

LEMON BAY NEWSLETTER CONSERVANCY®

FALL 2012 VOLUME 41 ISSUE 3

for the preservation, protection and acquisition of natural areas important in maintaining the ecological balance of Lemon Bay, Charlotte Harbor and adjacent waters

Conservancy
President Jim Cooper



From The President JOIN OUR ADVENTURES

In September, we celebrated the second anniversary of LBC's acquisition of Wildflower Preserve. Over the last two years, an amazing array of donors and volunteers have stepped forward to help us transition Wildflower from the overgrown abandoned golf course that we purchased in 2010 into a wonderful venue for hiking through our natural habitats and for learning more about our beautiful, local, naturally "wild" coastal environment. Ironically, the prior owner's golf-specific land upgrades have provided us with a wonderfully broad spectrum of tiny individual "micro-systems," each with its own birds, critters & plants.

As you'll read in this newsletter, we now have several important and interesting new initiatives underway at the preserve. We are studying juvenile tarpon in our three Lemon Creek tidal areas. We are working to improve water quality in the preserve ponds. Our new well-marked trail network includes over four miles of loop trails with educational signage. Our butterfly habitat features more

than 75 native plant species that serve as host plants and nectar sources for our local butterflies. The community has passionately responded to help us, including the CHNEP, Mote Marine, the Men's Garden Club of Englewood, the Boy Scouts, the Native Plant Society, Lake Watch, and a host of others. Best of all, we have many more plans and ideas for future improvements!

INVITATION: I invite you & your friends to come out and join us for one or more of the many activities the Conservancy has scheduled throughout the coming season. We're participating in the *Charlotte Harbor Nature Festival on November 17th*. LBC is hosting an "Open House" to the public on *Sat. December 8th* at Wildflower Preserve. Don't miss our special presentation on the Tarpon Life Cycle and Juvenile *Tarpon Research on Boca Grande on January 17th*. And, as always, LBC will be offering a series of Nature Walks at the preserve throughout the winter season. You'll find all the dates and details for upcoming events in the pages of this newsletter.

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A fun way to support our Conservancy efforts and meet some wonderful new friends is by joining us for our annual fundraiser, the *“Toast to the Coast.”* Mark your calendars: our 2013 “Toast Event” is February 6th at the Boca Bay Pass Club. The venue is beautiful and the silent and live auctions will feature exciting activities, artwork and travel opportunities. Make your reservations soon to be part of the festivities!

LBC NEW MEMBERSHIP CHALLENGE: I ask you to join

our adventures by *renewing your annual membership* or becoming a *new member*. As you probably know, Lemon Bay Conservancy is a non-profit organization. All of our work is funded by memberships, donations, partnerships and grants. *Our goal this year is to double our membership!* Please use the enclosed form to send in your membership dues today. Then, take a few minutes to tell your friends and neighbors about the exciting work we have underway and encourage them to join us as well.

Sincerely,
Jim Cooper

Wildflower Preserve Update

The Wildflower Preserve trail network is now in place and ready for the new season! Colored trail arrows mark the four loop trails and informational signs have been placed at selected special interest points. A “trail map” brochure showing the full trail system is available at the parking lot kiosk and on our website.

Last January, a group of Wildflower volunteers went to the home of Sandra and Vern Wilson to dig up coontie tubers. The plants had outgrown the space around the family home and they called the LBC office to see if we might like to move some of the tubers to Wildflower. The transplant project has gone well and now over 30 new coontie plants can be seen emerging in the beds around the kiosk and near the butterfly habitat.

Special thanks to Phil Dakin, Bob Fowler and Eva Furner, who worked

thru the hot summer months to maintain the trail network, the bird observation area, and the kiosk plantings! In late September, they were joined by Lemon Bay High School Environmental Club students who spent an afternoon helping us cut Brazilian Pepper near Duckweed Pond.

In the butterfly habitat, dedicated volunteers Maura Qualls, Ruth Wilson and Jane Wallace continue to work regularly on maintenance and new plantings. The latest enhancements to the habitat include a new arbor to provide support for vines, 75 new plant identification markers and a 2’ by 3’ butterfly identification sign.

