

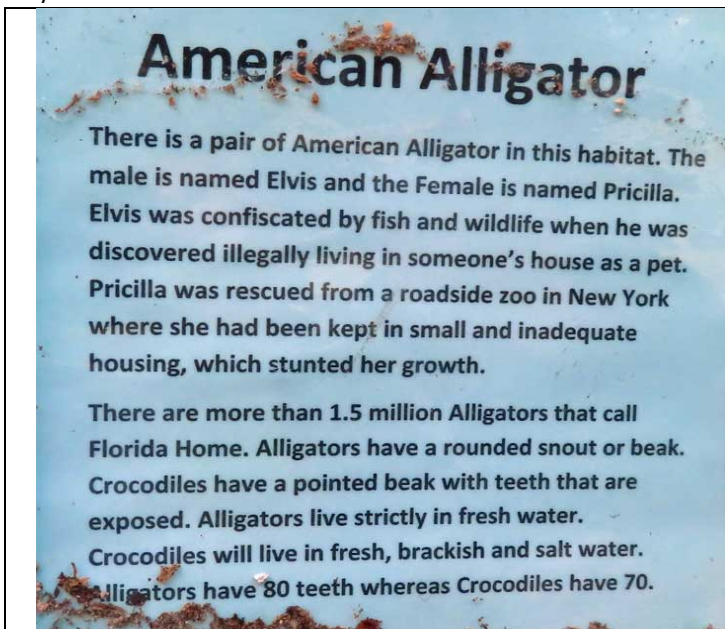


Flamingo Gardens: Flora and Fauna

Floyd L. and Jane Wray established Flamingo Gardens in 1927. It is one of the oldest botanical gardens in South Florida. Today's not-for-profit establishment has over 90 species of Florida native birds and animals. Some of the birds are permanently injured or non-releasable. It also has 20 "Champion" trees, over 250 wading birds—representing 45 species, an insect gallery, and various types of flowers. The Wildlife Encounter Show offers a personalization of Florida's native wildlife.

Photographing animals, whether in captivity or in the wild is not an easy task. For instance, National Geographic's "Fundamentals of Photography" includes 24, 30-minute lectures on the basics of taking better pictures. This photo program shares a few of my flora and fauna photos as an overview of what you can see at Flamingo Gardens Botanical Collection and Wildlife Sanctuary.

The interesting part of the experience are the various posted topics throughout the Gardens that include short and concise information to make your experience more educational. The internet includes many more photographs taken by people at Flamingo Gardens. Weather, time-of-day, and other factors can make or break a "good" photograph. On the day of our visit, it was hot and very humid.



Alligator Snapping Turtle

Macrochelys temminckii

Physical Description: Alligator Snapping Turtles (*Macrochelys temminckii*) are the largest freshwater turtles. They look very primitive and have been called the dinosaur of the turtle world. They are identified by the three prominent ridges on the upper shell (carapace), long muscular tail, and massive head with a hooked beak. Alligator Snapping Turtles may weigh up to 200 pounds. They are unique among snapping turtles for having eyes on the side of the head. The webbed toes are equipped with large claws. Adults have dark brown heads, legs and shells, but the skin on the neck and other areas may be yellowish brown. Males have longer tails than females and are at least twice their weight.

Range & Habitat: Alligator Snapping Turtles live in the deep waters of large rivers, canals, lakes and swamps in the South-eastern region of the United States. They are confined to the river systems that drain into the Gulf of Mexico. Hatchlings and juveniles usually live in small streams. Alligator snapping turtles spend most of their time in the water, and generally only nesting females venture on land. However, males have been known to bask.

Lifespan: They can live between 20 and 70 years in captivity. Adult snappers have no natural predators other than humans, who capture them for their meat and shells, and to sell in the exotic animal trade. A severe reduction in population due to unregulated harvesting and habitat loss has led states to protect them throughout most of their range, and they are listed as a threatened species.

Food Source: The Alligator Snapping Turtle is both a scavenger and an active hunter. It lies quietly on the bottom and opens its jaws to reveal a small pink worm-like lure in the back of its gray mouth. This attracts fish which it swallows whole. They also eat frogs, snakes, snails, worms, crayfish and other turtles too.



