Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary
Education Report 2009-2010

It has been a year of successes and honors at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary.

We celebrated Sanctuary Director Ed Carlson’s 35 years of dedicated service to Audubon. His efforts over three decades resulted in expansion of conservation lands in our area from his involvement with the inception of the CREW Land Trust and the addition of Panther Island Mitigation Bank lands to the Sanctuary. This winter Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary received the Ramsar designation as a “Wetland of International Importance.” The Sanctuary joins 28 others sites in the USA that meet the stringent requirements for this recognition. Over 100,000 visitors came to Corkscrew this year to enjoy nature and expanded their knowledge of the species and habitats that make Southwest Florida a unique, beautiful and critical environmental resource.

With the Sanctuary’s success as its model, the Education Department is expanding its boundaries, widening its sphere of influence and engaging citizens of all ages in conservation efforts.

Our Curriculum Programs, including the Teacher Specialist activities, were initiated over 10 years ago to make environmental education more meaningful for elementary school students in Collier County. Over 12,000 students have been beneficiaries of these successful programs. Corkscrew continues to collaborate with Florida Gulf Coast University through their Colloquium Course. More than 15,000 FGCU students have ventured to Corkscrew for site visits, with participation increasing exponentially each year. As student populations grow, demand for programs grows. To meet new needs the teaching population had to grow.

In response, the Education Department initiated and expanded Partner Educator activities. The program was designed to enlist teachers to lead their students through field studies at the Sanctuary. The plan provided trainings, workshops and field trials to enhance teaching methods. Under the guidance of Corkscrew staff and volunteers, teachers have garnered self-confidence in presenting lessons in our outdoor classroom. These enriched teaching methods have resulted in increased benefits to students.

Program success is evident in the enthusiasm of our students, positive feedback from teachers and administrators, and the continuing dedication of our Corkscrew volunteer guides and sponsors.

Our report this year is told from the perspective of teachers as they foster their students’ interest in science, comment on expanded relationships with their classes and share their personal goals and experiences as Partner Educators. Also included are National Audubon’s newest initiatives for engaging young people in conservation. There are insights from an Education Program Sponsor on the rewards of supporting environmental education and an invitation to join in our success.

Special thanks to all those who participate in Education Department Programs. This year topped the charts!

Rebecca Beck
Director of Education

Candace Forsyth
Donor Relations

375 Sanctuary Road West / Naples, FL 34110 / Phone: (239) 348-9151 / Fax: (239) 348-1522 / www.corkscrew.audubon.org
"We started our Insect Adventure in the classroom," Tammy Simmons, Lely 2nd grade teacher reports. "As a team, we administered a pre-test to see how much our second graders knew about insects and spiders. Once students were assessed we began our instruction on insects. The teachers' resource materials provided by Sanctuary staff were phenomenal. The students eagerly waited for daily "read alouds" from the "Magical Insect Suitcase", Corkscrew’s traveling library. Along with teacher created materials and projects, students began to acquire a wealth of knowledge."

"Not only was the material taught during science, the material was integrated into all subject areas: from writing and researching, to measuring the length of a caterpillar."

"Our students had the opportunity to see a beautiful place that they normally would not have the resources to visit. They learned about insects and about various species of birds, plants, and habitats. Once students experienced the outdoor classroom and post tests were given, their scores soared up 24%. We are certain that our students benefited greatly from the lessons that were provided and the Insect Adventure field trip."

Corkscrew Elementary 5th grade teacher Mattea Marks relates, "When we began speaking of our Wild Florida Adventure field trip, students who were already Corkscrew Swamp enthusiasts became interested very quickly. They began to understand they would learn information about the swamp they had never thought about before. With interests sparked, we watched the Corkscrew video and completed worksheets that went along with it. Students loved watching the wildlife they would soon be looking at! This assignment proved valuable at familiarizing the students with terminology and background they would soon encounter on their trip."

Sabal Palm 5th grade team reports, "Students researched plants, mammals, reptiles, and birds and created displays. The format is a nature magazine page and the bulletin board displays are visited by many students and are used as a learning tool for months."

"By observing, discussing and discovering, the students enjoyed the story of the Sanctuary."
"Being a guide this year at Corkscrew was wonderful," states Anna Ruth Crouse of Poinciana 2nd grade. "Every station was prepared and ready for me to teach. It allowed my students to see me as an explorer in nature rather than just a teacher. It also gave my students a chance to show off what they had learned in class. Being in nature gives every child a chance to experience something that they might not if we did not come to Corkscrew for this field trip. It is the most organized and meaningful field trip I have ever been to in my years of teaching."

Corkscrew Elementary 5th grade teacher Kishia Thompson remarks, "It was great to see students conversing with each other about what they had learned in the classroom weeks prior and applying it out on the trail. Seeing and hearing them making those connections is what makes the program so worthwhile. I feel fortunate to be trained as a guide and lucky to be able to have learned about the Sanctuary. It is amazing to see how this experience has impacted how my students see nature now. For some this is a once in a lifetime opportunity."

"I am proud to have been their guide and share their experiences in this beautiful natural area."

Every explorer appreciates the value of a good field guide. Identifying species along the Corkscrew trail creates outings that are more informative, resulting in deeper connections to nature. National Audubon has turned several of its popular guide books into electronic, on-the-go databases, putting the most authoritative and comprehensive information about the natural world at one’s fingertips. Electronic field guides, currently available as iPod touch applications, are a cost effective and green way for a new generation to be introduced to the natural world. Science is ever changing. Our programs must keep pace with technology. Our goal is to integrate the use of digital field guides by outfitting our Discovery Station toolkits with iPod touch equipment. Teachers from elementary to college are excited about this new opportunity.
Joe Ambrozy is a birder, Corkscrew volunteer and a School Sponsor. A retired business executive, Joe has spent hundreds of hours as a “Boardwalk Naturalist” at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. He has taught birding and managed monthly bird surveys. He is an Audubon of Florida board member. Joe wants new generations to experience the serenity of the ancient cypress forest at Corkscrew and the unaltered native habitats of Florida. He describes his reasons for becoming a school sponsor, “We need to invest in education so young people will cherish the wonders of nature and carry on the culture of preservation. They must learn the value of protecting and restoring our natural systems which are vital to the health of both wild and human populations.”

Join me in providing quality environmental education and outdoor experiences for students, teachers and parents of our community.

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Special thanks to:
SFWMD Big Cypress Basin
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Corkscrew Sanctuary’s Panther Island Mitigation Bank is a huge success story with a rich future. With habitat restoration, scientific research and new land management practices already underway, prospective educational opportunities are being discussed. Through Pennies for the Planet, a Together Green program based on an alliance between Audubon and Toyota, students are collecting pennies, nickels, dimes and dollars to help protect critical habitats and threatened species. Panther Island Mitigation Bank will benefit from these funds. Student contributions will support ongoing habitat management and initial planning to develop new science and environmental programs on the Panther Island property.

Wildlife photos on this page are courtesy of Panther Island Mitigation Bank Team.