Just east of the butterfly area, work continues on the wildflower meadow project. Over the last few months, we have been working to reduce the grass cover in the meadow area. Following advice from

wildflower experts, our next steps will be raking the meadow in early November, distributing wildflower seeds, “rolling” the seeds with a turf roller to ensure good ground contact, and then covering the area with a light mulch to encourage germination. In the spring, we hope to see the start of an exciting growing season.

Much of the funding for the recent improvements at Wildflower has come from a \$5,000 grant received from the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program in December 2011. Grant funds were used for purchasing chainsaws and a weed trimmer, for buying the colored trail markers and posts, for printing the plant id signs and the

trail informational signs, for production of the trail map brochure, for creating the information display at the kiosk, and for seeds for the wildflower meadow. A huge **“thank you”** to the CHNEP for helping make Wildflower Preserve a wonderful place to visit and enjoy the beauty of our local environment!

Water Quality in the Wildflower Preserve Ponds



PHOTO: BILL DUNSON

Joe Goedkoop, Pam Neer, and Eva Furner conducting water sampling.

In July 2011, a group of Wildflower Preserve volunteers began regular water quality sampling on the six major ponds at the preserve. The sampling work is conducted using procedures and equipment provided as part of the University of Florida’s statewide Lake Watch program. Each month our volunteers launch kayaks into the ponds and collect samples to study total nitrogen, phosphorus, and chlorophyll levels.

If you’ve walked the trails in the preserve or listened to one of Dr. Bill Dunson’s presentations about

the property, you may recall that three of our ponds have heavy coverings of floating aquatic vegetation, specifically duckweed and azolla. In contrast, the other three ponds are relatively clear. The results from the sampling work show us that the water quality characteristics in these two sets of ponds are very different.

The results show that the three “clear” ponds have nutrient and chlorophyll levels that are within and sometimes above the ranges for similar Florida lakes and ponds that are categorized as “eutrophic.” Florida Lake Watch brochures tell

us that “A eutrophic waterbody is capable of producing and supporting an abundance of living organisms (*plants, fish and wildlife*).”

While the “clear” ponds have relatively high nutrient levels, the nutrient readings for our three duckweed-covered ponds are much higher. The readings vary over time, but total phosphorus levels in all three ponds are at least three times higher than the top phosphorus reading for a eutrophic waterbody, and total nitrogen readings are two to ten times the high-end nitrogen level for eutrophic waters. These very high nutrient loads are contributing to the excess surface vegetation growth on the ponds. That vegetation blocks sunlight to the lower levels of the ponds, reducing algae growth and leading to low dissolved oxygen levels that limit the ability of fish and other aquatic wildlife to survive in the ponds.

Improving water quality in our ponds over time will be beneficial not only to the Wildflower Preserve habitats, but also to Lemon Bay, because the ponds connect to one another and then feed into a drainage system that flows into Lemon Creek and from there into Lemon Bay. We are talking with the Southwest Florida Water Management District about long-range plans to restore habitats and improve overall water quality in the preserve. *continued on page 4*

For the near term, we have recently received approval from the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program (CHNEP) on a grant request to initiate water quality improvement work at the pond that we have named Duckweed Pond. This half-acre pond sits at the southeast corner of the preserve and has the highest nutrient levels among the major preserve ponds. We believe that the very high nitrogen and phosphorus levels are the result of this pond receiving treated effluent from a nearby sewage treatment plant when Wildflower was a golf course. *(The golf course used the high-nutrient water in fertilizing the fairways and greens.)*

When we study the month-by-month water quality data for Duckweed Pond, we see a declining trend in total phosphorus readings in the pond, but no similar pattern for the total nitrogen readings. The chlorophyll readings tell us the levels of algae in the water column. Chlorophyll spiked briefly late last winter suggesting that more algae may have been able to grow when the duckweed cover was lighter or when winds pushed the duckweed to one side of the pond and allowed more light to the water column.

