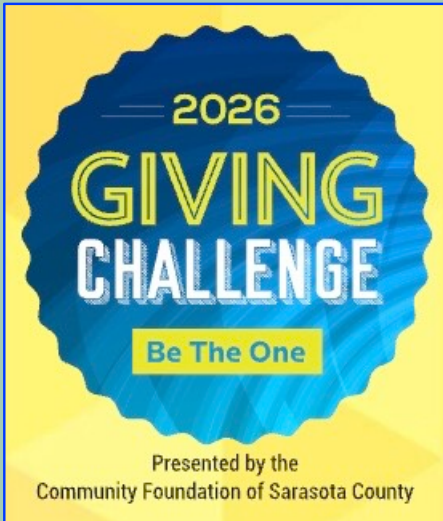


UPDATE IN BRIEF

- Did You Know (Pg 1 & 4)
- Manager's Message (Pg 2-3)
- Volunteers (Pg 2 & 8)
- 2026 Giving Challenge (Pg 5)



- Upcoming Events (Pg 6)
- Park News (Pg 7)
- Eagle Watch at the Park (Pg 9)
- Nature Center Tidbits (Pg 10-11)
- Scrub-Jay Fun Facts (Pg 12)
- Park Staff & Friends Board (Pg 13)



DID YOU KNOW...

...About the Echo Moth?
(*Seirarctia echo*)

One of the fastest caterpillars in Florida lives quietly among the trails of Oscar Scherer State Park—and plays a tiny but powerful role in the ecosystem?

The echo moth caterpillar may look soft and fuzzy, but it moves with surprising speed, often darting across sandy paths like it's on a mission. These caterpillars usually appear in late winter through spring in Florida, sometimes in bursts where dozens seem to show up at once.



Before you spot them racing across a trail, they're often hiding in plain sight—tucked under leaf litter, nestled beneath palmetto fronds, or resting low on the plants they feed on. Their world is close to the ground, a quiet layer most hikers step right past.

(Continued on page 4)



Manager's Message

Matt Kruse
Park Manager

Greetings, Friends of Oscar Scherer Park:

Welcome to a spectacular spring season at Oscar Scherer State Park!

As the air warms and the landscape transforms, there is a distinct energy moving through our scrub habitat. We are fresh off the heels of an incredibly successful Scrub-jay Festival, and I want to personally thank the over 500 guests who joined us to celebrate Florida's only endemic bird. It was a joy to see so many people connecting with the unique "scrub" environment we work so hard to protect.

Nature in Transition

Spring is truly the best time to witness the circle of life in the park. If you head out on the Green Trail, keep your binoculars ready—our juvenile Bald Eagles are officially fledged. Watching these majestic birds take their first clumsy, courageous flights is a sight you won't soon forget. Don't wait too long, they will be heading north soon.



Meanwhile, our iconic Florida Scrub-jays are deep into nesting season. You might spot them caching acorns or keeping a watchful eye on their territory. And for the early birds and night owls among you, listen for the deep, resonant hooting of Great Horned Owls echoing through the pines during the dawn and dusk hours.

(Continued on the next page)

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. Summertime is approaching and we're in need of camp hosts and skilled trades for maintenance.

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. It is a great way to meet new friends!

Did you know that campground hosts get a campsite for up to 16 weeks at no charge, in exchange for your volunteering 24 hours per week?

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

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 don't get paid, not because they're worthless, but because they're priceless." – Sherry Anderson

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

Manager's Message (continued from page 2)

Explore and Relax

The wildflowers are currently in bloom, splashing color across the trails and providing a feast for our local pollinators. While our formal interpretive programs are winding down for the season, the park remains a premier destination for a self-guided adventure:

- Hit the Trails: Lace up your boots for a day hike through our diverse ecosystems.
- Cast a Line: Spring is a fantastic time to drop a fishing line into the serene waters of Lake Osprey or along the banks of South Creek.
- Get Your Bearings: Don't forget to stop by the Ranger Station to say hello and pick up a trail map before you head out.

Mark Your Calendars: Trails Day 2026

We have a major celebration coming up! Please join us for Trails Day on Saturday, April 25th, from 8:30 AM to 5:00 PM. It's a day dedicated to the paths that connect us to nature, and we have a wonderful lineup of activities planned for all ages.



