



FRIENDS OF OSCAR SCHERER PARK UPDATE

SPRING 2025

NEWS • PROGRAMS • EVENTS • ANNOUNCEMENTS

UPDATE IN BRIEF

- Join the Park's 36th Annual Earth Day Celebration from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday, April 19th. (Pg 3)
- Over 400 participated in January's 25th Annual Scrub Jay 5K and Scramble 10K.
- Road work on the park's main drive is due to begin in March - April.
- The Bald eagles are actively nesting in the Park.
- Nature Center Tidbits (Pg 5)
- Scrub-Jay Fun Facts (Pg 6)
- Volunteer Luncheon (Pg 7)
- Park View Frame (Pg 8)



DID YOU KNOW?



Did you know? Oscar Scherer State Park is home to one of Florida's most iconic residents—the bald eagle! These majestic birds have made their nests in the park for many years, offering visitors a rare opportunity to see them in their natural habitat.

Bald eagles are easily recognizable with their white heads and tails, contrasting with their dark brown bodies. As powerful birds of prey, they play a vital role in the ecosystem, often hunting fish from the park's freshwater streams and Sarasota Bay. Oscar Scherer provides the perfect environment for them, with its mix of tall trees and open waters.

The park is particularly known for being a successful bald eagle nesting site, especially during the winter months when the eagles build their nests high in the trees. For those visiting, the South Creek Trail offers great opportunities for spotting eagles, either perched majestically on branches or soaring above the park. If you're lucky, you may even spot an eagle with its young in tow, as the park is an important nesting site.

The presence of bald eagles in Oscar Scherer is not just a remarkable wildlife sighting, but a sign of the park's healthy environment. Conservation efforts have ensured that the eagles have a safe place to thrive. For the best chance to see them, plan your visit during early mornings or late afternoons, when they're most active. Oscar Scherer State Park is truly a hidden gem for birdwatchers and wildlife enthusiasts alike!



Manager's Message

Matt Kruse
Park Manager

Hello Friends of Oscar Scherer Park,

As always, I want to thank you for your dedication and commitment to the park. I greatly appreciate the support provided by our devoted officers. Recently the Friends of Oscar Scherer Park held the 25th annual Scrub jay 5K and 10K Scramble on Saturday January 25th, 2025. Although, the day of the event started with cold temperatures, runners showed their determination by showing up in large numbers to run. The event was a great success with over 400 runners participating between the two races. The course for the race is always popular with runners for its scenic views and challenging landscape. I hope you will be able to join us for next year's race. If running is not for you, please consider volunteering to help with the race. We can always use your help with course directors and setup.

If you have never been to Oscar Scherer State Park or it has been a while since you last visited. I invite you to discover or rediscover Oscar Scherer State Park. Please plan a visit to the park where you can spring into serenity and discover the park's natural resources. As the warmth of spring spreads across the Florida landscape, Oscar Scherer State Park emerges as a vibrant haven for nature enthusiasts. With its lush pine flatwoods, serene waterways, and a diverse array of wildlife, this gem of a park offers a refreshing escape from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. Springtime brings a special magic to Oscar Scherer, making it the perfect destination for a rejuvenating outdoor adventure.

(Continued on page 4)

VOLUNTEERS

Are you interested in helping out with the operations of a state park? Florida State Parks have many volunteer opportunities, day volunteer positions and residential positions.

Some examples of the volunteer opportunities include: Nature Center host, Ranger Station assistant, field worker, trail maintenance, butterfly gardening, park maintenance, campground hosts, specialty skills worker, and many others. There is something for everyone; all skill levels and abilities are welcomed and encouraged. Our winter seasonal events and programs are kicking off and are al- ways in need of extra volunteers.

We have a group of volunteers that work strictly on Mondays and/or Wednesdays from 8 am to noon on various tasks. They split wood, work on trails, carpentry, mowing and trimming, and whatever else needs to be done for the day. A great way to meet new friends!

Did you know that campground hosts get a campsite for up to 4 months at no charge, in exchange for your volunteering 24 hours per week? We're currently in need of campground hosts for the months of June thru November.

If you are interested in volunteering, please complete an online volunteer application at: <https://www.floridastateparks.org/get-involved/volunteer>.

If you would like more information on volunteer opportunities, please feel free to contact Jamie Butler, Park Services Specialist, at (941) 882-7219 or e-mail at Jamie.Butler@floridadep.gov

“Volunteers are not paid – not because they are worthless, but because they are PRICELESS.”

***Thank you to all the wonderful volunteers at
Oscar Scherer State Park!***

36th Annual Earth Day Festival

Oscar Scherer's 36th Annual Earth Day Festival from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday, April 19th will be welcoming visitors to celebrate and honor the earth, and learn ways to protect nature.