A key idea with the new CHNEP grant is to use the duckweed produced by the high-nutrient water as a tool to help us reduce the pond nutrient loads. Studies conducted at North Carolina State and other venues have shown that duckweed is very good at absorbing nutrients and also that it re-grows very quickly when “harvested.” Today, when the duckweed dies in the pond, it is sinking to the pond bottom and returning some of the nutrients it had absorbed to the water. Using grant funding, we are initiating a project to use a “trash” pump to

periodically suction the duckweed out of the pond. By doing this on a regular basis, we anticipate that we will begin to reduce the nutrient levels in the pond. *(As an added benefit, the dried duckweed may serve as an effective fertilizer and mulch in some of our planting work elsewhere in the preserve.)*

Other elements of the new CHNEP grant funding include installing a

solar-powered aerator to improve oxygen levels in the pond, using a riser system to restrict water flow out of the pond, and adding two floating plant islands to further reduce nutrient levels.

We are always looking for new volunteers to help us with our water sampling and water quality work. – Please give the office a call if you’d be willing to help!

Tarpon Research Program



Lew Hastings and JoEllen King hauling in the net.

The juvenile tarpon research initiative at Wildflower Preserve officially kicked off in September when DNA samples were taken from 43 tarpon netted in Lemon Creek. Lemon Bay Conservancy is partnering with Mote Marine and the Bonefish and Tarpon Trust on a two year study of tarpon in the creek system at Wildflower. Dr. Aaron Adams, Senior Scientist at Mote Marine, is leading the project. University of Florida graduate student JoEllen King is coordinating the monthly fish sampling work and data analysis.

Development of coastal areas has caused many mangrove backwaters like Lemon Creek to be lost or degraded. That’s a major concern



Scanning a tagged tarpon.

because these protected mangrove areas play a very important role in the life cycle of tarpon and many other species. Tarpon are born 100 miles out in the Gulf of Mexico. By instinct, the tiny fish (*called leptocephalus larvae*) find their way back to the shoreline and into protected creeks and waterways. In these backwaters, the young tarpon feed and grow for about two years

before heading to more open waters. When the tarpon are netted for the study, they are quickly placed in a holding tank. Each fish is measured and a DNA sample is taken. For tarpon over 19 cm in length, a small RFID (*radio frequency ID*) tag is inserted into the fish. These tags, similar to those used for pets, provide a unique identifying code for each individual tarpon. As soon as the analysis work is complete, the young fish are quickly returned unharmed to the creek.

The objectives for the study are to gain an understanding of the tarpon populations in the creek and to learn how many juveniles leave the creek to return to Lemon Bay and more open waters. With the cooperation of the Lemon Bay Golf Course, an RFID antenna has been mounted above Lemon Creek near the point where it meets the bay. The antenna and a linked recording system will pickup the RFID signals of passing tarpon and log that information for the study.

Interested in learning more? Please join us on Wednesday, January 17, 2013, at 3 pm, at the Boca Grande Community Center. Dr. Adams will make a presentation about the tarpon life cycle and this project.

If you would like to assist with this initiative by donating toward project funding or assisting with fish sampling, please call the LBC office at 941-830-8922.

2013 Toast to the Coast

Lemon Bay Conservancy will hold our annual fund-raising gala, **Toast to the Coast**, on **Wednesday, February 6, 2013 from**

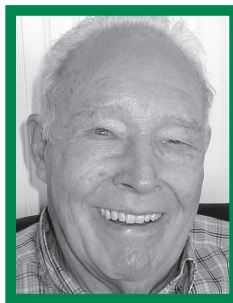
6-9 p.m. on the lawn of the beautiful **Boca Bay Pass Club**. Among this year's offerings during the live auctions will be trips to the Sonoma California wine country, cooking classes in New Orleans and tickets to the Masters' golf tournament. The silent auction will provide a host of unique items donated by our generous supporters that you will not want to miss!

Reservations are available through the Conservancy office at 941-830-8922. The ticket price of \$125 per person includes fabulous food stations, delicious desserts, and an open bar. Credit cards are accepted.