A Heartfelt Thank You

None of what we do would be possible without the unwavering dedication of the Friends of Oscar Scherer Park. Their continued support provides the resources and volunteer spirit that keep this park thriving. When you see a member of the Friends group, please join me in thanking them for their service.

If you can't make it out for Trails Day, please make it a priority to visit us whenever you can. I can personally assure you that a day spent at Oscar Scherer is a day well spent, you won't be disappointed.

See you on the trails,

Matthew Kruse, Park Manager, Oscar Scherer State Park

Did you know (continued from page 1)

About the Echo Moth:



Their life cycle moves quickly. After hatching, the caterpillar stage lasts about 2 to 4 weeks, depending on temperature and food availability. Then they form a cocoon, entering the pupal stage for another 1 to 2 weeks before emerging as adult moths. In just about a month, they transform completely—nature’s version of a rapid costume change.

And they’re not just passing through. As caterpillars, they help control plant growth and recycle nutrients back into the soil. As moths, they may assist with pollination and become part of the food web, supporting birds and other wildlife.

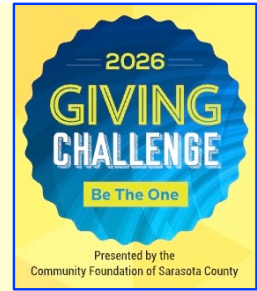
Their bright orange, black, and yellow coloring is a warning flag to predators, signaling that they may be toxic from the plants they eat. Beautiful, bold, and a little bit untouchable.



So next time you’re at Oscar Scherer, look down. That quick flash of color might not be a leaf—it’s a tiny, fast-moving thread in Florida’s wild tapestry, doing its part before disappearing into wings.

(By Laurie Johnson, Park Ranger)

Giving Challenge 2026 Invitation to Support - Be The One!



Hello, Friends of Oscar Scherer Park:

Oscar Scherer State Park is a treasured place for wildlife, recreation, and community connection. With your help, we can continue to protect and enhance this special space for everyone.

The Giving Challenge is an exciting 24-hour online giving event that brings together approximately seven hundred nonprofit organizations and thousands of generous donors across Sarasota, Manatee, Charlotte, and DeSoto counties. Since 2012, it has generated over \$92 million in unrestricted funding for local nonprofits. This remarkable event is hosted by the Community Foundation of Sarasota County, with support from The Patterson Foundation.

Our History

In previous years, the Friends of Oscar Scherer State Park have been honored to receive up to \$8,000 through the Giving Challenge. Donations to the Friends directly support the Park, the funds are used to complete projects and enhancements that would otherwise not be possible. Some examples of projects that the Friends have supported in the past are listed below:

- Create an accessible to all path around Lake Osprey, partially paved.
- Construct a pier with safety rail, 200' long by 8' wide for fishing on the lake.
- Create a littoral shelf around Lake Osprey - on each side of the swimming and beach area bumping it out behind fishing pier.
- Renourish Lake Osprey beach with sand and repair or rebuild the retaining wall.
- Repair and update of the screen room annex at the Nature Center for volunteers, campers and visitors to use.

Save the Date and Join Us

Please mark your calendars for April 15–16. For just 24 hours, you can help make a real difference for Oscar Scherer Park.

When our community comes together, every gift—no matter the size—creates lasting impact. Thank you in advance for donating, sharing, engaging, and helping to make Oscar Scherer State Park an even better place.

How to Donate

1. Visit www.GivingChallenge.org during the Giving Challenge:
(Wednesday, April 15, 2026, at 12:00 PM through Thursday, April 16, 2026, at 11:59:59 AM)
2. Search for Friends of Oscar Scherer
3. Make your donation using a credit or debit card!



Double your donation impact!

To strengthen giving during the 2026 Giving Challenge (April 15-16), The Patterson Foundation (TPF) will provide a 1:1 match for all unique donations, up to \$100 per donor, per organization made online with a credit or debit card. That means that a \$100 donation becomes \$200!

There is no limit to the number of individual matches from unique donors a nonprofit organization can receive during the 2026 Giving Challenge.