African Spurred Tortoise

Geochelone sulcata

Range & Habitat: The African Spurred Tortoise, also called the Sulcata Tortoise, is not native to Florida. It is a species of tortoise which inhabits the southern edge of the Sahara desert in northern Africa. In these and regions, the tortoise excavates burrows in the ground to get to areas with higher moisture levels, and spends the hottest part of the day in these burrows. Their pleasant temperament and large size have made them a popular pet, and excessive captive breeding in the exotic pet industry has resulted in an overabundance of abandoned African Spurred Tortoises. Animal sanctuaries like Flamingo Gardens are necessary to accommodate them.

Physical Description: The African Spurred Tortoise (*Geochelone sulcata*) is the largest continental land tortoise, surpassed in size only by the giant island species from Alabama and Galapagos, with recorded carapace lengths to 83 cm (over 2.5 feet) and a maximum recorded weight of 195 kg (about 440 lbs.). Well camouflaged in the desert by its overall sandy coloration, thick golden to yellow-brown skin, and a brownish carapace. The African spurred tortoise has a broad, oval carapace which displays prominent serrations at the front and back margins and conspicuous growth rings on each scale, which become particularly marked with age.

Lifespan: African Spurred Tortoises can live between 50 and 150 years in captivity.

Food Source: Sulcata tortoises are herbivores. Primarily, their diets consist of many types of grasses and plants, high in fiber and very low in protein. Due to their high dietary fiber needs, grasses form a minimum of 75% of their food intake. To remain healthy, they require sufficient calcium for bone and shell development, low protein, and minimal fruit or sugary foods.



Freshwater Turtles

Testudines

Range & Habitat: Turtles are ancient reptiles that have existed for 220 million years and are found in most parts of the world with temperate or tropical climates. Florida has more species of turtles than any other state. Of the 26 types of turtle species found in Florida, the vast majority (16) are freshwater turtles. These species live in fresh water such as lakes, ponds, rivers, canals, as well as the brackish marshes and swamps. Freshwater turtles cannot tolerate salt water, unlike terrapins and sea turtles.

Physical Description: A turtle's most distinctive feature is its shell which provides protection from predators like a shield. When frightened or attacked, turtles can retract their head, feet, and tail quickly inside the safety of their shell. The upper shell is called a "carapace" and the lower shell is called a "plastron". While most freshwater turtles have hard bony shells, three species known as softshell turtles have fleshy shells adapted for swimming. Turtles are the only reptile that have a shell but no teeth.

Freshwater turtles do not have any visible external ears, but they have all the "inner ear" parts, and the auditory nerve and brain center required for hearing. They don't hear airborne sounds as well as other animals, but use vibrations to sense and interpret what is happening in their surrounding environment. They also have an excellent sense of vision and smell.

Lifespan: Freshwater turtles can live for many years, some for more than one hundred years! However, human over-development, water pollution, and introduction of invasive species are threatening the future survival of Florida's native turtle species. Red-eared sliders were introduced through the pet trade and have established large populations which compete with indigenous populations for food, introduce disease, and breed with native species.

Food Source: Some turtles are omnivores and eat plants and animals, others are vegetarians and eat only aquatic plants. Turtles have no teeth; instead, they use their sharp beaks to catch, cut, and slice through prey, and sever vegetation to eat.

Behavior: Although all turtles are air-breathing reptiles, aquatic turtles can hold their breath for long periods of time. All freshwater turtles lay eggs on land in holes they have dug. When the eggs hatch, the baby turtles (puplings) return to water.



Box Turtles

Terrapene carolina

Physical Description: Box Turtles are small turtles with dome-shaped shells. The top part of the shell is called the Carapace. The bottom shell is the Plastron which consists of a single hinge that helps the turtle close its shell. They "box" themselves inside to protect themselves from predators. The most common Box Turtles found in Florida are the Florida Box Turtle (*Terrapene carolina floridana*) and the Eastern Box Turtle (*Terrapene carolina carolina*). The Florida box turtle is quite different in appearance from the other subspecies of *Terrapene carolina* as its carapace has a distinct pattern of light radiating yellow stripes that make it easily identifiable. The Eastern Box Turtle's carapace has a radiating pattern of yellowish or orangish spots or blotches.

