADULT MALE  
EASTERN  
SCREECH  
OWL



OWLS FREQUENTLY  
INHABIT MAN-MADE  
STRUCTURES





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RIVER OTTERS, WITH THEIR MAGNIFICENT SWIMMING ABILITY AND PLAYFUL DEMEANOR, ARE AN INTERESTING SIGHT. THESE CAT-SIZED MAMMALS HAVE BEAUTIFUL BROWN FUR, AND WEBBED FEET. THE WEBBING ON THEIR FEET HELPS TO MAKE THEM QUICK SWIMMERS CAPABLE OF CATCHING FISH, THEIR PRIMARY FOOD SOURCE. OTTERS ARE KNOWN TO "PLAY WITH THEIR FOOD" WHILE PRACTICING THEIR FISHING SKILLS BY PLAYING A GAME OF CATCH AND RELEASE WITH THEIR PREY. THEY FEED MOST OFTEN ON SLOW-MOVING FISH, SUCH AS SUCKERS AND CATFISH. INTERESTINGLY, THEIR DENS, LOCATED ALONG THE SHORELINE, TYPICALLY HAVE A LAND AND WATER ENTRANCE.



A RIVER OTTER RESTING ON A ROCK

THE BEST PLACE HERE AT CHARLOTTE FLATWOODS ENVIRONMENTAL PARK TO CATCH A GLIMPSE OF AN OTTER, AND MAYBE EVEN A FAMILY GROUP, IS AT THE LARGE MARSH LOCATED AT THE MAIN TRAILHEAD.





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AS ONE OF THE LARGEST BIRDS YOU ARE LIKELY TO SEE IN FLORIDA, THE SANDHILL CRANE WITH ITS RED-CROWN OF FEATHERS IS A MAGNIFICENT SITE. THE MARSHES AT CHARLOTTE FLATWOODS PROVIDE AN IDEAL SITE FOR SANDHILL CRANES TO FORAGE AND NEST. THE PARK HAS BEEN HOME TO AT LEAST ONE PAIR OF SANDHILL CRANES EACH YEAR. THESE BIRDS ARE KNOWN TO MATE FOR LIFE AND THE MALE AND FEMALE ARE BOTH ACTIVE IN RAISING THE YOUNG, CALLED COLTS, OF WHICH THERE IS TYPICALLY ONLY ONE AT A TIME.

- SANDHILL CRANES HAVE AN ELABORATE COURTSHIP DISPLAY WHICH INCLUDES DANCES WITH HEAD BOBBING, BOWING AND LEAPING, GRASS TOSSING, AND RUNNING WITH WINGS EXTENDED. A MATED PAIR WILL USUALLY DUET AT THE NEST AT DAWN AND DUSK.
- SANDHILL CRANES HAVE A FOSSIL RECORD DATING BACK 2.5 MILLION YEARS; THIS IS OVER 1/2 A MILLION YEARS OLDER THAN MOST BIRD FOSSILS.



- THE SUBSPECIES KNOWN AS THE FLORIDA SANDHILL CRANE, WITH ONLY AROUND 5,000 INDIVIDUALS REMAINING, IS PROTECTED UNDER THE STATE OF FLORIDA AND FEDERAL LAW.



BABY SANDHILL CRANES ARE REFERRED TO AS COLTS

