

The Understory

Newsletter of the Pinellas Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society, Inc.

August - September 2011

President's Message

By: Alexa Wilcox-Huegel

I was recently reviewing some notes I had taken at a nursing conference several years ago about lessening the stress in our lives. The things listed that stood out to me were "plant flowers, listen to the birds, and take a walk in the woods," all things we native plant enthusiasts do naturally. Other things he mentioned also work in conjunction with our "environmental" sense -- things like "pick up litter in your area, help others, greet people, have potluck dinners, and bake & share from your table." Being in nature, helping others, and working with others give us a sense of usefulness and feeling good about ourselves and helps our brains to release certain neurotransmitters that, in turn, helps lower our blood pressure and stress hormones. Although those of us who love to be involved with the natural world have probably sensed this all along, scientists now have ways of proving why nature and our interaction with natural areas have such beneficial effects on us. So I hope you will take time to interact with nature and our native plant friends for some nice 'stress-releasing' events. Our August speaker was the wonderful and witty author, Dr. Walter Taylor, who spoke to us about Florida's native grasses. Although Dr. Taylor is mostly known for his books about identifying native wildflowers, he has recently written a book about our native grasses and his talk focused on that topic.

Our field trip this month will be a relaxing hike and picnic to one of Florida's most beautiful beaches, Caladesi Island. In September, we will have our annual Landscape Tour (see page 7), where we tour

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yards landscaped mostly with native plants. These yards help to bring back a 'sense of place' and the identity of what 'real' Florida is, and they give us a better understanding of how we can help bring nature into our own yards. Our October meeting/talk will be about
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“Edible & Useful” native plants given by one of our former Pinellas Chapter president’s, Katy Roberts. Our October field trip (one of the best times of the year) will be to Tiger Creek Preserve in the Lake Wales Ridge. Also in October is our “Fall Wildflower Festival & Plant Sale,” held at Wilcox Nursery in Largo (See flier on page 3).

In these times, we need nature more than ever to keep our stress levels down. We also need to be ever vigilant of the cuts and plans proposed in Tallahassee to chop away at our natural areas and environmentally important lands and to make our voices heard. As we have already seen several times, if we do not let our legislators know how important our natural areas are they will continue to reprioritize what is essential to Florida’s future. Writing, calling and making your voice heard is IMPERATIVE. Those walks in the woods and interacting with nature are probably more important than ever to keep our stress levels down but we need to stay involved so the legislators in Tallahassee leave us some to enjoy!

Alexa



New Members

Janice Chambers,
Patricia Jennings,
Darby Jones

Celebrate Florida in Gulfport This Summer

By: Jan Allyn

Those unwilling to brave the afternoon thundershowers to hear Elizabeth Neily and Holly Harriman’s program “Living in Paradise” missed an entertaining evening. With help from the avuncular Hermann Trappman, Elizabeth and Holly explored native plants used for food, medicine and other uses by Florida’s earliest inhabitants, their presentation illustrated with their wonderful photographs and Hermann’s lively illustrations of Tocobagan and other native peoples.

One of the interesting plants included in the talk was amaranth (*Amaranthus* spp.), an herbaceous, upright annual whose seeds are an excellent, gluten-free source of protein and iron, and whose leaves are also edible. Amaranths were cultivated by the Aztecs as long ago as 5,000-7,000 years. According to a paper on amaranths produced by the organization ECHO in Fort Myers, amaranth is “cultivated for both its seeds which are used as a grain and its leaves which are used as a vegetable or green. Both leaves and seeds contain protein of an unusually high quality. The grain is milled for flour or popped like popcorn. The leaves of both the grain and vegetable types may be eaten raw or cooked.” Another interesting edible included in the talk was the groundnut, *Apios americana*, a member of the pea family with beans and peanut-like tubers that are edible. Hermann reported foraging on them during a trip to the Everglades, saying that the tubers have a nutty flavor. Undoubtedly native Americans ate them, as groundnut was mentioned as a food source in the first “best-selling” book in the United States, published in 1682: a first-person account written by a woman named Mary Rowland who, with her children, was captured by native Americans in New England and lived with them for nearly three months before being ransomed.

