



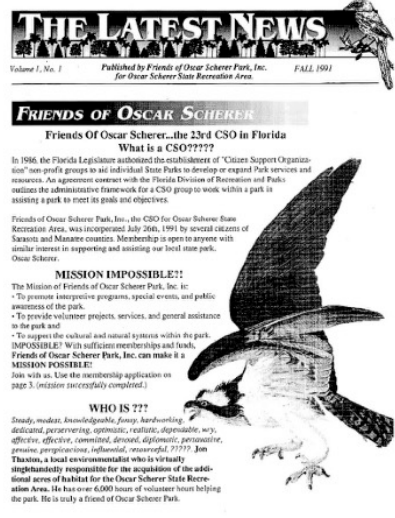
SUMMER
2026

NEWS • PROGRAMS • EVENTS • ANNOUNCEMENTS

UPDATE IN BRIEF



- Did You Know (Pg 1 & 4)
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- Volunteers (Pg 2 & 7)
- Park News (Pg 5-6)
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- Scrub-Jay Fun Facts (Pg 10)
- Blast From the Past
- Park Staff & Friends Board (Pg 12)



DID YOU KNOW...

...About Fishing at the Park?

Oscar Scherer State Park is not only a haven for wildlife but also a fantastic destination for fishing enthusiasts! With its serene creek, access to Sarasota Bay, and the peaceful Lake Osprey, the park offers great opportunities to cast your line and enjoy the outdoors.



Lake Osprey, in particular, is a hidden gem for anglers. This freshwater lake is stocked with bass, bluegill, and red ear sunfish, providing plenty of fishing opportunities. At this lake, there is a wheelchair accessible fishing pier. Whether you prefer fishing from the shore or bringing a small boat, Lake Osprey offers a quiet, scenic spot for a relaxing day on the water. The park's waters also connect to South Creek and Sarasota Bay, where saltwater fishing enthusiasts can reel in species like snook, redfish, sea mullet, and spotted sea trout.





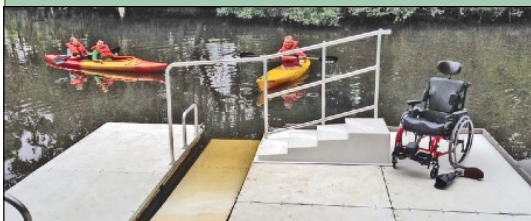
Manager's Message

Matt Kruse
Park Manager

Hello Friends and Neighbors,

Summer has officially arrived at Oscar Scherer State Park! As the vibrant green of the landscape deepens and the afternoon skies bring their familiar Florida character, we are gearing up for another memorable season. While the summer months bring a change of pace, the park remains a bustling haven for nature lovers, families, and outdoor enthusiasts.

Whether you are a long-time regular or a first-time visitor, summer is a wonderful time to explore everything our park has to offer.



Cool off by paddling down the scenic, tidal blackwater of South Creek. Canoe and kayak rentals are available through Whenever Watersports, providing a front-row seat to our coastal ecosystems. If you are looking to splash around, Lake Osprey remains our premier swimming destination and freshwater fishing spot. For those looking to explore on foot, our 15 miles of trails—including the fully accessible Lester Finley Barrier-Free Nature Trail—offer beautiful, peaceful treks through our unique habitats. Keep your eyes peeled for our famous resident, the threatened Florida scrub-jay! Be sure to stop by the nature center to cool off in the air conditioning, while viewing our nature displays and the gift counter that for park-themed souvenirs.

(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 that include day 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 here 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 Matt Kruse, Park Manager at 941-882-7216 or Matthew.Kruse@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 Be Safe!

