



On Our Pond

A NEWSLETTER FOR CLEANER WATER & BETTER POND ENVIRONMENTS



Volume 7 No 4 Adopt-A-Pond is sponsored by Hillsborough County, the Southwest Florida Water Management District, and YOU! Winter 2001

ACTIVITIES UPDATE

Pond Walks

- Lakeview Village Dr
- Learning Gate Community School
- San Miguel St

Education Meetings

- Davidsen Middle School (Jade Castle)
- Temple Terrace Woods

Cleanups

- Haymaker Ct
- 12 Oaks larger
- 12 Oaks smaller

Plantings

- Saddle Rd
- Tarawood
- Hitchcock Pond
- 12 Oaks Larger

PRESENTING THE 2001 BEST MAINTAINED POND



Adopt-A-Pond is proud to present the winners of the 2001 Best Maintained Pond Competition: Hitchcock Pond in Boyette Springs! You may remember this group from the last edition of On Our Pond, this is definitely their year! Find out more about this group and how the competition went down inside.

See Pond Judging on page 3.

Think Fast

What percentage of homeowners use fertilizer according to the label?

Answer: 50% Source: Water Taking a new tack on nonpoint water pollution

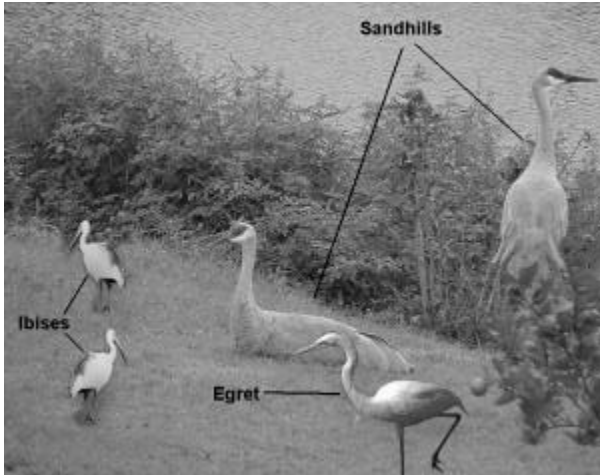
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On Our Pond

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THE BIRDS & THE BEES- ...well really just the birds.



By Martin Montalvo

Various bird species common to our ponds are engaging in intricate dances, distinctive calls, and developing colorful plumage. The reason for this is, it's nesting season again here in South Florida. A few of the most common birds nesting in the area are Sandhill Crane, White Ibis, and Great Egret.

Sandhill Cranes are social birds, that nest around open marshes or bogs. Adults will measure about 42 inches tall and are all gray with a red patch on their head. Sandhill Crane courtship typically involves an elaborate "dance," with birds spreading their wings and leaping in air while calling. Their nest is a mound of plant material usually found among marsh vegetation in shallow water. The pair will share in the incubation of usually 2 eggs for a month. The new young will leave the nest to follow their parents in the marsh within a day after hatching and can fly in about 65 days.

White Ibis is one of the most numerous wading birds in Florida. These highly social birds are all white, standing about 25 inches tall, and can be distinguished by their long red bill and face. In order to attract mates, males perform ritualized preening and lower their heads onto their backs. White Ibises nest in mangroves, swamps, and dense thickets, usually 2 to 15 feet above ground or water. Breeding pairs usually have 2 to 3 eggs with an incubation period of 21 days. While maturing the young may clamber about near the nest after 3 weeks and may leave the colony to forage with adults after 7 weeks.

The Great Egret, or the American Egret is a large, stately, slender white heron standing about 38 inches tall. This bird has a long slender yellow beak and black legs, which distinguish it from the Great White Heron that has greenish yellow legs. These birds will nest in colonies with other species of herons. The nest is composed of a platform of sticks assembled in a tree or bush. The clutch usually consists of 3 or 4 pale blue eggs that hatch in about 26 days.

FLOATING ISLANDS

A great way to spice up your pond!

Looking for a way to customize your pond? Interested in attracting more wildlife? Adding a floating island is an easy way to do both. So what is a floating island? Well, it's simply a floating box on which plants can grow in the middle of the pond. It adds habitat for birds, turtles, fish, and who knows what else, and it increases the amount of biomass treating your pond. In effect you're adding pond bank! There's no set way to build these things, so find one that works for your pond, but here are some pointers:

- ☛ Fill the box with dead plant material, compost, or exotic-free mulch.
- ☛ Don't use styrofoam floats, they break down and pollute your pond.
- ☛ Plant native aquatics on the island, or let it recruit naturally, but remember to control the nuisance species.