This event strives to bring awareness of the conservation, preservation and the importance of protecting our planet. This year's Global Earth Day Theme is "Our Power, Our Planet." Narrated tram tours will be available and guided hikes with knowledgeable interpreters will be offered where you can learn about the flora and fauna in the natural habitats that make up Oscar Scherer State Park.

The photo contest exhibit will be on display and "People's Choice" will be open for voting in the Nature Center. Plenty of kids activities and games will be offered. There will be many family friendly booths, exhibitors and food vendors. OneBlood donation mobile will also be on site. A scavenger hunt will be a fun activity based on the Earth Day theme.

— Regular park entry fees apply —



Manager's Message (continued from page 2)

The awakening landscape during spring in Oscar Scherer is a symphony of colors and sounds. The park's signature scrub jays, Florida's only endemic bird, are particularly active during this season, their distinctive calls echoing through the scrubby flatwoods. Wildflowers begin to bloom, painting the landscape with splashes of vibrant colors, from the delicate white blossoms of the sand live oaks to the bright yellows of coreopsis. The awakening flora attracts a flurry of pollinators, creating a lively buzz of activity.

Oscar Scherer has activities for every nature lover. If you enjoy hiking and biking you may want to explore the park's 15 miles of scenic trails, which wind through diverse habitats. The Yellow Trail, a popular choice, offers glimpses of the park's natural beauty. Springtime mild temperatures make hiking and biking particularly enjoyable. Paddle in a canoe or kayak along the tranquil South Creek, a blackwater stream that meanders through the park. Keep an eye out for turtles, alligators, and wading birds as you glide through the calm waters. The park is also a birdwatcher's paradise, especially during migration season.



Spring brings an influx of migratory birds, alongside the park's resident species. Look for bald eagles, ospreys, and, of course, the iconic Florida scrub jay. Enjoy a leisurely picnic in one of the park's designated areas, surrounded by the sights and sounds of nature. The peaceful atmosphere provides the perfect setting for relaxation and rejuvenation. Experience the park's beauty overnight by camping in one of its well-maintained campsites. The cool spring nights are ideal for stargazing and enjoying the tranquility of the wilderness.

No visit to Oscar Scherer is complete without encountering the Florida Scrub-Jay. This charismatic bird is a threatened species, and the park provides crucial habitat for its survival. Spring is a critical time for scrub-jays as they are nesting and raising young. Observe their behavior from a respectful distance and learn about the park's efforts to protect these fascinating birds.

Tips for Your Spring Visit:

- *Plan Ahead: Reservations are recommended for camping.*
- *Bring Essentials: Pack sunscreen, insect repellent, a hat, and plenty of water.*
- *Respect Wildlife: Observe animals from a safe distance and avoid feeding them.*
- *Check the Weather: Florida weather can be unpredictable, so check the forecast before your visit.*
- *Enjoy the Moment: Take time to appreciate the natural beauty and tranquility of Oscar Scherer State Park.*

Although programs for the season are slowing down, it's not too late to attend a program or guided tour. Please pick up a program guide at the ranger station. There are plenty of selections to spark your interest. If you haven't made plans yet, be sure to mark your calendars for Saturday, April 19th for our Earth Day

Celebration. There will be lots of food, fun, and activities for the entire family. Oscar Scherer State Park in spring is a true testament to the beauty and diversity of Florida's natural environment. Whether you are seeking adventure, relaxation, or simply a connection with nature, this park offers an unforgettable experience. So, pack your bags and spring into serenity at Oscar Scherer State Park.



NATURE CENTER TIDBITS

I Use Algae to Fuel My Car

This is not a new biofuel phenomenon. Mother nature has been using algae to make our natural gas and crude oil for millions of years. We just don't realize it because we're used to saying our gasoline and plastic products come from fossil fuels, whatever those are.

In the Oscar Scherer State Park nature center, we have hands-on fossil exhibits and fossils in show cases for scout groups, school groups, church groups, local ethnic clubs, HOA groups and regular visitors to view and learn from.

Algae Skeletons Eliminate Fleas



One item on display is a two-inch cube of diatomaceous earth. I purchased it at Windley Key Fossil Reef Geological State Park in the Florida Keys. The historical site was once a quarry for limestone building blocks.

The stored sun's energy in the decayed algae (diatoms) is created by heat and pressure over millions of years. Natural gas is in the top of pockets deep in the earth, and crude oil is beneath the natural gas. Diatomaceous earth is the silica skeletons of diatoms. Today, we use diatomaceous earth in pool filters and sometimes to rid our rugs of fleas.