As many of you are aware, Southwest Florida is currently experiencing significant drought conditions. Our ecosystems are resilient, but the dry weather requires all of us to be extra cautious and mindful of our natural surroundings. Despite these challenging and dry conditions, our expert resource management team achieved a major victory recently. Through meticulous planning, precise weather monitoring, and incredible teamwork, we successfully executed a 150-acre prescribed fire right here in the park. Fire is a vital, natural tool for Florida's ecosystems, especially for our scrubby flatwoods. By safely clearing out overgrown underbrush under strictly controlled conditions, we have dramatically reduced the risk of catastrophic, uncontrolled wildfires later this season, while simultaneously restoring the pristine habitat that our scrub-jays and gopher tortoises depend on for survival.

While we want you to fully enjoy your outdoor adventures, the Florida summer heat can be intense and unforgiving. We urge all visitors to prioritize safety and plan accordingly before heading out onto the trails. Bring significantly more water than you think you will need. Don't wait until you are thirsty to start drinking. Hit the trails early in the morning or later in the evening when temperatures are cooler. This is also when wildlife is most active! Wear lightweight, light-colored clothing, a wide-brimmed hat, and plenty of sunscreen. High humidity makes the temperature feel much hotter. Take frequent breaks in the shade and listen to your body.

Finally, none of what we do would be possible without the incredible dedication of the Friends of Oscar Scherer Park. From helping us maintain our 106 campsites to supporting our nature center and funding crucial scrub-jay conservation efforts, your unwavering support is the lifeblood of this park. Thank you for standing by us, rain or shine, drought or flood.

Stay safe, stay hydrated, and we look forward to seeing you out in the park this summer!

Matthew Kruse,
Park Manager, Oscar Scherer State Park



Did you know (continued from page 1)

About Fishing at the Park:

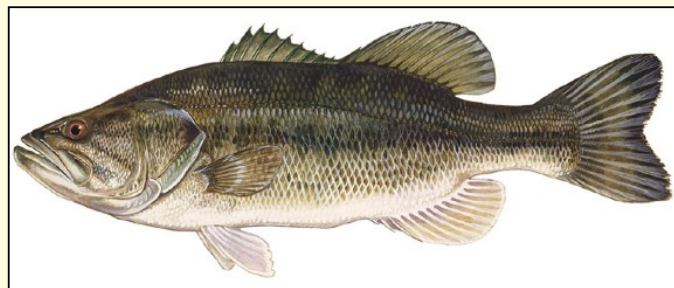
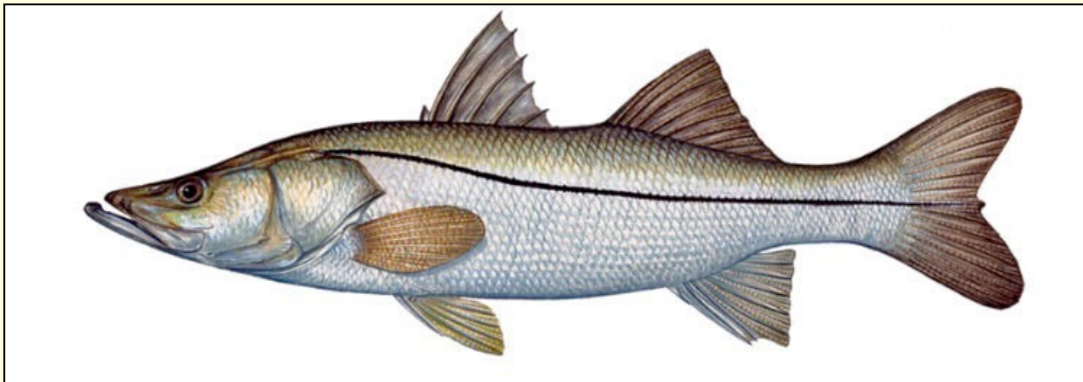
The park's diverse fishing options make it ideal for both freshwater and saltwater anglers. Whether you're casting a line in Lake Osprey or along the creeks, you'll find plenty of places to enjoy a peaceful fishing experience. The beautiful Florida landscape and calm waters make this a perfect spot to unwind and connect with nature, whether you're a seasoned angler or a beginner.

So, whether you're fishing in Lake Osprey or exploring South Creek, Oscar Scherer State Park offers an ideal setting for your next fishing adventure. Don't forget your gear, fishing license, and patience—great catches await!

