



News from...

Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve

Shell Island Road: Restored and Enhanced

Shell Island Road, located off Collier Boulevard between Naples and Marco Island, serves as a major vehicle access point to the Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (RBNERR). The road, open to the public during daylight hours, crosses through a variety of habitats and often provides views of deer, bobcats, gopher tortoises, hawks, snakes, and other wildlife. When the road was originally constructed in the 1940s it was built using fill dredged from adjacent mangrove wetlands. Impacts to the environment included loss of mangrove trees and disruption of tidal flushing to mangrove forests.



Three years ago, RBNERR initiated an environmental restoration project on the road in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Collier County. The borrow ditches were filled in, and a series of culverts were constructed to restore tidal flushing to the impounded mangrove forests. This successful restoration was the result of an effective partnership with federal, state, and local government agencies working together. Following the restoration, RBNERR continued to work with Collier County, using funds allocated by the Florida Legislature, to pave the road's limerock surface. This project enhanced public access, reduced storm water runoff, and is resulting in a cost savings to the State of

Florida by eliminating the need for frequent maintenance. RBNERR is constantly working to protect coastal resources and has enhanced its partnership with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission by helping establish a field office for marine enforcement officers on Shell Island Road. These officers have done outstanding work and have greatly increased our capacity to enforce laws that protect wildlife and the public.

As an added measure of protection, a gate at the entrance to Shell Island Road automatically opens at sunrise and closes at sunset, and new public education signs have been installed that describe the restoration project, the habitats and wildlife that can be observed along the Road, and guidelines reminding visitors of compatible ways to enjoy the area.

RBNERR and partners will continue to protect the Shell Island Road area but need the help of local citizens. For more information about RBNERR and to find out how you can help protect Shell Island Road, please visit www.rookerybay.org.



Spiny Swimmer

Often mistaken for a porcupine fish or a puffer, the striped burrfish (*Chilomycterus schoepfi*) is actually a different species with a similar defense mechanism: the ability to inflate or enlarge its body by ingesting water. Scaleless skin covers the burrfish's spines when relaxed, but upon inflation the spine points are exposed making the fish a difficult meal to swallow. This strategy, along with excellent camouflage, helps the slow-swimming burrfish elude most predators. The striped burrfish's teeth are fused together and ideal for crushing armored prey such as clams and barnacles. Striped burrfish can grow to about 10" in length and are found among seagrass beds and other shallow-water habitats of the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Ocean from New England to Brazil.



Rookery Bay Reserve, located in southwest Florida, is recognized as one of the few remaining pristine, mangrove-forested estuaries in the U.S. The Reserve is managed by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's Office of Coastal and Aquatic Managed Areas in cooperation with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). As one of 28 sites within NOAA's National Estuarine Research Reserve System, Rookery Bay serves as an outdoor classroom and laboratory for students and scientists from around the world.

(239) 417-6310 www.rookerybay.org 300 Tower Rd., Naples, FL 34113 (located off Collier Blvd. 1 mile south of U.S. 41/East Tamiami Trail)

Rookery Bay Environmental Learning Center January 2011 Events

January 4, 8 a.m. - 12 p.m.

Wing It! A Beginning Birders' Workshop

Learn the basics of birding, then practice your skills at a nearby park. Cost is \$20, members \$15. Space is limited; pre-registration required.

January 5, 12 - 1 p.m.

Lunch-N-Learn

Marine biologist Gary Pettit, Ph.D. will discuss Southwest Florida nature, including amphipods. Lunch provided by Carrabba's and Costco. Cost is \$5, members free. Pre-registration required by calling 239-417-6310 ext. 401.

January 13, 5 - 7 p.m.

An Evening with Audubon on Marco Princess

Cost is \$55, includes hot buffet. Pre-registration required online or by calling 239-642-5415.

January 14-16, 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Southwest Florida Nature Festival

Trips, talks, live birds, family fun activities. Event admission is \$10/day, kids under 16 free. Pre-registration and extra fee required for field trips and Friday evening keynote reception with Brian "Fox" Ellis as John James Audubon.

January 19, 4 to 6:30 p.m.

Sunset Kayak Tour

Cost is \$50, members \$45. Pre-registration req'd.

January 26, 2011, 6:30 - 8 p.m.

Public Meeting

Here's your chance to provide input as part of the federal performance evaluation of the Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve.

Pre-register for events at www.rookerybay.org

Winter hours: Monday - Saturday, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Admission: \$5 adults, \$3 kids 6-12, under 6 FREE.

Daily programs offered at 11 a.m. & 2 p.m.