



MYAKKA RIVER STATE PARK
SEPTEMBER 2018
EDITION 1, VOLUME 1



THE DRENCHED, DRY PRAIRIE?

Myakka River State Park has large expanses of a rare and gorgeous ecosystem: the Florida Dry Prairie. Filled with saw palmetto, grasses, wildflowers, and cabbage palms, the Florida Dry Prairie is the second-most biologically diverse ecosystems in North America. It is also one of the most endangered ecosystems in the United States.

In *The Palmetto*, ecologist Linda Conway Deuver describes “In a sense, the Dry Prairie is a piece of Texas. Once, when sea level was lower, there was a vast grassy plain extending all along the Gulf Coast. Most of it was flooded by the Gulf of Mexico when sea levels rose again and only in the west and in central Florida did the climate remain dry enough for grasslands to dominate the landscape. Here, during the long winter-spring drought, fires sweep across the prairies and keep them from growing up into woodlands. On the average, a fire occurs in this community every one to four years.”¹

While the lack of trees and evidence of fire gives a barren impression of these scrub-dominated lands, the Florida Dry Prairie is bursting with life and biodiversity. Red-Shouldered Hawks, Caracaras, and the threatened Bachmann Sparrow all find refuge in these treeless oases. Diamondbacks race through the brush as gopher tortoises dig their underground homes in the soil.

¹ Deuver, Linda Conway. “Florida’s Natural Communities: Dry Prairie.” *The Palmetto*, Vol. 6, No. 3, Fall 1986.

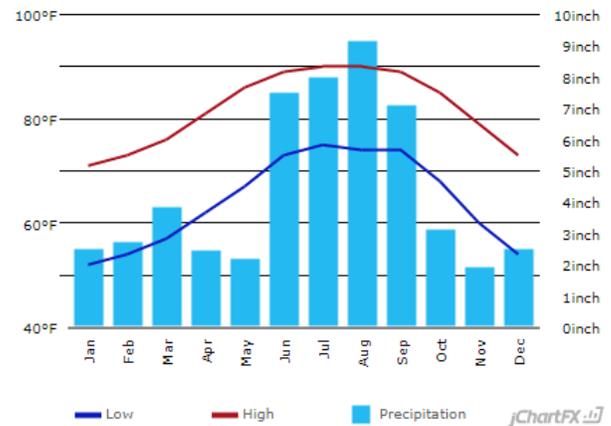
Those visiting the park this month will notice one peculiar aspect of the Florida Dry Prairie: it isn't very dry! Summertime rain make the ecosystem name seem like a misnomer. Rainfall heavily increases in the summer, between June and September, every year. The low, flat plains of the Florida Dry Prairie have very poor drainage ability. The ground quickly becomes saturated and water pools.

Plants and animals rely on this fluctuation of water levels for survival. Blueberry flowers go to fruit throughout the park, and many animals are more able to raise their spring younglings with the plethora of vegetation. Alligators enjoy the temperature of the warm, shallow water and are more likely to stay submerged than face the heat on dry land.

At the park, some of our trails may be underwater.

Visitors should not attempt to wade through, as an alligator could be submerged in very shallow water. Additionally, the park may close certain areas due to water levels, ecosystem protection, and public safety. Please respect all closures. Various wildlife may come closer to our main road, as sometimes it is the driest place in the park. While this is a wonderful opportunity to see Myakka's diverse fauna, please **drive slowly** and keep a safe distance. If you see alligators, snakes, or other animals, make a wide circle around them. For your own safety, do not get close and do not attempt to interact with them.

Climate Sarasota



The blue columns show the average rainfall per month in inches. Notice the visible increase between June and September that causes the high water in the Dry Prairie.