*Thank You,
The Friends of Oscar Scherer Park*



Upcoming Events

Celebrate Trails Day at Oscar Scherer State Park!

Saturday, April 25, 2026

8:30 AM to 5:00 PM



Hosted by the Friends of Oscar Scherer Park

Come celebrate the trails at Oscar Scherer State Park! Join us at the Nature Center for trail-specific scavenger hunts with prizes, a fundraising raffle, and nature education!



Celebrate
Trails
Day
powered by rails to trails conservancy



CONTACT:
lauren.fosp@gmail.com

News From the Park



Florida Scrub-Jay Festival a Success

Over 500 visitors attended this event on March 21st at the park to learn about and celebrate Florida's only



District 4 Employee of the Month

Congratulations to Alyssa Rothstein, District 4's employee of the month for January 2026! As an administrative professional at Oscar Scherer State Park, Alyssa's excellence, precision, and "Ranger First" attitude make her an invaluable member of the Florida Park Service. Her exceptional administrative skills and fiscal accountability ensure smooth operations and responsible stewardship of park resources. Beyond the office, Alyssa consistently steps into the field operations: supporting the ranger station, prescribed fire efforts, and resource management projects. Her dedication, versatility, and commitment to teamwork strengthen park operations and exemplify the mission of Florida State Parks.

Volunteer Spotlight: Summer Heroes of Oscar Scherer State Park

As the summer heat settles in over the park, our volunteers continue to shine as the backbone of our operations. Their dedication keeps the park running smoothly even during Florida's most challenging months.

Our volunteers go above and beyond—welcoming visitors, keeping campsites clean and inviting, and serving as the friendly faces that help guests feel at home. Whether they're answering questions, cleaning bathrooms, or making their rounds under the summer sun, their commitment makes every visitor's experience safer, easier, and more enjoyable.

If that wasn't enough, our volunteers tackle the tough, sweaty, essential jobs that keep our park beautiful and functional. From clearing storm debris and repairing facilities to mowing, trimming, and keeping our trails in great condition, they work tirelessly through high humidity, blazing temperatures, and unpredictable weather. Their work often goes unseen, but its impact is felt everywhere in the park.



This summer, their perseverance stands out more than ever. It takes grit, heart, and a true love for this park to accomplish what they do—day after day—in Florida's midsummer heat.

To all our summer volunteers: thank you for bringing your energy, skill, and spirit to Oscar Scherer State Park. Your dedication is what keeps this park thriving, and we're incredibly grateful for everything you do.

Oscar Scherer State 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. Even though the park visitation is lower during the summertime, we still need volunteers!

Our volunteer projects include:

- Serving as camp hosts or skilled trades workers
- Preserving and improving the 15 miles of hiking trails and updating trail markers.
- General "hands on" maintenance projects throughout the park
- 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://www.floridastateparks.org/volunteers>

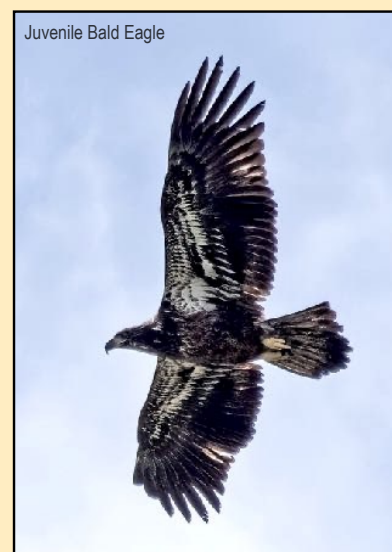
Eagle Watch at Oscar Scherer State Park

Oscar Scherer State Park provides good habitat for Bald Eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) and annually hosts several nesting pairs. This majestic raptor has been our national symbol since June of 1782 and has since endured severe threats because of habitat destruction, hunting, and in the 1950's, the pesticide DDT. Due to federal protection and DDT regulations, the country's bald eagle population has since recovered. Though it remains protected through the 1940 Bald Eagle Protection Act, it no longer is considered a threatened species.