The way to tell the difference of sex on most turtles and tortoises is to look at their underside. Males have a concave plastron, longer tail, and larger claws on the back feet and shed during mating. Females have a flat plastron and a shorter tail. The Florida Box Turtle males have red eyes, females have yellow eyes.

Range & Habitat: Box Turtles inhabit primarily open woods. They are usually found on land, but will also soak themselves in water for days. Box Turtles hibernate under the soil for long periods of time.

Lifespan: The average life span of an adult Box Turtle is 50 years, although a significant proportion live to over 100 years. The Box Turtle can protect itself from predation by hiding, closing their shell, and being. The risk of death is greatest in small animals due to their size and weaker carapace and plastron. While the shell of an adult box turtle is seldom fractured, the box turtle is still vulnerable to surprise attacks and persistent gnawing or pecking. Common predators are mammals like muskrats, skunks, raccoons, dogs, and rodents, but birds and snakes are also known to kill Box Turtles.

Food Source: Box Turtles are considered omnivorous. They eat fruit, vegetables, meat, insects, worms, and small vertebrates.



Some birds you might see in the Rookery throughout the year:



The Rookery

A Rookery is a colony of breeding animals, generally birds. The term is also applied to the roosting, nesting, or breeding grounds of seabirds. Safety is an important element of a Rookery. This island with its surrounding water creates a safe haven for birds to roost at night, where predators like raccoons and opossums can not reach them.

Most birds in this Rookery are descendants of birds in the Aviary that were released here.

These birds are free to come and go as they please and fly in at night to roost. Hundreds of birds come here to roost in safety each night covering the tree and island. It is not unusual to see many species roosting in the same Rookery.





American Black Bear

Ursus americanus

Range: Native to North America, the American Black Bear is the continent's smallest and most widely distributed bear species and the most common. They are found throughout most of the contiguous United States, north into Canada and south into Mexico.

Habitat: Black bears are most often found in undisturbed rural areas with relatively inaccessible terrain. Black bears can survive suburban areas as long as they contain easily accessible foods and some vegetative coverage. Black bears once ranged throughout Florida but now live in several fragmented areas of forest, swamp, scrub oak ridges, and hammock habitat.

Physical Description: Black bears are large, powerful mammals with rounded ears, short tails, 5-toed feet, and large canine teeth. Although black bears in western states may have several color phases, all black bears in the Southeast are black. The muzzle may be tan or nearly black, and some bears have white or white "blazes" on their chests. Average weight for adult bears in Florida range from 250 to 450 pounds for males and 125 to 250 pounds for females.

Lifespan: In the wild, Black bears may reach 20 years of age. In captivity they frequently live up to 40 years. Once fully grown, Black bears have no predators besides humans and other bears. The main causes of mortality are vehicle collisions, starvation, and poaching.

Food Source: Bears are called omnivores because they eat both plants and animals. A Florida Black Bear's diet varies, but usually consists of plants, insects, and animal matter. Only a small percentage of their diet is meat.

Breeding: The breeding season for Black bears runs from June to July. Bear cubs are very small at birth, only 3 to 10 pounds. They stay with their mother for a year and a half, and will almost always den with her the following winter. During their second summer the juveniles wander off and the adult female is ready to breed again.

Hibernation: Most Black bears hibernate depending on local weather conditions and availability of food in the winter months. Bears in southern states den for shorter periods and sleep less deeply than bears in colder climates. Male bears in Florida may have a very short denning period or none at all.



EVERGLADES WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Opened in 1990, the Everglades Wildlife Sanctuary at Flamingo Gardens was one of the first of its kind in South Florida giving residence to permanently injured or non-releasable Florida native wildlife with the goal of returning offspring to the wild. Today it has the distinction of being the largest collection of Florida native wildlife in the State, with over 90 native species including alligators, bobcats, a bear, eagles, falcons, hawks, otters, owls and panthers.