*A friendly reminder: a valid Florida fishing license is required for all anglers over the age of 16.
Be sure to obtain the proper license before fishing to comply with regulations.*

(By Laurie Johnson, Park Ranger)

FWC Fishing Regulations and Licensing: <https://myfwc.com/fishing/>



Snook, Redear Sunfish and Florida Largemouth Bass images courtesy of Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
<https://myfwc.com/fishing/saltwater/recreational/snook/>
<https://myfwc.com/fishing/freshwater/black-bass/florida-bass/>
<https://www.fws.gov/media/redear-sunfish-5>

News From the Park

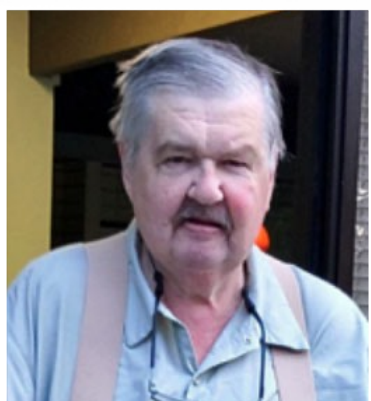
New District IV Second Assistant Bureau Chief

Congratulations to Zach Lozano upon his selection as the inaugural second Assistant Bureau Chief for District IV. He will be residing at Oscar Scherer State Park.

Zach began his career with the Florida Park Service in 2011 as an OPS Park Attendant at Cayo Costa State Park then served as Resident Park Ranger there. Zach later became Park Services Specialist for the Gasparilla Island Administration, supporting Gasparilla Island, Cayo Costa, Don Pedro Island, and Stump Pass Beach State Parks.

In 2015, Zach was selected as Assistant Park Manager at Sebastian Inlet State Park and Indian River Lagoon Preserve State Park. He later served as Park Manager at Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park. He then briefly managed Gasparilla Island Administration before being selected as Park Manager at Koreshan State Park, where he has served for nearly eight years.

In addition to his field leadership experience, Zach serves as an instructor for Ranger Academy and the Florida Park Service Leadership Academy. He is a Certified Park and Recreation Professional, Certified Prescribed Burn Manager, and graduate of the Florida DEP LEAPS leadership program. He was also honored with the Award of Valor and recognized among 100 Florida Heroes at the Governor's Mansion.



District 4 Employee of the Month

Congratulations to Jerry Bodnar, toll collector at Oscar Scherer State Park, District 4's employee of the month for April 2026! Recognized for his dependability, initiative, and dedication, Jerry consistently goes above and beyond-arriving early, prepared, and ready to take on busy days. He supports his team by planning ahead and helping ensure smooth operations. Jerry also takes initiative to improve efficiency, including creating a recorded phone message to answer common visitor questions. His proactive approach to educating visitors and encouraging compliance helps prevent issues before they arise. Jerry's reliability, teamwork, and commitment reflect the very best of the Florida Park Service and strengthens our parks, our people, and our mission.

Meet Senior Park Ranger Colin Ott

Hometown: Ellet, OH

How long in Florida: 17 Years

I've been a Florida State Park Ranger for: 4 years

What do you like best about you job?: Every day brings new challenges and adventures.

What was your funniest/hardest/most outrageous experience you have had in your role?: After the hurricanes in 2024, we only had one trail open. We had placed our taxidermy animals along this trail for a later youth hike. Unfortunately, our guests with dogs hiking this one open trail saw the raccoons, foxes, and bobcats' 1st and the barking and howling rang out through the park.

When not at work you'll find me: Caring for my many snakes, reptiles, and birds!



News From the Park

Recent Prescribed Fire

On June 2nd, park personnel conducted a successful 150 acre prescribed fire at the park. Regularly scheduled and controlled burns such as these are vital to maintain the park's scrubby flatwoods and other fire-dependent environments. Properly managed scrubby flatwoods is home our Florida Scrub-Jays and gopher tortoises at Oscar Scherer State Park. Such controlled fires are also critical for clearing underbrush and accumulated leaf litter, thus reducing the risk of uncontrolled and dangerous wildfires.