“Living in Paradise” was the first in a series of six Celebrating Florida! Lectures that Elizabeth Neily’s nonprofit organization 1st Florida Frontiers will be producing on the fourth Thursday of each month. The next one will be about “Pinellas’ Original Inhabitants” on August 25th, from 7-9 p.m. at the City of Imagination Arts Center in Gulfport. For more information, call Elizabeth at 727-744-7051 or visit <http://www.floridafrontier.com/>.

FALL Wildflower Festival & Plant Sale Fundraiser

Saturday, October 8, 2011

9:00 AM to 4:00 PM

Wilcox Nursery

12501 Indian Rocks Rd, Largo

727-595-2073

Sponsored by:

Florida Native Plant Society

Pinellas Chapter

Event will include:

- Ø Native plant specialists to advise and assist with plant choices
- Ø Educational information about gardening with natives, plants to avoid, attracting wildlife to your landscape
- Ø Educational Lectures
- Ø Information on composting, use of Rain barrels, best mulch for you site
- Ø Native Plants books for sale;
- Ø Nature photography prints by Christina Evans, professional photographer
- Ø Nature inspired ceramics and art to enhance your outdoor spaced
- Ø Information on installing ponds or water features to enhance your yard and attract wildlife to your landscape.
- Ø Potted Herbs for your 'Kitchen Garden"; Farm Fresh produce
- Ø Special & unique selection of 'hard to find' native wildflowers

Volunteers Needed!

There are many jobs to do, even if you are not a 'native plant expert', so if you are willing to volunteer for a 2-3 hour period of time, (or all day)

Please contact Mary Ann Beekman @ mbeekman@tampabay.rr.com

A copy of the official registration and financial information may be obtained from the Florida Division of Consumer Services by calling toll-free within the state (800-435-7352, reg. no. CH4271). Registration does not imply endorsement, approval or recommendation by the state. (FDACS/DPI Cert. #47222877)

September Program: Wednesday, Sept. 7, 7:00 pm
Pinellas County Extension, 12520 Ulmerton Rd, Largo.

Topic: Preview of Landscape Tour Homes

Join us for a preview of some of the yards that will appear on our Landscape Tour. This program will tell us the specifics of some of the yards that may be difficult to share on the tours, specifically what they started with, what their objectives for the yard were, and how any problems were solved, or how negative features were turned into positives. Homeowners will share some of the special features of their yards, talk about the wildlife the yard attracts and how the yard is used by the homeowners and their friends.

September Field Trip: Saturday, Sept 10

You must sign up for all Field Trips — see info below.

Location: Anderson Park, Tarpon Springs, New addition (no yet open to public), 39699 U.S. Hwy. 19 N., Tarpon Springs.

Check out <http://www.pinellascounty.org/park/maps/color/amenities/ANDERSON.pdf> for park diagram, amenities, restroom info, map.

Time: Meet at Main Parking area off US 19 at 9:00 am

Field trip leader: Debbie Chayet, of Parks & Conservation Services

Description: This beautiful Pinellas County park is characterized by hilly terrain, wooded areas and beautiful vistas overlooking Salmon Bay and Lake Tarpon. The area Debbie is taking us to is a newer acquisition, a Scrub/sandhill type of habitat, that is not yet open to the general public. At this time of year the native wildflowers should be beautiful, so join us for a fun and informative hike.

Bring: Close-toed shoes appropriate for walking (We may encounter our native cactus, *Opuntia*); Hat, sunscreen, bug spray, beverage & snacks for hike; Camera or binoculars optional. You may want to bring a notebook for notes. Bring lunch if you want to picnic afterward. We are always looking for someone to write an article for the Understory newsletter, so consider volunteering for that.

Sign-up / Information: Sign up: via Doodle from Pinellasnativeplants.org, or E-mail: Alexa Wilcox-Huegel @ alexa776@tampabay.rr.com

or call 727-422-4792 (leave message). Anyone is welcome, but we do ask that you register for the hike.

5th Annual Landscape Tour of Native Yards

Saturday and Sunday, September 24th and 25th (See article on page 7)

Members Receive Awards!

Two of our members have received awards recognizing their contributions to the environmental world this month.

Ray Wunderlich, with two interns, Stephanie Martis, & LaTasha Thompson received the Sunshine Ambassador Award from the City Council of St. Petersburg for their work at Little Bayou.