Magnified photo of diatoms compliments of photomacrography.com

Bituminous, Anthracite, Lignite

Since we're talking about fossil fuels, another fossil on display is a 6 by 7-inch lump of jet-black coal. Three main types of coal are bituminous, anthracite and lignite. Most people who come into the nature center can't identify it. I can because in the 50s I had to shovel it into our furnace in the basement every morning. Now coal is used around the world mostly for producing electricity via steam generators.

Unlike natural gas and crude oil, coal was created from massive swamps filled with a variety of plant life. It is found much closer to the earth's surface. If you've been to Ireland, you know about heating with peat, which is the first stage of creating coal. What coal and crude oil have in common is being produced by millions of years of heat and pressure from the rock, oceans, aquifers and soils above them.

Be Amazed!

Imagine the amount of plant life and microscopic sea creatures it took to produce the fuel for millions of cars and to electrify millions of houses and factories for hundreds of years with no end of the supply in sight.

Visit our nature center and learn hundreds of bits of information about Florida's flora and fauna. The park has highly knowledgeable rangers and some nature center volunteers are Florida Master Naturalists or self-taught nature enthusiasts. All are available to answer questions, make presentations, lead tram rides, help with bird watching, lead kayak tours, and give guided walks.

--Joel Robbins, Director of OSSP Nature Center

SCRUB-JAY FUN FACTS

Description & Taxonomy

- Florida Scrub-Jays are about 9.8" to 11.8" long and weigh about 2 3/4 ounces.
- Similar in size and shape to the Northern Mockingbird.
- Pale blue overall with pale grey breast and back and has a blue "bib" and white throat and forehead.
- The genders of Florida scrub-jays have identical plumage, and males average only slightly larger than females. Only the female has a distinct "hiccup" call.

Its taxonomic name is *Aphelocoma coerulescens*

Aphelocoma is the name for a genus of New World jays that includes scrub jays and their relatives. The name comes from the Latinized Ancient Greek words *apheles*-meaning "simple" and *-coma* meaning "hair". This is a reference to the lack of a crest, stripes or bands in the feathers of these birds, compared to other jays.

The specific term (*coerulescens*) is a Latin word *caeruleus* meaning "sky blue" with the ending *-escens* signifying "beginning of" or "becoming".



Our featured scrub-jay this quarter is youngster AS-AF (Azure/Silver-Azure/Flesh). She was hatched sometime in April of 2024 in the LGCY family to Droop-Wing and PS-PF. She has two siblings: HS-PF and BS-AF. This family can often be viewed by the Legacy Bike Trail at the eastern end of the park. AS-AF was determined to be a female when she was recently observed making a distinctive "hiccup" call.

<https://friendsofoscarscherer.com/adopt-a-scrubjay/>



Volunteer Luncheon

The Park Staff of Oscar Scherer Park held a volunteer luncheon on Wednesday March 12 to show their appreciation for all work and other duties the volunteers perform. Their work assists the park staff in maintaining the park in a pristine and beautiful condition. The luncheon was attended by approximately 50 volunteers. The luncheon was catered by Sonny's BBQ located in Sarasota. This was the first luncheon catered by a local business and was a big hit for the volunteers. The luncheon consisted of the famous Sonny's BBQ pork, sliced turkey, baked beans, coleslaw, iced tea and lemonade. A big thank you to Volunteer Coordinator Jamie Butler and Laurie Johnson for their help in coordinating the luncheon.

After the meal, awards were presented out to the following to the following volunteers:

Deb Murray – Statewide Adult Volunteer Greener Initiative category

Darlene Newton – 500 hours

Rita Budig – 1,000 hours

Anne Heuer – 2,000 hours

Joe Krol – 5,000 hours

Bruce Lawrence – 5,000 hours

Dick Wirey – 8,000 hours

Gary Wehnes – 8,000 hours

Friends of Oscar Scherer Park - Volunteers

An industrious team of volunteers is an integral part of ensuring that Oscar Scherer State Park is maintained in peak condition. These volunteers do a variety of tasks and administrative duties dedicated to supporting the park in its undertaking to provide a natural environment of learning and pleasure for all: campers, day visitors, adults and children, naturalists, and visiting groups such as school children and scouts.

Our volunteer's projects include:

- General "hands on" maintenance projects, including providing firewood for campers.
- Preserving and improving the 15 miles of hiking trails and updating trail markers.
- Conserving the habitat of the Florida Scrub-jay.
- Maintaining 106 campsites and related facilities through the Florida Campground Host Program.
- Presenting nature and outreach programs; including bird walks and nature strolls, to provide a deeper understanding of the park's natural ecosystem.
- Removing invasive exotic plants, encourage Florida native plant gardening, and maintaining the butterfly gardens.