We hope you will join us in our efforts to support the important programs sponsored by Lemon Bay Conservancy. As always, our mission is to preserve and protect the beautiful coastal environment that is our home. *Be a part of it - join us on February 6th!*

New Board Member

Thor Johnson is the newest member of our Lemon Bay Conservancy board of directors. Thor was born in Sycamore, Illinois and served in the US Navy from 1945 thru 1947. He holds a Bachelor of Engineering degree from Cornell University where he met Blanche, his wife of 61 years. Following a twenty-six year career with Sun Oil Company, with



Thor Johnson

assignments in dozens of locations, he retired in 1978 to form his own electronic sales company. Discovering Boca Grande in 1998, he closed the company and retired to "the best place we ever lived." His island interests include serving on the Bridge Authority (2008-2012), co-chairing the annual Christmas and Spring Harry Chapin Food Drives on the island, and founding "The Taste of Boca Grande" annual fund-raiser for the Harry Chapin Food Bank."

Upcoming Nature Walks and Events

Charlotte Harbor Nature Festival, Saturday, November 17:

Once again this year, the Lemon Bay Conservancy will be participating in the fun, informative and free Charlotte Harbor Nature Festival sponsored by the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program. The Nature Festival is scheduled from 10 am to 3 pm on Saturday, November 17th, at the Charlotte Sports Park. The festival grounds are located behind the stadium where the Tampa Bay Rays play spring training, at 2300 El Jobean Rd./S.R. 776, in Port Charlotte. The festival includes exhibits by local environmental organizations, nature walks in nearby Tippecanoe Environmental Park, the Mote Marine Laboratory mobile exhibit with touch tanks, native plant sales, raffles, music and a silent auction. The Children's Discovery Zone will offer games and activities, including a fossil dig, and children will receive a free fishing pole while supplies last. Food and refreshments will be available for purchase.

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Stop by to see us at the LBC booth during your visit to the festival!

Wildflower Preserve Open House, Saturday, December 8:

To kick-off the new season at Wildflower Preserve we invite you to join us for an “Open House” on December 8th from 9 am to 2 pm. Our trail guides will be offering a series of short trail walks throughout the day to introduce you to the new trail network and the different habitats within the preserve. A special “Introduction to Dragonflies” walk will be offered at 10:30 am. For visitors who may have difficulty walking the trails, Thoroughbred Golf Carts will be providing two golf carts for the day to allow us to offer special cart tours of the preserve. LBC members may call the office at 941-830-8922 between now and December 5th to request reserved seats for one of the golf cart tours.

The Men’s Garden Club of Englewood, the CHNEP, the Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center, and the Coastal Wildlife Club are among the groups who will have informational booths at the event. Volunteers from LBHS Project Graduation will have food and drinks available for purchase.

Wildflower Preserve is located on the Cape Haze peninsula, at the southeast corner of the Gasparilla Pines Boulevard and Placida Road (Hwy 775) intersection. The parking lot is at 3120 Gasparilla Pines Boulevard. Please visit the preserve on December 8th and see all the exciting improvements we have underway!

Wildflower Preserve Nature Walks: During “the season,” Dr. Bill Dunson and our team of nature guides will again be offering two types of free, public nature walks.

All walks will begin at 9 am at the Wildflower Preserve parking lot. Reservations are not needed. Except as noted, all walks are on Saturday mornings.

“**Ecology of Wildflower**” walks will focus on the plants, animals and habitats within Wildflower Preserve.

Scheduled dates:

- **Nov. 10, 2012**
- **Dec. 1, 2012**
- **Dec. 15, 2012**
- **Jan. 12, 2013**
- **Feb. 9, 2013**
- **Mar. 2, 2013**

“**Exploring Wildflower and Amberjack**” walks will be longer hikes that take visitors between Wildflower and adjacent Amberjack Environmental Park, managed by Charlotte County. These walks will include discussion of the varying habitat types visible on the two properties.

Scheduled dates:

- **Dec. 29, 2012**
- **Jan. 26, 2013**
- **Feb. 22, 2013 (Friday)**
- **March 16, 2013**

In addition to these public walks, special walks for groups and organizations can be arranged. Please call the office if you’d like to discuss scheduling.

Each visit to Wildflower provides new adventures, so we invite you to join us for several walks in the months ahead!

Wildflower Preserve Self-Guided Tours: While the preserve is open to the public only as part of scheduled walks and events, Lemon Bay Conservancy members may visit the preserve daily for self-guided walks. Copies of the preserve trail map are available at the kiosk by the

parking lot and on the LBC website. Please place your LBC membership card on your car’s dashboard to identify your vehicle as belonging to an authorized visitor.