Craig Huegel received the Florida Habitat Stewart award from the Florida Wildlife Federation, for his 'outstanding contributions to helping ensure a sustainable future for Florida's habitats', through his conservation work, educational contributions, books he has authored, and lectures to various groups around the state.



Flatwoods (above) and garberia in bloom (right) at Tiger Creek Preserve, which we will visit on our Oct. 22 field trip. Photos by Craig Huegel.

Another Black-eyed Susan: Orange Coneflower (*Rudbeckia fulgida*)

By: Craig Huegel

Florida is home to nine distinct species of black-eyed susans (*Rudbeckia* spp.). Most have been virtually ignored by the native plant nursery trade, though a few, like softhair coneflower (*R. mollis*), have recently begun to be offered. A few are very rare and are likely never to gain much attention. And, the ubiquitous black-eyed susan (*R. hirta*) is universally loved and grown by nearly everyone. Then, there is orange coneflower; the greatest anomaly of the genus.

Orange coneflower occurs in scattered locations in Florida from the central panhandle to Dixie and Taylor Counties in the “Big Bend” region of the northern west coast. Though not as universally prevalent in Florida as its more popular cousin, it is not really rare nor localized. Orange coneflower is widespread in eastern North America and ranges from Texas in the west, to Ontario in the north, and pretty much everywhere from that latitude east to the Atlantic and then southward. Throughout this range, it occurs in open sunny habitats with moist to average soils. And, in most of that range, it is widely grown and propagated. Even in much of the Southeast, orange coneflower is a favorite wildflower among native plant enthusiasts. Most nurseries offer it and named varieties and cultivars are the norm.

But, for some reason, orange coneflower has not yet found a similar stature in Florida. During my 23+ years experimenting with native Florida wildflowers, I have only once or twice stumbled on this species in Florida at a plant sale and over the past few years it has not been listed at all by growers associated with FANN – the Florida Association of Native Nurseries. This has always struck me as odd given the universal appeal of common black-eyed susan. The two species share some of the same characteristics. One is widely loved and the other is virtually unknown here.

Orange coneflower is somewhat larger and showier than its common cousin. Though the outer ray petals are a



rich yellow in color and the central disc is black, the diameter of these blooms is about 1/3 again as large on average. The same is true of its mature height. Foliage-wise, orange coneflower is a highly variable species, but its leaves tend to be a bit larger than black-eyed susan. The one major difference between them is the way the hairs occur on the leaf stems. In black-eyed susan, the hairs along the stem are often rough and scattered in all directions. Taxonomists call this “hirsute.” In orange coneflower, the hairs are not so dense and they tend to line up along the stem in the same direction; “strigose.”

Orange coneflower seems to have all the traits necessary to make it a widely used Florida native wildflower – at least in the northern third of the state. Its use outside of this latitude deserves more study. Perhaps one day, it will gain more attention, but for now it remains the “forgotten” eyed susan.



Photos by the author.



June Field Trip – Wall Springs Park

By: Jo Hubbard

Fourteen people followed long-time member and Pinellas County Parks Department employee, Debbie Chayet through the coastal addition of Wall Springs Park. This addition was made possible over the past decade by multiple grants to the state Florida Communities Trust and brings the total acreage of the Park to 210 acres, but the new area is not open to the public and we were very fortunate to be allowed this opportunity to see it. A lot of work has already been done as trash was hauled off the property and large swaths of Brazilian pepper were removed. With the pepper gone a great view of St Joseph Sound was restored. There is a house which had been used by the family of Dan McMullen and which may be used in future to house a Sheriff's Deputy to provide security for the property.