Don't be afraid to experiment with designs and configurations, build several and string them together, add nest boxes to them, be creative! It's your pond, make it unique. You and your neighbors can get hours of enjoyment from this simple project. Let us know how it comes out, maybe your pond can be featured in the next newsletter.

For a **free copy** of one **easy-to-follow set of plans** check out the link to **Floating Islands** in **Websites** on **page 6** or contact us by phone, mail, or email. The phone number and addresses are on the front of this newsletter. And as always, if you need help, just ask!



THE POND JUDGING

Congratulations to all of our competing ponds

Every fall, as the big planting season winds down, Adopt-A-Pond holds its annual Best Maintained Pond Competition. Every pond in the program has the opportunity to enter and be judged by a team of local environmental professionals on several criteria that make up a good healthy pond. This year we had 7 ponds enter the judging and when the scores were totalled, Hitchcock Pond ranked the highest.

This pond had a great percentage of native vegetation. There were nuisance plants but they weren't dominating. And the pond group had done some nice things in the area. Rather than try to remove a small island of sedimentation, they planted it, resulting in a beautiful patch of pickerel where turtles and alligators love to hang out. The group also made use of an open space beneath some trees to place some furniture and outdoor games in a sort of community area. Finally, some of the residents have even begun to integrate the pondscape into their yard design with birdfeeders and terraced gardens. Overall it was a great example of what an Adopt-A-Pond can be.

The other ponds that competed all did very well. If these groups stick with it, they'll all have a good chance at winning in the future. And if your pond missed out on the competition this year, keep watch for the announcements next fall. This is not only an excellent opportunity for you to show off what you've been doing, but it gives us a chance to see the state of our ponds. Even if you don't think you'll win, sign up, at least you'll get to see what the experts think about your pond... and who knows you may be surprised!



Bill Copeland studies the Country Grove Pond before making his marks.

LAKE AND POND EDUCATION IN PINELLAS COUNTY

On March 23, 2002 from 10am-4pm, The Pinellas County Department of Environmental Management, the Florida Botanical Gardens, and the Cities of Clearwater and Largo will host an educational seminar on lakes and ponds at the Florida Botanical Gardens at Pinewood Cultural Park (<http://www.flbg.org>) in Largo. Local experts from Hillsborough County, SWFWMD, the FWCC, and the Florida Lake Watch Program will discuss how you can implement a lake or pond restoration project right in your own back yard. Discussion topics include water quality, algae blooms, aquatic vegetation, fish management and more. This is an excellent opportunity for those of us outside Hillsborough County. Lunch will be provided. For more information or to register please call **Kelli Hammer Levy** at **727-464-3317** or e-mail **klevy@co.pinellas.fl.us**.

READY OR NOT- Here come the weeds



We thought we should at least give you all fair warning. The growing season is coming on fast. Is your pond group ready to deal with the sudden appearance of whatever might be waiting to sprout up? Before we know it the weeds will be out in force and now is the time to prevent problems before they start. Take this opportunity of slow growth to plan your actions. Weed out any dead areas, thin overgrown places. Will you need a supplemental planting? You may want to plan a workday now so everyone will have time to schedule for it.

Remember that the best time to take out a nuisance problem is just after it starts to sprout. That way it's smaller and less established, so be sure to keep up with your pond surveys and don't wait until June when you suddenly notice that the pond is dominated by some undesirable plant. A little foresight now will go a long way in the hot, wet, and weedy months ahead.



Weeds encroaching, and in the distance, too much spatterdock (a nice native, but it tends to get out of hand)



New pickerelweed on the cleaned bank.

All By Themselves

But hey, that's the whole idea here.

Not too long ago, I got a call from the Tarawood subdivision. They'd been in the program since '97, but the original planting hadn't taken very well, and the pond was covered with spatterdock and weeds. The group rep had moved and interest had sort of languished, but a couple of residents weren't going to let that stop them. Lisa Bentsen stepped up to be the new rep and Dan Gemmell kept trying to cut the pads out from his small boat.