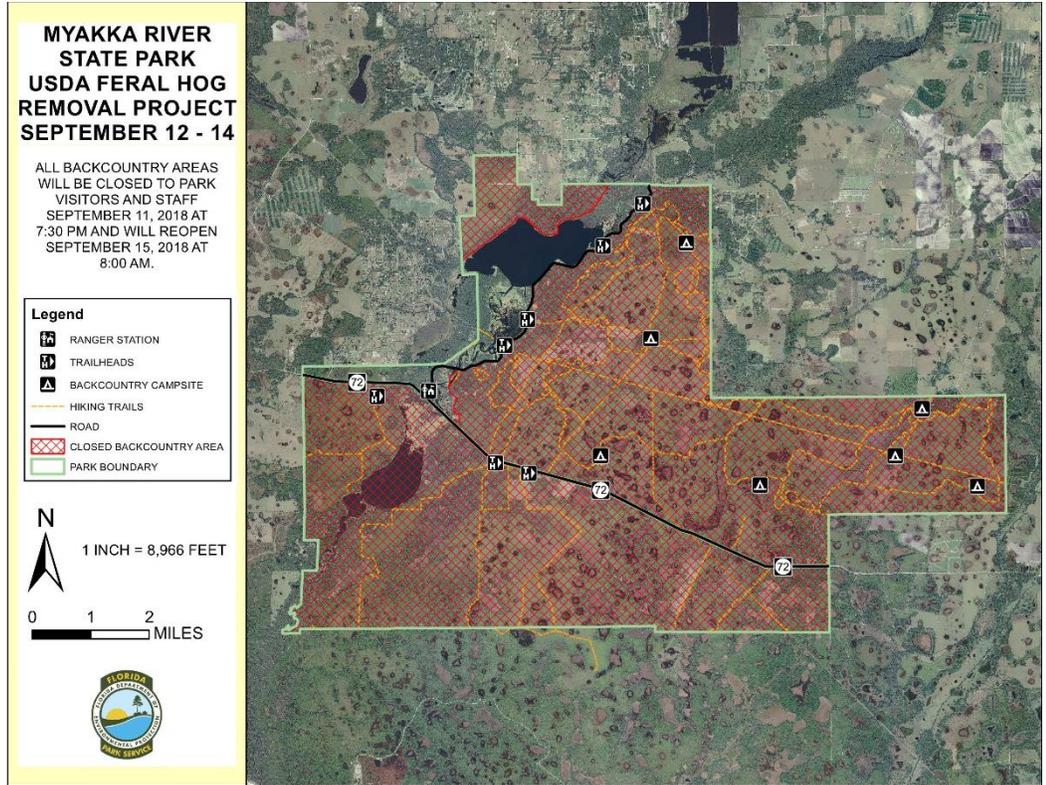
Species of the Month: Roseate Spoonbills (*Platalea ajaja*)

While commonly mistaken as the Flamingo, Roseate Spoonbills are an even more peculiar-looking pink bird! Roseate Spoonbills use the shape and hyper-sensitivity of their bill to sort through mucky water, seeking insects, small plants, minnows, and crustaceans. Scientists believe that their bright pink plumage is the result of the pigments in the crustaceans they eat.



PARK UPDATE: TRAIL CLOSURE

From **September 12th-14th**, the entire backcountry of Myakka River State Park will be closed. The United States Department of Agriculture will be conducting a feral hog removal project, a crucial part of our resource management plan. Feral hogs are an exotic, invasive species, and they cause severe destruction to the Florida Dry Prairie ecosystem. All trails east of the main road and south of State Road 72 will be inaccessible to the public during this scheduled time. The main paved drive and concessionaires will remain open. Please make your recreational plans in accordance with this exciting environmental project!

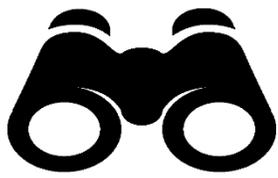


Trivia: What was Lower Myakka Lake known as in the 1870's?

Hint: It was named after a prolific cattle rancher who grazed his cattle on over 1,000 acres of what is now Myakka River State Park.

A: Vanderipe Lake, named after W. H. Vanderipe.

WILDLIFE WATCH!



This is a Tri-Colored Heron enjoying Myakka's wet season. Notice the red coloration on the top of the bird's head, the blue-grey wings, and the pure white underbelly.



PC: Charlene Brown

FRIENDS CORNER!

The Friends of Myakka River State Park is proud to announce that it has raised enough funding to build an equipment pole barn! Land management requires a large quantity of expensive equipment. Staff members do everything they can to protect and maintain our equipment; however, Florida weather is less cooperative. Having a pole barn will extend the life of all equipment and save money on repairs.



PC: Jackie Pope

The Friends have provided funding for the Canopy Walkway (pictured here), the Bird Walk, the Palm Log Restoration Project, and many other vital purchases and activities for the park. They run an annual concert series and create programs to help restore natural habitats throughout Myakka River State Park.

Interested in joining? Fill out the bottom portion of this page and mail it to:

Friends of Myakka River State Park
13208 State Road 72
Sarasota, FL 34241

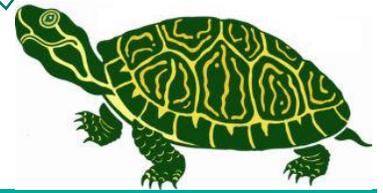
100% of Friends' funding goes directly to Myakka River State Park. Everything is used to preserve and protect wildlife and natural resources, without any overhead or administrative fees.

Volunteer at Myakka!

Myakka River State Park is always looking for volunteers to help us in our mission of protecting the environment, providing recreational opportunities, and educating the public about the natural world. A few hours a week can make a huge difference for the plants and animals that call Myakka their home. Whether you like battling invasive species, helping visitors, or anything in between, MRSP needs your help!

For information on volunteering, please visit the [Florida State Parks Volunteer Page](#). All applications can be submitted through the [Volunteer Portal](#).

Thank you!



Learn more at www.FriendsOfMyakkaRiver.org

YES! I/WE WOULD LIKE TO HELP BY JOINING THE FRIENDS OF THE MYAKKA RIVER!