Today, Florida has one of the highest densities of breeding Bald Eagles in the lower 48 states. The Audubon Eagle Watch is a community science/volunteer program in Florida intended to observe and document eagle nesting activity to help determine conservation and protection measures. During this past season, our local Eagle Watch volunteer, Oliver Janney, has regularly observed and reported on two active eagle nests in Oscar Scherer State Park and a third nest in the Scherer-Thaxton Preserve. During the nesting season, the area surrounding each nest is cordoned off to prevent human intrusion into these sensitive spaces.



Bald Eagles regularly reuse their same nests from year to year. One of the Oscar Scherer nests is located at the west end of the park's green trail, enabling public viewing at the edge of the exclusion zone, supplemented by guided viewing on Sunday mornings from December through March. Visitors can observe the brooding adults and later, the appearance of young eaglets. It is exciting to view the young juvenile birds begin to "branch" by exercising and hopping to nearby branches and subsequently flying away from the nest tree. Juvenile Bald Eagles are mostly brown in color with some light spotting. As they grow older, their plumage transitions through several stages, but they won't obtain the distinctive white head and tail and dark body of a mature adult until they are in their fifth year.



For more information about Audubon Eagle Watch visit:
<https://www.audubon.org/florida/projects/eaglewatch>

NATURE CENTER YIDBITS

Orienteering at Oscar Scherer State Park

By Joel Robbins, Nature Center Volunteer

Hundreds of area high school JROTC (Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps) students participated in an orienteering competition this year at Oscar Scherer State Park. Orienteering is the practice of orienting—using a map and compass to find your way through a natural area.

This event was organized by Captain Dean Krom, the instructor at Venice High School, the host school. Programs from Lakeland, Tampa, St. Petersburg, Venice and other cities participated. The Navy, Army, Marines and Air Force were represented.



Don't Forget Your Dibber

The goal of orienteering is to use only a paper map and a compass to find several control points (locations) on a map in the most efficient way and shortest time. To prove that participants have done this, they must tap their dibber (aka finger stick) on a sensor attached to a post. That records their success back to the competition judges.



Orienteering contestants are judged on different levels, so they receive appropriately challenging maps: green is for experienced orienteers, orange is medium and yellow is easier.

Handrails, Thumbing, Attack Points and Aiming Off

As it is with any organization, there always is special terminology or jargon. A handrail is a linear feature (a fence row, for example), thumbing simply means tracking your progress on the map with a finger so that there is no accidental backtracking, an attack point is an easily identifiable feature (unique rock, tree or building) near the next control point, and aiming off means approaching the target from one side so that the final turn, right or left, is already determined.

Orienteering requires several skills as participants must jog through the woods for miles, think on their feet, read a map, and use a variety of learned compass reading techniques.

(Continued on next page)

NATURE CENTER TIDBITS

(Continued from previous page)

Disorienting the Photographer

The day of competition ends with the awarding of team and individual trophies. The photos are of groups of orienteers. Some are in line to receive a map and jog off to find control points, others are sitting patiently waiting for the awards ceremony, four are studying one of the competition maps and one colorful group is joking around and pointing the photographer in the wrong direction.

These events are not only for JROTC programs, so anyone can participate. They simply need to surf the internet for competitions and then register with the host school.



Our Nature Center

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

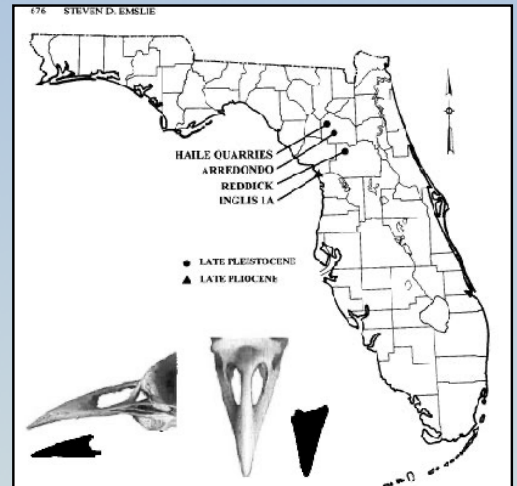
Oscar Scherer's interpretive nature center is located adjacent to Lake Osprey and a large picnic area, or a short walk over the bridge from the campground.

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.