Since this was basically a new group we offered them a cleanup to help remove the lilies, but we couldn't do a whole lot with them since these floating pads are really hard to grasp with the excavator. So Mr. Gemmell kept cutting the remaining pads until the rhizomes finally gave up and floated to the surface. I sent him an Adopt-A-Pond notebook and Lisa Bentsen did some legwork to drum up support. They set up their own educational meeting and sent me the minutes. I have to tell you, these guys had done their homework, they printed copies of the plant pictures for the residents and discussed the whole stormwater pollution process all by themselves! Best of all, they sent me a report on it! I knew this group would do well.

They decided on a planting date and I sent the plants out. Mrs. Bentsen has a good knowledge of the plants from her previous involvement with the group so she directed things. When I went out to see how the planting had gone, the pond looked great.

We always say that you guys can do this on your own... here's another example of how our volunteers can turn a pond around. Congratulations Tarawood, you're well on your way to a great-looking healthy pond, and best of all, you did it all by yourselves!

UH-OH

Think twice before you act!

Source: Portland Press Herald 11/15/01

Recently in Maine two men were cited by that state's Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) for dumping 3 pounds of 2,4-D in a residential stormwater pond without a license. It was expected that these men would be fined \$800 each for the violation. 2,4-D is an aquatic herbicide that is widely used for control of certain weeds. The DEP says the incident didn't harm the pond irreparably but they are concerned that the two acted without the proper licenses.

Beyond the legal issues, these men faced outrage from the local residents who claimed they were terrorized with the aquaticicide. It affected some dogs and irritated at least one resident's skin. Further the local homeowners association had been working on a way to manage the pond, but had elected to avoid the use of chemicals.

The two men agreed to pay the fine and admitted that they did not know it was wrong. Fortunately their ignorance didn't cause any lasting harm, but this is why Adopt-A-pond strives so hard to educate our volunteers. With a little knowledge we can avoid any serious harm to our ponds and environments. And if your thinking of taking matters into your own hands, check with us first. We're here to help you avoid these kind of problems.



WATER QUALITY- pH

This quarter we'll be investigating pH. This parameter is simply the measure of acidity or alkalinity (basic-ness, if you will) in the water. Technically it measures the activity of free hydrogen ions in the water, but we're less concerned with the chemistry than with the effect changes in pH have on our ponds. A normal lake will have a pH between 6 and 9, but some swamp environments can be as low as 4.5 due to the effects of certain biological processes. Anything much outside these ranges would be considered unhealthy.

So how does this effect our ponds? The pH reading is related to a chemical process that centers on carbon dioxide (CO₂) and carbonic acid (H₂CO₃). CO₂ dissolves in water readily. As plants photosynthesize they take up CO₂. This causes reactions in the water that result in less hydrogen ions and a higher pH. And conversely, when organisms breathe they let off CO₂, thus releasing more hydrogen to the water and lowering the pH. Now the real problems occur when pH gets too low (**more acidic**). In these situations certain algae and microscopic species die out and fish birth rates drop off leaving mostly older fish. As these die off the pond may become fishless.

Often, acidity is not a big issue for our pond groups, but the background level can be affected by rain and runoff. So if you see a drastic change, someone may be dumping pollutants into your pond or stormdrains! By monitoring pH we can ensure that we're maintaining a healthy balance in our ponds.

*To learn more about interpreting your test results see the **Sampling** section on **page 6**.*



ANOTHER SOLUTION, BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE GOOD PEOPLE AT ADOPT-A-POND



Many of our pond groups often face the problem of trying keep landscapers, maintenance people, and other residents from damaging the new plants they've placed around the pond. Well, we've come up with a solution. These PVC signs are a simple and weather-resistant way to let everyone know that something's going on in the pond! If you think your Adopt-A-Pond project could benefit from these signs, have your group representative give us a call. If you don't know who that is, we can probably tell you. Call **272-5912** or email mcgee@hillsboroughcounty.org

NONPOINT POLLUTION BOOKLET

Free for the asking... How nice of us!

Getting people to grasp that elusive non-point pollution concept can be difficult, especially if they've had no exposure to environmental management. So we've found this publication to help you out. This 66 page booklet was published by the National Geographic Society and The Conservation Fund. It details the causes and solutions of non-point water pollution, and discusses some of the successful initiatives people have taken around the country to deal with the problem. In fact, Adopt-A-Pond is just this type of program. This booklet may help you explain your efforts to your community, or simply help you grasp the larger scope of this issue. So don't hesitate to **call or email for a free copy**.

Phone: **272-5912** Email: mcgee@hillsboroughcounty.org