Lemon Bay Conservancy Annual Meeting, January 15:

The Conservancy’s annual meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, January 15, 2013 at Cedar Point Park. The business meeting begins at 7:00 pm, with refreshments available at 6:30 pm. A speaker will follow the business meeting.

Volunteer Opportunities

While we’ve made tremendous progress at Wildflower, we still have many new projects we want to undertake and lots of continuing maintenance to handle. Our seasonal volunteer work parties at the preserve are launching on October 29th. Volunteers will meet at the Wildflower Preserve parking lot at 8 am every Monday and Wednesday morning thru March. Work sessions usually last for two hours. Projects include planting, clearing, bench building, water sampling, plant and wildlife inventories, mulching, mowing, weeding, and removing invasive vegetation. Call the office if you have questions. Or, just grab a hat and your work gloves and join us at the preserve! It’s fun and good exercise!

We are also looking for volunteers to help us with LBC office operations, with the tarpon research project, with our marketing activities, and with expanding our use of social media. *If you’d like to help, please call us at 941-830-8922 to discuss volunteer opportunities.*

2013 Membership Drive

Please take a few minutes today to send us your 2013 membership enrollment and payment. You can renew your membership online on our website or use the membership form on the back page of this newsletter. You can also call our office at 941-830-8922 to contribute.

Current members: Please pass this newsletter around to your friends and invite them to join our efforts.

New members: Your membership will be effective as soon as your membership payment is received and will continue thru year-end 2013. This will allow you to

immediately begin enjoying the membership benefit of daily access to Wildflower Preserve.

As you can see from this newsletter, we have many important projects underway. Your membership will help us continue to advance our work on preserving and enhancing our local environment!

Birding at Wildflower Preserve

On any given day at Wildflower Preserve, you won't see 109 different species of birds. In fact, if you look and listen carefully as you walk the preserve trails, you're more likely to identify about 25 to 30 bird species. So why did we start this article with "109" species? Because that's the number of different species that our birding volunteers have recorded in our first fifteen months of bird surveys at the preserve, and that's an exciting number for one site!

At the preserve, the "yellow" trail provides good opportunities to see a variety of birds. The trail begins at Verna's Pond where Anhingas dry their wings on the floating logs and Palm Warblers and Common Yellowthroats feed in the brush along the banks. In January, the Purple Martins should return to the martin house to build nests during the spring.

Leaving Verna's Pond, the yellow trail meanders through the woods. Bird sightings there include Northern Mockingbirds, Blue Jays, Catbirds, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Downy Woodpeckers and Carolina Wrens. All are common winter residents in the preserve. When the trail reaches Moorhen Pond, you're likely



Above: Common Gallinule adult with chicks.

to find Common Gallinules (*aka Moorhens*), a variety of egrets and herons, and sometimes ducks. At the Birders Woodland, wintering Indigo Buntings may be among the birds at the feeders and the Live Oaks are often full of warblers and vireos.

We're working on a bird checklist for Wildflower Preserve that will identify species seen by season and the frequency of sightings. If you'd like to join the monthly bird survey group at Wildflower or help us compile the species list, please give us a call at the LBC office.





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MY CONTRIBUTION TO LEMON BAY CONSERVANCY

We invite you to support the Lemon Bay Conservancy's efforts to protect the inherent beauty of southwest Florida by becoming a member or making a donation to our Land Acquisition Fund. Thanks for your consideration and for your concern for the preservation of our natural heritage.

LEMON BAY CONSERVANCY, INC. / www.lemonbayconservancy.org Membership Application / Donation Form

Name _____ Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____ Telephone (_____) _____

e-mail address _____ Check this box to allow us to send future correspondence by e-mail

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Yes, I would like to contribute toward preserving native wildlife habitat and open lands, as well as help protect Florida's threatened and endangered animal and plant life.

- | | | | |
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**You can also join and/or make your contribution on-line at www.lemonbayconservancy.org
or by calling our office at 941-830-8922**

Thank you for your support. It is greatly appreciated!

LBC is a 501(c)(3) Non-Profit. Contributions are, in general, tax deductible. Please consult your tax professional if you have questions

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