The Everglades Wildlife Sanctuary also uses the experiences and insights gained through caring for these birds and animals to educate the public about the environment, loss of habitat, and other problems affecting wildlife resources.

BIRD OF PREY CENTER

The Bird of Prey Center opened in 1990 to much fanfare as the first exhibition of Flamingo Gardens Everglades Wildlife Sanctuary. The center gave residence to permanently injured or non-releasable hawks, owls and other birds of prey. Today it is one of the largest and most inclusive collections of birds of prey in the country.



Birds of prey, also known as raptors, are birds that hunt invertebrates and vertebrates, including other birds. In Ornithology the term for "bird of prey" refers to birds that have keen vision that allows them to detect prey during flight, strong feet for holding food, and a strong curved beak for tearing flesh. Most birds of prey also have strong curved talons. In most cases, the females are larger than the males. Birds of prey include Eagles, Falcons, Hawks, Kites, Owls, Ospreys, and Vultures.



Red Shouldered Hawk



Barn Owl



Ruby Macaw

Ara Macao x Ara chloropterus

Native to: tropical North and South America

Diet: In the wild, their parents' species would eat palm nuts, fruits, seeds, and vegetable matter from the treetops. In captivity, they should be fed formulated foods, seeds, nuts, and dried food.

Breeding: The hybridization of macaws is usually due to the placement of multiple macaw species in the same enclosure. Breeders may choose to pair different species to intentionally produce hybrid offspring, or the parrots themselves may select such a partner due to a lack of a same species partner. They are often bred for their "pet quality" and personality traits.

Interesting Facts:

- The Ruby Macaw is a hybrid cross between a Scarlet Macaw and a Green-winged Macaw. Fathers have the dominant gene, so this will generally influence the offspring's coloration.
- Hybridization of macaws occurs both in nature and captivity, being one of the few species that can produce viable, fertile offspring.
- Hybrid macaws do not hold any scientific names and are often labeled by the two macaw species they are produced from.



Major Mitchell's Cockatoo

Lophochroa leadbeateri

Native to inland areas of Australia

Habitat: scrublands, savannas, and wooded grasslands, but needs forested areas for nesting

Diet: seeds from melons, weeds, and pine trees; cereal grains; and insect larvae.

Nesting: Females lay 2-5 eggs in a clutch. The incubation period is 23 to 30 days, and the young remain in the nest for a period of six to eight weeks prior to fledging. The fledglings continue to be fed, mostly by the male, for 8 more weeks. Unlike other cockatoos, Major Mitchell's pairs will not nest close to one another, so they cannot tolerate fragmented, partly cleared habitats.

Interesting Facts:

- Life expectancy of 40 to 60 years in the wild; up to 80 years in captivity
- They are weak fliers, and have a characteristic slow, labored flight at a low altitude. They will often fly for a short distance and rest before continuing their flight.
- Generally, keeps its crest flat, but it raises its conspicuous crest to either attract a female or threaten a rival.



Florida Bobcat

Lynx rufus floridanus

Physical Description: Bobcats, sometimes called wildcats, are roughly twice as big as the average housecat. They have long legs, large paws, and tufted ears similar to those of their larger relative, the Canada lynx. Most bobcats are brown or brownish red with a white underbelly with dark brown or black spotted or lined markings covering most of their body and a short, black-tipped tail. The cat is named for its tail, which appears to be cut or "bobbed", and measures only 4 to 7 inches. Bobcats grow to be 26 to 41 inches (66 to 104cm) and weigh 11 to 30 lbs (5 to 14 kg). Like the Florida panther, the Florida bobcat is a distinct subspecies, of which there are 12 in North America.

Range & Habitat: Bobcats are elusive and nocturnal, so they are rarely spotted by humans. Although they are seldom seen, they roam throughout much of North America and adapt well to such diverse habitats as forests, swamps, deserts, and even suburban areas. The bobcat is the most abundant wildcat in the U.S. and has the greatest range of all native North American cats.