Everyone enjoyed the diversity. On the way into the addition, some saw a bobwhite quail and a Sherman's fox squirrel. We saw longleaf and sand pine trees but also, turkey oak, bluejack oak, laurel oak, myrtle oak and huge spreading live oak. Smaller trees included persimmon, a wild plum (*Prunus umbellata*) and black cherry. Some members pulled up invasive carrotwood. Craig explained that this area can't be classified as a typical pine flatwoods due to the many salt tolerant species on the property and the absence of wiregrass. Birds present were red-bellied woodpeckers, titmice, many towhees, blue-gray gnatcatchers, cardinals, mockingbirds and their cousins, the brown thrasher. Blooming were greeneyes (*Berlandiera subacalis*), tarflower (*Bejaria racemosa*), purple Bacopa, both white and purple Beauty Berry (*Callicarpa americana*) and a small morning glory (*Stylisma patens*). Not flowering, but promising a terrific show in the fall, were two *Carphephorus* species; the vanilla plant (*C. odoratissimus*) and the umbellate *C. corymbosus*. We saw a good-sized gopher tortoise, perhaps looking for the gopher apple (*Licania michauxii*) we found in multiple spots.



Coastalplain goldenaster *Chrysopsis scabrella*. Photo by Alexa Wilcox-Huegel.

Several types of butterflies were evident and Craig explained the different grasses and rushes. There is a beautiful black rush marsh in a brackish area that seemed a hundred miles from the frantic activity of Pinellas County.

This property is particularly important to conservation as it is one of the few undeveloped coastal locations left. Some members of the party went on to tour the developed portion of Wall Springs where recent engineering has restored better flow between the springs and adjacent waterways. Thanks to all who made this great trip possible.



Photos by Irene Hernandez

Florida State Parks Travelogue: Anastasia State Park

By: Dmytro Durbak

Beginning in this issue of the Understory, we initiate a regular column on Florida's State Park system, designed to encourage all of us to visit these gems of real Florida. If you wish to contribute a column for a future issue, please send it to Craig at: Huegelc55@aol.com. Thanks to Dmytro Durbak for getting this started with an article on Anastasia State Park near Jacksonville.

Anastasia State Park is located on Anastasia Island, across the Bridge of the Lions from St. Augustine. It has the most beautiful beach I have ever seen. The beach is a peninsula 4 miles long, ½ mile wide and is attached to Anastasia Island on the southern end. St Augustine Inlet, leading to Matanzas Bay, is on the northern tip of the peninsula. In the 1940s the peninsula was two islands, Conch Island and Bird Island. Over the years natural accretion joined the islands to each other and to Anastasia.

Walking north from the park the beach is pristine. There is not a man-made structure to be seen. Walking about a mile will take you away from the bathers, and into a truly isolated environment.

Wave action is strong compared to the Gulf. The first day we encountered four foot waves. Jane loves body surfing and her timing is very good. I enjoy diving into the waves. The beach is very wide and gradual, allowing waves to cover 75 feet or so of sand with a thin film of water, which reflects clouds or sunset. This is ideal for photography. In the evenings the sun sets behind the sand dunes. There is a moment when the horizontal sun rays make the entire ocean turn golden. Whitecaps become goldcaps.

The campground is nice. Most spots are shady and the layout was designed for privacy. Rest rooms are clean and there is a dish-washing station. Camp is about 1¼ miles from the beach. We used bikes to go to the beach, as well as to town.

5th Annual Landscape Tour of Native Yards

September 24th and 25th, 2011.

Saturday: 8-2 ; Sunday 9-3

Each tour (North county & South county will be on separate days) will feature six to eight yards demonstrating a variety of landscape styles and stages of maturity, from small urban courtyards to larger gardens, from traditional design to natural settings, from sunny and xeric to shady and moist. Visitors will see how native plants can enhance any landscape, providing a 'sense of place', and also reducing the need for pesticides, fertilizer and over-watering.

Native trees, shrubs, grasses, vines, flowers and groundcovers provide food and shelter for a delightful assortment of birds, butterflies and other wildlife. These yards add something back to nature instead of competing with it. Many of the yards will show ways of using water features to help attract birds. Whether a beginner, an avid native-plant gardener, or just someone who wants to do less yard work, visitors will find some great ideas to take home with them.

Pre-Registration will be available about 3 weeks prior to the tour at Wilcox Nursery, Indian Rocks Rd, Largo; and online at our website: Pinellasnativeplants.org (Paypal). Other ticket/booklet purchase sites may be available as time gets closer. Watch for updates regarding sites.

Volunteers are needed to help in the Host yards, so if you are willing to donate a few hours on either day, please contact our Volunteer coordinator: Mary Ann Beekman : mbeekman@tampabay.rr.com, and let her know your preference for north or south county.