<https://friendsofoscarscherer.com/volunteers/>



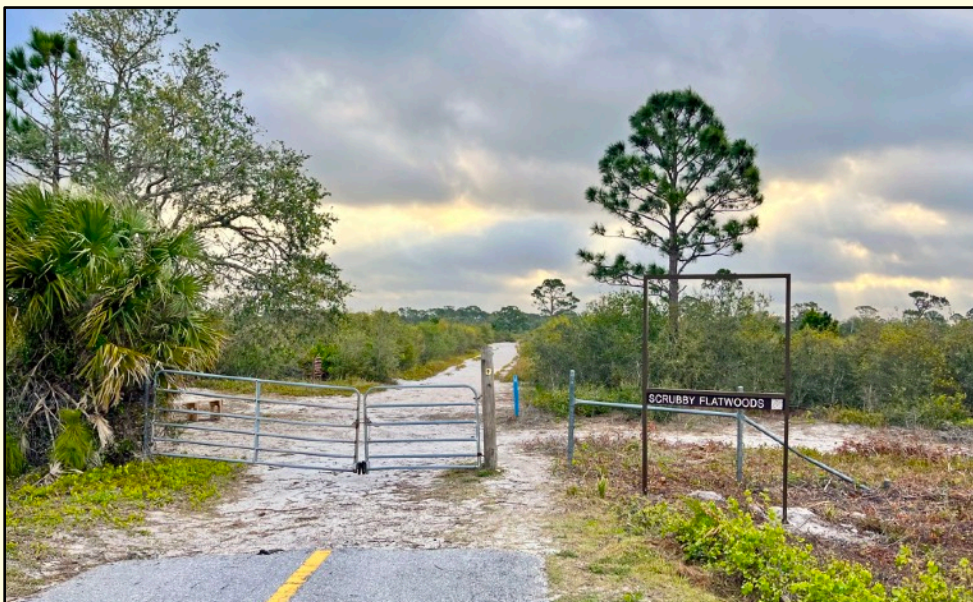
Community News

Friends of the Legacy Trail Framed View

As many of you know, the multi-use Legacy Trail runs north-south right through Oscar Scherer State Park. The trail is currently about 12.5 miles long on a scenic CSX railroad corridor from Center Road in Venice to just below Clark Road in Sarasota. The trail bisects the park through the scrubby flatwoods ecosystem that is home to the majority of the park's scrub-jays. The scrub-jays are frequently observed flying from one side of the trail to the other and foraging in the scrubby berm areas. The berms of the trail through the park's scrub areas are kept clear of tall foliage to make it scrub-jay friendly and remove tall trees that can harbor scrub-jay predators.



The Friends of the Legacy Trail recently installed an interpretive “view frame” at the intersection of the park's yellow trail and the Legacy Trail. The open frame looks east into prime scrubby flatwoods, and there is a QR code on the sign that links to an excellent interpretive webpage about the flora and fauna of the scrubby flatwoods at Oscar Scherer. The link is here: <https://friendsofthelegacytrail.org/scrubbyflatwoods/>



The Oscar Scherer State Park Florida Scrub-Jay Adoption Program is your opportunity to directly support our efforts to protect and preserve the threatened Florida Scrub-Jay population for current and future generations.



Scan me to adopt your Scrub-Jay online!



Or go to: <https://friendsofoscarscherer.com/adopt-a-scrubjay/>



Our Nature Center

The nature center offers interactive ways to learn about park programs, history and wildlife.

Oscar Scherer's interpretive nature center is located adjacent to Lake Osprey and a large picnic area or a short walk over the bridge from the campground.

Stop in to chat with one of our wonderful volunteers to learn more. Hours may vary so contact the park at 941-483-5956 for current hours. The public hours are made possible by volunteers.



Meet the Friends' Directors & Officers (March 2025)

President - Ron Newton
 Vice President - Jim Rogers
 Secretary - Dave Wankowski
 Treasurer - Anne Heuer

Robert Frank
 Joel Robbins
 Julie Wankowski

Meet the Park's Staff (March 2025)

Park Manager – Matt Kruse
 Assistant Park Manager – Chris Tretter
 Administrative Assistant – Alyssa Rothstein
 Park Services Specialist – Jamie Butler
 Services Specialist – Jon Hunter
 Park Ranger – Donnie Berube
 Park Ranger – Colin Ott

Park Ranger – Glenn Mitchell
 Park Ranger – Morgen Coe
 Park Ranger – Jerry Bodnar OPS
 ROAR AmeriCorps – Laurie Johnson
 AmeriCorps ANT Member – Ibrahim Sharif
 AmeriCorps ANT Member – Ezra Townsend