Jamie Butler going to Kissimmee and Okeechobee Parks

Our Park Services Specialist and volunteer coordinator, Jamie Butler, has accepted a new assignment as the new Park Manager for Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park and Okeechobee Battlefield State Park in District 3.

Prior to her park service career, Jamie served more than seven years in the 82nd Airborne Division as a Staff Sergeant and Jumpmaster. Afterwards, she was with the Florida Conservation Corps at Kissimmee Preserve, coming to Oscar Scherer as a FLCC ROAR member in 2023, subsequently as a Park Ranger and Park Services Specialist.

Best wishes, Jamie!

Volunteer Spotlight: Nature Center Improvements

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.

Recently, the Nature Center greatly benefited from a dedicated group of volunteers for external repainting, inside repairs, and upgrades.

Also, volunteers Deb and Jim Murray worked on the butterfly garden in front of the Nature Center planting many native flora and other improvements. Gulf Fritillary and Zebra Longwing caterpillars will especially appreciate the construction and installation of a wooden obelisk for their preferred food, Maypop Passionflower vines.



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>

NATURE CENTER TIDBITS

You Can Always Find What You Look For

By Joel Robbins, Nature Center Volunteer

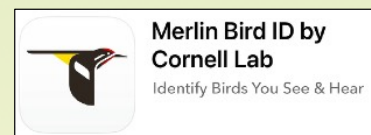
As a Nature Center volunteer at Oscar Scherer State Park, the second most common question I receive is: "Which trail should we hike?" Of course, the first standard query is: "Where's the restroom?" After a few questions about their stamina, interests, birding equipment and available time, I make my trail suggestions. FYI, the restrooms are in the Osprey Lake bathhouse.



The South Creek Trail is my go-to for first-time visitors because it's short, shaded, and scenic. It's especially nice in the summer when the temperature typically hits 93 degrees in the shade early afternoons. So, you can imagine what it is like in the direct sun. And I can easily point to the sign from the door of the nature center.

Be a Lazy Hiker

Lots of people come in and ask for the best trail for seeing animals. The problem is that zoos have spoiled us. They fence in and cage animals so that we can always watch them. That's not what we want in a state park or preserve. My recommendation is to plan nothing for a morning but enjoying nature. Then head for Oscar Scherer State Park.



At the park, find a trail bench or take a light beach chair, a hat, sunscreen, a bird call identification app (I like Merlin Bird ID), insect repellent and water. Find a spot just at sunup and sit for a couple of hours. People have seen eagles, bobcats, warblers, limpkins, ospreys, otters, deer, alligators, gopher tortoises, armadillos, 7-foot coachwhip snakes, marsh rabbits, diamond-back rattlers, squirrels, coyotes, coral snakes, feral hogs, and a variety of fish.

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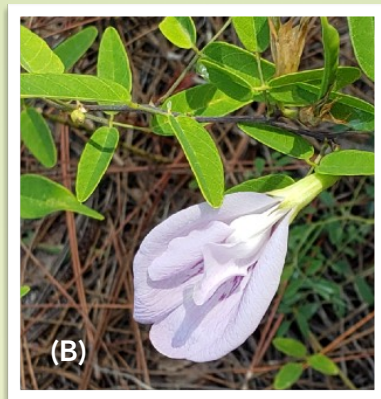
NATURE CENTER TIDBITS

(Continued from previous page)

Go Wild with the Flowers

The Lester Findley Trail, which is an extension of the South Creek Trail, is our favorite place for wildflowers. When I've guided nature walks there, I have the members of the group download the "PlantNet" flora identifier onto their phones. Then if I don't know a specific species, I'll challenge them to see who can identify it first using the app.