SCRUB-JAY FUN FACTS

Prehistoric Florida Scrub-Jays

Fragmentary fossil remains identifiable as scrub-jays were discovered at three Pleistocene sites in Florida in 1959, 1964 and 1965. Older scrub-jay fossils were subsequently discovered in 1974 at a late Pliocene sinkhole deposit at Inglis Quarry 1A, Citrus County. These are the earliest fossil records for the genus *Aphelocoma*. Subsequent studies compared the Inglis Quarry fossils with modern skeletal specimens of modern *Aphelocoma* species: the Florida Scrub-Jay, Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay and California Scrub-Jay. The findings from these studies reveal that the fossils share characteristics of the modern Florida Scrub-Jay, distinct from the western *Aphelocoma* species, thus supporting the Florida Scrub-Jay as a separate species since the Pliocene era. These fossils also reinforce the 1987 taxonomic recognition as a distinct species from the western scrub-jays.



Fast Facts:

- The earliest scrub-jay fossil specimens (Inglis Quarry) date from 2.0 to 1.6 million years ago
- These Florida fossils represent the earliest fossil occurrence of the genus *Aphelocoma*
- Florida scrub-jay fossils are distinct from western scrub-jays
- The Florida Scrub-Jay descended from ancestral scrub-jays that later evolved into different regional species
- Scrub-jay range expanded into Florida via gulf coast corridor comprised of savannah and thorn-scrub habitat
- Later climate changes isolated the Florida population from the western scrub-jay species

Reference:

Emslie, Steven D. (1996) "A Fossil Scrub-jay Supports a Recent Systematic Decision," *Condor*: Vol. 98: Iss. 4, Article 1
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/condor/vol98/iss4/1>



Our featured scrub-jay this quarter is a young female, banded WS-GF. She was the single fledgling in the SQEZ group in 2025. Her parents are male SBW-Y and female GS-AF. We are not usually able to distinguish multiple unbanded juveniles of a family, but as she was the single juvenile of her family in 2025, we've been able to track her as a specific individual prior to her banding in September of 2025. Her gender was undetermined until the December census when she was observed performing the female-only "hiccing" call. She is one of our 2026 adoptable birds.

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



Adopt a Florida Scrub-Jay Program

Adopt a Florida Scrub-Jay



Whether you're observing Florida Scrub-Jays in the wild, joining a winter event, or adopting a scrub-jay, Oscar Scherer State Park offers meaningful ways to connect with and protect this extraordinary bird.

Visitors can make a direct impact through the Friends of Oscar Scherer, who offer a symbolic Adopt-a-Scrub-Jay program. Adoption funds support habitat management, education, and ongoing conservation work within the park.

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

KEEP THE WILD IN THE WILD

Do Not Feed our Scrub-Jays!

The official position (of the Department of Environmental Protection) is that "Intentional feeding of a threatened species (including luring them to one's person), constitutes take (i.e. harass, molest, possess) as the activity alters the natural behavior of the bird by changing its diet and feeding behaviors as well as acclimating it to make contact with humans."

Adoptable Birds 2026



1- TWOB family
Hatch year 2020
PS-HF



2 - SAND family
Hatch year 2023
BS-HF



3 - ROGUE family
Hatch year 2024
PS-LF



4 - SQUEZ family
Hatch year 2025
WS-GF



5 - LGCY family
Female, Hatch year 2019
Droop-Wing



6 - CNTY family
Male, Hatch year 2020
LS-AF

Meet the Friends' Officers & Directors (March 2026)

President - Dave Wankowski

Secretary & V.P. - Jim Rogers

Treasurer - Anne Heuer

Robert Frank

Kimberly Olsen

George Tatge

Lauren Thornberg

Julie Wankowski

Meet the Park's Staff (March 2026)

Park Manager – Matt Kruse

Assistant Park Manager – Chris Tretter

Administrative Assistant – Alyssa Rothstein

Park Services Specialist – Jamie Butler

OPS Park Ranger — Bryon Teran

Park Ranger – Colin Ott

Park Ranger – Glenn Mitchell

Park Ranger – Morgen Coe

Park Ranger – Jerry Bodnar OPS

Park Ranger – Laurie Johnson

Park Ranger- Ty Beetham