Ponte Verde Beach near Anastasia Island State Park. Photo by the author.

July Field Trip: Silver River Kayaking

By: JanAllyn

At the outset, the July field trip to the beautiful Silver River looked like a very iffy proposition. The previous day's weather was rainy and dismal, and nobody could reach the kayak outfitter, who was out of town (his relief phone answering service dropped the ball, he explained later). As a result, a number of people were unable to reach him to make reservations, and until the last minute we wondered whether the trip would happen. But when the day dawned, the weather looked slightly more promising, if still damp. We headed off to Ocala, dodging scuttling rain clouds as we went.

Despite the setup problems, the trip was full, with about 25 people. Most folks were FNPS members, but there were also a few regular customers of the outfitter, Lars Andersen of Adventure Outpost. We convened at the put-in at Ray Wayside Park on the other side of Ocala, on State Road 40 east of the Silver Springs attraction. After Lars gave the group a bit of background about the river, its history, and what we would likely see, we were off.

Our put-in was downstream from the spring head at Silver Springs, so we paddled against the mild current in a straggling group, after dawdling a bit near the ramp to admire a school of huge, fish-sized tadpoles and to catch a glimpse of an otter. The changeable weather turned out to be a blessing. The partly cloudy, partly rainy day meant a respite from the heat of the relentless summer sun, with still enough sunshine to make the day bright and pleasant.

One of our early "finds" was a gorgeous yellow prothonotary warbler, resplendent in bright yellow feathers. He was kind enough to hang around in the streamside vegetation until almost everyone could admire him. We spotted groups of beautiful scarlet hibiscus (*Hibiscus coccinea*), peering at us demurely from behind stands of cypress trees along the bank. In the water we saw eelgrass (*Vallisneria americana*) and elodea (*Elodea canadensis*)—but they were almost completely covered with algae growth, a sad sight to see. Farther on, an alert member of our group spotted a snake in a low branch of a cypress tree. When Lars arrived at the snake-tree, he deftly snatched its occupant down by its tail and stroked it until it regained its calm demeanor. A brown water snake, he said, a female,

and explained how to tell it wasn't a venomous water moccasin. (The moccasin has an eye stripe and a chunky head, among other things.)

All along the river banks we saw patches of cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*), its blossoms redder than red. When combined with the chartreuse of sunlit foliage and the bright purple flowers of pickerelweed (*Pontederia cordata*), the result was stunning. Another interesting plant we saw was a species related to duck potato (*Sagittaria latifolia*), that tall, upright plant with three-petaled, yellow-centered, white flowers that is so common in retention ponds. The plants we saw had the same characteristic flowers, but they were tiny. The plant itself was submerged, with just the flower emerged. These were strap-leaved sagittaria, *S. kurziana*, found in flowing freshwater streams in north central Florida. We also saw quite a few alligators along the way, many juveniles of a foot or less, and many wading birds, including a somewhat uncommon green heron. Strangely absent were belted kingfishers, so often present on our rivers. Nor did we see any monkeys in the treetops, a sight that often delights visitors to Silver Springs.



A lovely thing about the Silver River is the complete lack of development along its banks. Although the attraction owns the land right around the spring head, the remainder of the river is on state-owned land. We saw one dock with a pontoon boat, and a few USGS/SJRWMD water elevation gages, but otherwise the hand of man is not in evidence. Powerboats do travel the river, but most were considerate and made way slowly without creating a wake. We did see one airboat, but thankfully it was not underway and we were spared having to listen to its deafening racket. Thunder rumbled in the distance as we hauled out at the boat ramp at Silver River State Park for a rest and a bite to eat. We had paddled a little less than 3.5 miles, with Silver Springs

still a couple of miles distant. Since the weather seemed prone to deteriorate into a thunderstorm soon, we opted to head back downstream after our break. The fast paddlers in our crew managed to beat the rain, but the majority of us didn't quite make it back to the boat ramp in time and got a thorough soaking, not altogether an unpleasant thing on a hot summer day. Though maybe not as crystal clear as she once was, the Silver River is still beautiful to behold and full of life.