The trail also has two small sections specifically for plants that butterflies like. The flowers there are often labeled, too. A fishing platform makes checking out the creek a highlight of the walk. From there, you will probably witness mullets jumping in the brackish current or see a little blue heron on a branch overlooking the creek.

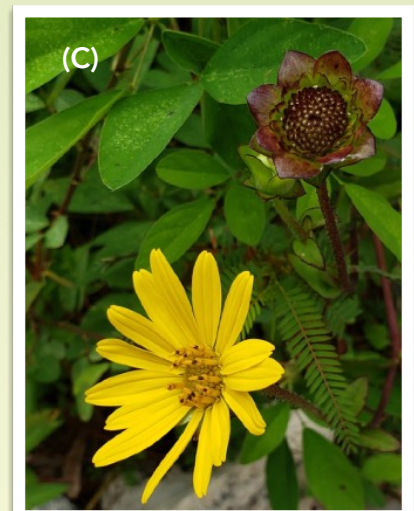


Don't Take Preconceived Ideas with You

Looking up, down and all-around is the best way to enjoy the combined trails. If you do that, you may see lizards and black snakes, birds, vines, animal tracks, snails, nuts, mosses, lichen, barks, unique leaf shapes, and invasive plants, not just beautiful wildflowers.



If you're only looking to see a scrub-jay on your visit, you may go home disappointed. So, look for all things natural, and you'll find what you're looking for every time. The Friends of Oscar Scherer and park rangers look forward to seeing you on the trails.



Wildflower photos by author:

(A) Partridge Pea

(B) Atlantic Pigeonwing

(C) Starry Rosinweed

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 Nature Center public hours are made possible by volunteers.

SCRUB-JAY FUN FACTS

Florida Scrub-Jays Population & Range, Then & Now

The Florida Scrub-Jay was first observed and described by naturalist William Bartram west of the St. Johns River during his 1774 travels through Florida. He originally called it “*Pica Glandaria cerulea non cristata*, the little jay of east Florida”. The bird was later officially described to science in 1795 by zoologist Louis Augustin Guillaume Bosc, calling it “*Corvus coerulescens*”. The pre-settlement population of the Florida Scrub-Jay is unknown but it is estimated to have been at least ten times larger than today. The present population is estimated to be about 7,500 - 9,300 birds.

References:

<https://www.fws.gov/species/scrub-jay-aphelocoma-coerulescens/map>

“The Curious Case of the Florida Scrub-Jay” https://www.audubonadventures.org/florida_scrub_jay_essay.htm

Bartram, William. *Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida, the Cherokee Country, etc.* Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, U.S.A.: James & Johnson. p. 290. ISBN 0-486-20013-2

Florida Scrub-Jay Population Status on Conservation Lands 2019



Featured Scrub-Jay

Our featured scrub-jay this quarter, pictured above, is currently the park's oldest scrub-jay. She is a female and is banded SBL-G, though she lost her light green band between 2022 and 2023. She hatched in 2013 and was trapped and banded in January of 2014. She frequents the Green Trail south of the campground.

A Blast from the Past!

THE LATEST NEWS

Volume 1, No. 1

Published by Friends of Oscar Scherer Park, Inc.
for Oscar Scherer State Recreation Area.

FALL 1991

FRIENDS OF OSCAR SCHERER

Friends Of Oscar Scherer...the 23rd CSO in Florida What is a CSO????

In 1986, the Florida Legislature authorized the establishment of "Citizen Support Organization" non-profit groups to aid individual State Parks to develop or expand Park services and resources. An agreement contract with the Florida Division of Recreation and Parks outlines the administrative framework for a CSO group to work within a park in assisting a park to meet its goals and objectives.

Friends of Oscar Scherer Park, Inc., the CSO for Oscar Scherer State Recreation Area, was incorporated July 26th, 1991 by several citizens of Sarasota and Manatee counties. Membership is open to anyone with similar interest in supporting and assisting our local state park, Oscar Scherer.

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE?!

