

2021

THE VG VOICE

YOUR WEEKLY E-NEWSLETTER

Wildlife of Victoria Park

by John Serrao



[Click Here to Read This Week's Article:](#)
St. Francis Trail

Click [here](#) to view the new Self Guiding Nature Trail booklet.

Explore a Preserve Nature Trail Today

Get some fresh air by walking one of the nature trails within the community.

There are two nature trails you can explore, the North and South Trail. Click the Preserve Photo to the right to find the entrance



Nature Trail Maintenance

The semi-annual mowing of the North and South preserve was recently done



AUTUMN COLORS IN FLORIDA? BY JOHN SERRAO

06 January

One of the seasonal highlights of living in the more northern and mountainous parts of our country is the autumn foliage. Many of the deciduous trees — maples, birches, beech, tuliptree, sassafras, even some oaks — undergo a miraculous transformation from the green, chlorophyll-dominated color of summer to the red-yellow-orange-purple hues caused by carotene and anthocyanin pigments. Here in Florida, where most of our trees are evergreen or semi-evergreen, we don't witness such a profound color display. Our pines, palms, and oaks, for the most part, stay green all year long.

Nevertheless, there are some trees in our southeastern states that undergo seasonal changes and give us a little taste of northern autumn. Instead of happening in September or October, their leaves don't turn color until late November or December. One of these trees — red or swamp maple — happens to be our country's most widely distributed tree. It grows from Canada all the way into southern Florida and westward through the midwestern states. Along with its close relative, sugar maple, red maple is responsible for much of the outstanding, vibrant colors taken on by the forests of New England, the mid-Atlantic, and Great Lakes states in October. Look for this tree's beautiful leaves now in our wetlands and along our rivers.

A second wetland tree that becomes absolutely awesome in late autumn and early winter in Florida is sweet gum. This is the tree with star-shaped, 5-pointed leaves and round, spiked seed balls. Sweetgum doesn't grow as far north as red maple, reaching only up into New Jersey and Connecticut. Its leaves turn from green to red, pink, yellow, and deep purple along our rivers, creeks, canals, and swamps.

There's a smaller tree that turns a brilliant scarlet in autumn — shining or winged sumac. This tree grows in sunny clearings, roadsides, old fields, and other disturbed areas. Its compound, fern-like leaves have mostly fallen off by now but there are still some clinging to the branches. They don't cause a rash like those of its relative, poison sumac.

Finally, there's even an oak in Florida that shows some pretty colors before its leaves fall off, unlike most of Florida's other oaks that hold onto their leaves in winter. Named turkey oak after the resemblance of some of its large leaves to the 3-toed feet of a turkey, this tree grows in dry, sandy, scrubby areas. Its autumn leaves turn dark, rusty red, and brownish-gold — not as colorful as those of maple or sweet gum, but still a nice addition to Florida's more sedate autumn forests.



PAINTED BUNTING BY JOHN SERRAO

20 January

If any of you maintain bird feeders during the Florida winters, be on the lookout for a visitor that has often been described as “North America’s most beautiful bird”. In fact, the French explorers called it “nonpareil”, or ‘without equal’. The Painted Bunting has to be seen to be believed. The adult male has all the colors of the rainbow: dark blue head, red rump and belly, yellow and greenback, and dark green wings with purplish highlights. The female lacks this kaleidoscope of colors, but her completely lime-green body is also eye-catching.

Related to the cardinal and other finches, the Painted Bunting breeds in 2 separate geographic regions of the country. The western range is mostly in Texas, extending into Mississippi and Kansas. The eastern range is along the coast, from southern North Carolina to Florida’s Brevard County, as well as along a few of our state’s large rivers like St. Johns. In winter, most Painted Buntings migrate south from their breeding areas into subtropical and tropical areas (where, unfortunately, many are illegally trapped for the pet trade), but some stop to spend the cooler months here in Florida. In fact, Florida is the only state that supports both a breeding and a winter population of this gorgeous bird. In early January, a male Painted Bunting somehow wound up in a Maryland park, and hundreds of people showed up to catch a glimpse.

Look for the Painted Bunting in its preferred habitats of brushy fields, coastal scrub, and the shrubby edges of woods where it searches for seeds. I’ve seen them in winter at Lake Woodruff National Wildlife Refuge (DeLeon Springs), Merritt Island NWR, and Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive, where I was lucky enough to capture the attached photos of a male eating grass seeds. And they also visit bird feeders, as reported by Lynn Campbell of Victoria Gardens. Let me know if you see one at your feeder.



WILDLIFE IN VICTORIA PARK

20 January

EXPLORE A PRESERVE NATURE TRAIL TODAY

Explore a Preserve Nature Trail Today
Get some fresh air by walking one of the nature trails within the community. There are two nature trails you can explore, the North and South Trail. Click [HERE](#) to the right to find the entrance

WILDLIFE IN VICTORIA GARDENS



SANDHILL CRANE NESTING SEASON



Start looking for our sandhill cranes to perform their elaborate mating dances as a preliminary step to nesting in Victoria Park's wetlands. Click the image to the left for more information.