Chapter Directory

JanAllyn
jallyn@tampabay.rr.com 399-1022

Mary Ann Beekman
mbeekman@aol.com

Frank Brandt
fbrandt135@gmail.com

Debbie Chayet
dchayet@verizon.net

Tiffany Custer
salteegr1@yahoo.com 727-244-1909

Dr. Craig Huegel
Huegelc55@aol.com 422-6583

Marie Hughes
521-1261

Mary Jackson
maryjack99@aol.com 542-1138

Andrew Karpinski
ak@stonemarmot.com

Ginny Nelson
Grn22srm6@yahoo.com 953-9782

Cindy Peacock
rpeacock5@tampabay.rr.com 787-4031

Cathy Quindiagan
CQuindiagan@aol.com 327-7573

Katy Roberts
kroberts@ij.net 7270726-1455

Cindy Smith
CSmith55@tampabay.rr.com

Michael Stallings
813-235-5944

Bruce Turley
wnursery@tampabay.rr.com 595-2073

Cathy Vogelsong
cathybirdsong@tampabay.rr.com 518-1026

Alexa Wilcox-Huegel
alexa776@tampabay.rr.com 422-4792

Jane Williams 447-7394
Jwilli56@tampabay.rr.com 447-7394



Scarlet hibiscus at Silver River

Only Two Hikes Remain! Off the Beaten Path

Hike Series at Brooker Creek Preserve!

By Barbara Hoffman,
Chairman, Friends of Brooker
Creek Preserve

Please join us for our nature-
based fundraising hike series,
Off the Beaten Path! This
series of four hikes will take

place in beautiful areas tucked away within Brooker Creek Preserve – areas that are closed to the public. We are lucky to have as our guide, Dr. Craig Huegel, who can identify everything – from the tiniest moss to the tallest tree and everything in between including animal prints, bird calls, lichens, and more. He is full of stories and very patient in answering questions. Every time I hike with Dr. Huegel, I come away with lots of good information and a time well enjoyed. You can count on me being there for these adventures *off the beaten path!* (Full series included March 27, Sandhills and June 26, Cypress Swamp hikes)

\$25 donation to Friends of BCP per person per hike (10% discount for members of Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve).

Sept. 25 - Pine Flatwoods Catesby's Lily Site – Located in the eastern part of the preserve, this site features the threatened Catesby's Lily in full bloom along with a profusion of other fall wildflowers.

Jan. 22, 2012 - Anclote Spur – this site was once part of the preserve but is now a preserve in itself. We will start in Brooker Creek Preserve, then traverse from woodlands into saltmarsh to a secluded spot along the beautiful Anclote River.

Hikes will be 3-4 hours long and begin at 9:00 a.m. – bring water and lunch. Reserve your spot by emailing fobcp@tampabay.rr.com followed with payment by check. Sign up early! Only 20 spots are open for these fabulous hikes *off the beaten path!*

Contacts

Officers:

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Vice-President: Mary Jackson
Secretary: Jan Allyn
Treasurer: Jane Williams
Chapter Representative: Debbie Chayet
Past President: Bill Bilodeau

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Mary Ann Beekman, Frank Brandt, Tiffany Custer,
Andrew Karpinski, Ginny Nelson, Cindy Smith

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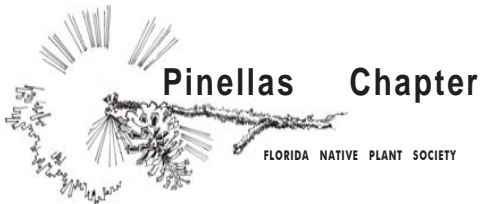
Advocacy /Conservation: Jan Allyn
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Hospitality/ Info Greeter - Meetings: Andy Karpinski
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Newsletter Editor: Dr. Craig Huegel
Co-editor/Publisher/ Artist: Cathy Vogelsong
Programs/ Special Events: Alexa Wilcox-Huegel

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& Alexa Wilcox-Huegel
December Conservation Celebration:
Cindy Peacock & Katy Roberts

**See Directory of phone numbers
and e-mail addresses on page 9**



P.O. Box 1661
Pinellas Park, FL 33780-1661

Pinellas Chapter web address:
<http://pinellas.fnpschapters.org>

FNPS Blog
<http://fnpsblog.blogspot.org/>