The Mission of Friends of Oscar Scherer Park, Inc. is:

- To promote interpretive programs, special events, and public awareness of the park.
- To provide volunteer projects, services, and general assistance to the park and
- To support the cultural and natural systems within the park.

IMPOSSIBLE? With sufficient memberships and funds, Friends of Oscar Scherer Park, Inc. can make it a MISSION POSSIBLE!

Join with us. Use the membership application on page 3. (mission successfully completed.)

WHO IS ???

Steady, modest, knowledgeable, funny, hardworking, dedicated, persevering, optimistic, realistic, dependable, wry, affective, effective, committed, devoted, diplomatic, persuasive, genuine, perspicacious, influential, resourceful, ?????? Jon Thaxton, a local environmentalist who is virtually singlehandedly responsible for the acquisition of the additional acres of habitat for the Oscar Scherer State Recreation Area. He has over 6,000 hours of volunteer hours helping the park. He is truly a friend of Oscar Scherer Park.



First Newsletter

Park staff recently discovered this in the files. The first newsletter of the Friends of Oscar Scherer dated Fall 1991!

Message from the Park Manager

Welcome to the first edition of the Friends of Oscar Scherer Park, Inc. Newsletter. The Friends is the realization of a four year dream of mine. Though I am blessed with a very competent and professional staff, the daily routine duties of operating the park are so demanding on our personnel that the Friends is a welcomed addition to our "park family". Together we shall move forward to improve our programs and facilities. In doing so we shall meet our mission statement: Provide resource based recreation while preserving, interpreting, and restoring natural and cultural resources.

Oscar Scherer State Recreation Area became a part of the state park system in 1956 when Elsa Scherer Burrows donated the original 462 acres with the park to be named in honor of her father, Oscar Scherer. The park, though small in size, was a wildlife refuge for various animals and plants. Included in this list were several designated species such as bald eagles, gopher tortoise, gopher frog, indigo snake, coonote, leather fern, spring coral root, rein orchid and, by far the most endangered species, the Florida Scrub Jay.

In 1987, the last Scrub Jay nest occurred in the park. Habitat within the park became unsuitable for nesting due to the suppression of naturally occurring

fires. Since that time, an aggressive management approach has been undertaken which includes mechanical treatment of the scrubby flatwoods followed by the reintroduction of fire. Also in 1987, Jeffrey Cox wrote in Special Publication #3 of the Florida Ornithological Society, that Oscar Scherer would likely host the last viable population of Florida Scrub Jays provided two things occur: 1) The existing habitat was properly managed; and 2) additional scrubby flatwoods would be acquired.

As I indicated above, the first of these endeavors has already begun. The second component of the Cox report was also realized this past August 29th when 922 acres were added to the park. The new land is also home to numerous other endangered species.

Over the next year, the addition will undergo a biological and resource assessment. During this time critical habitat will be identified and mapped. Upon completion of these necessary surveys, recreational usages will be approved, such as trails. Until the assessment is complete, there are no definite plans. However, those wishing to explore the new park land are welcome to do so on foot. Just be cautioned that there are no specific trails. So take a compass, pack a lunch, and come enjoy yourself for the day!

Joseph E. Smyth
Park Manager

THE LATEST NEWS is published periodically by Friends of Oscar Scherer Park, Inc., P.O. Box 336, Osprey, FL 34229, to provide its members and the public with information about Oscar Scherer State Recreation Area in Osprey, Florida, and the importance of its natural environment here in Southwest Florida.

Articles are written by members of the Friends of Oscar Scherer Park unless otherwise identified.

Printed on recycled paper



This Newsletter was designed by Laser Designs, Sarasota, FL • 923-5439

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 (July 2026)

President - Dave Wankowski

Secretary & V.P. - Jim Rogers

Treasurer - Anne Heuer

Robert Frank

George Tatge

Lauren Thornberg

Julie Wankowski

Meet the Park's Staff (July 2026)

Park Manager – Matt Kruse

Assistant Park Manager – Chris Tretter

Administrative Assistant – Alyssa Rothstein

Park Services Specialist – David Harris

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