In the early to mid 1900s, bobcat populations in many Midwestern and eastern states of the United States were decimated due to the increased value of its fur. However, international laws began to protect the world's spotted cats in the 1970s, and populations have rebounded since then. Today, populations are stable in many northern states and are reviving in many others. North American populations are believed to be quite large, with perhaps as many as one million cats in the United States alone.

Lifespan: The average life span of Bobcats in the wild is 10 to 12 years, and longer in captivity.

Food Sources: Fierce hunters, bobcats can kill prey much bigger than themselves, but usually eat rabbits, birds, mice, squirrels, and other smaller game. Bobcats are also known to eat adult deer, which they usually consume during the winter months, as well as lambs, poultry and young pigs when a ranch is near. The bobcat hunts by stealth, but delivers a deathblow with a leaping pounce that can cover 10 feet (3 meters).



Florida Panther

Puma concolor coryi

Range & Habitat: Puma, cougar, mountain lion, panther and catamount are all common names for one species of wild cat, Puma concolor. The species is so wide-ranging and populous there are 32 sub-species that vary based on location. The historic range of Puma concolor includes almost all of North and South America. During the 1800s and early 1900s the species was extensively hunted and almost eradicated from the eastern United States. Only one subspecies remains in the eastern U.S. - the Florida panther (Puma concolor coryi). It was one of the first species added to the U.S. Endangered Species List in 1973. Today, there are less than 100 Florida panthers left in the wild. They are found in southern Florida in swamps and scrublands such as Everglades National Park and Big Cypress National Preserve. The species is so critically endangered that it is vulnerable to just about every major threat - from habitat loss to cars and even feline diseases.

Physical Description: The Florida panther is tawny brown on the back and pale gray underneath, with white flecks on the face, neck and shoulder. Black markings decorate the tip of the tail, eyes, ears and around the snout. The main way to tell a Florida panther from other sub-species of Puma concolor is by looking at its tail and back. Florida panthers have a crossed tail and a unique patch of fur on the back. The back fur is almost like a comb, not conforming to the rest of the panther's fur. Florida panthers are about 6-7 feet long - males are bigger than females. Males average 130 lbs; females up to 90lbs.

Lifespan: Florida Panthers live 10-15 years, and may live longer in captivity.

Food Sources: Florida panthers primarily eat white-tailed deer, but they will also hunt feral hog, rabbit, raccoon, armadillo, birds and other animals.

Keystone Species: The Florida panther is recognized as Florida's official state animal but it is one of the most endangered mammals on Earth. Panthers are a Keystone species: protecting them and the vast, unspoiled, wild territory each one needs to survive—an average of 200 square miles for a single male—protects many other plants and animals that live there. At the top of the food chain, these cats help keep feral hog numbers in check and deer, raccoon and other prey populations balanced and healthy.



CHAMPION TREE COLLECTION

In 1983 the Florida Forest Service certified 21 trees at Flamingo Gardens as "Champion" trees, the largest trees of their species in the State. Several of them may be the largest of their species in the United States, but as they are non-native they are not eligible for national certification. Several of the trees have since been lost to senescence (old age), disease, or storm damage, but other trees have been named champions in their place.



Flamingo Gardens contains the largest single collection of "Champion" trees in the state of Florida. All Champion trees are identified with "Champion" labels.





**Please do not remove
Feathers, Seeds & Plants
from these botanical gardens.**

They may carry disease or parasites
harmful to you or native plants & animals
or may be an invasive species.

Flamingo Gardens 3750 South Flamingo Road Davie, FL 33330-1614 (954) 473-2955

Sources: <https://www.flamingogardens.org/>, <https://www.flamingogardens.org/easy.html>, <https://www.flamingogardens.org/wildlife-encounter-shows.html>, and <https://www.flamingogardens.org/new-projects.html>.

Other topics about the Flamingo Gardens: Flamingo Gardens, The Gardens Revisited, The Wray Home, Tram Tour, and Big Bugs Exhibit. Go to acuri.net: USA – Florida – Flamingo Gardens.

acuri.net John R. Vincenti Flamingo Gardens Flora and Fauna