DATE: ____ / ____ / ____

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP: INDIVIDUAL (\$25) FAMILY (\$35) CORPORATE (\$100)

LIFETIME MEMBERSHIP: INDIVIDUAL (\$350) FAMILY (\$500)

NAME(S): _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY

STATE

ZIP CODE

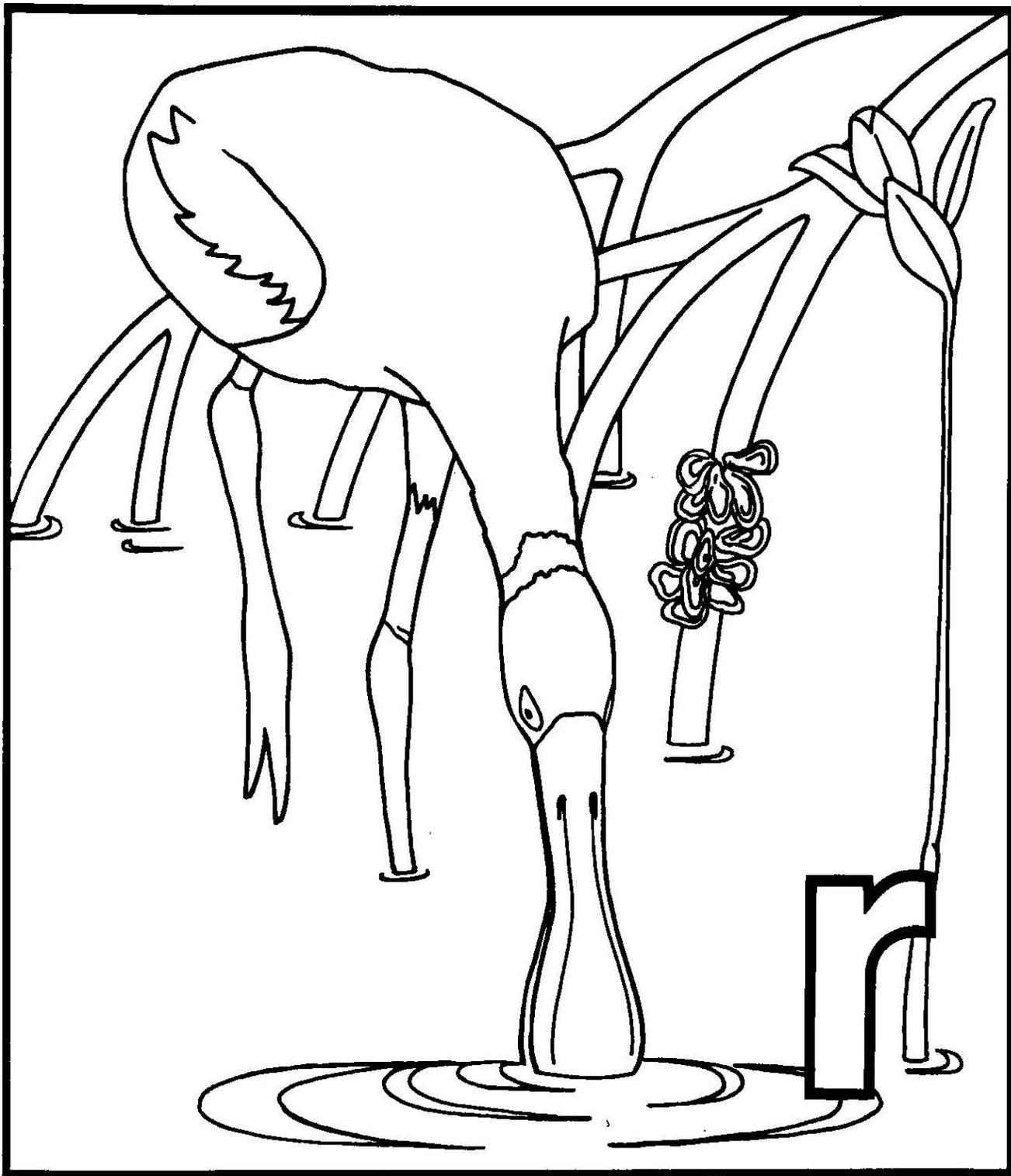
PHONE NUMBER: _____ EMAIL: _____

OPTIONAL: I/WE WOULD LIKE TO MAKE AN ADDITIONAL DONATION OF \$ _____

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KIDS' CHALLENGE!

Kids of all ages can compete in our monthly Kids' Challenges! Our species of the month is the **Roseate Spoonbill**. Come to the park, see one of these beautiful birds, color the picture, and write a new fact you learned about them! Entries must be delivered to the Ranger Station by the end of September. The winner in each age group will receive a one-day FREE pass to a Florida State Park! Please write your name, phone number, email address, and age on the back.



I learned that: