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"I like romantically thinking about nature. It helps you fall in love with all the ecosystems." ~ Leah Thomas

 ${
m A}_{
m s}$  we step into February, the shortest month of the year, we find ourselves surrounded by a unique

blend of winter's chill and the early whispers of spring. This month is a time for reflection and renewal, offering a chance to embrace the cozy warmth of home while also looking forward to the vibrant energy of the coming seasons. It's also national bird-feeding month. Whether you're celebrating Valentine's Day or simply enjoying the quiet beauty of nature, February has something special for everyone. Join us on February 13 for an evening of fun celebrating and supporting our mission at the Centre Club's Helping Hands Happy Hour (see link in the calendar/events section). Stop by Little Red Wagon Native Nursery and pick up some native strawberry plants to celebrate strawberry season or ask our knowledgeable staff for suggestions of of our wide selection of native plants that will bring butterflies to your garden this spring.

# **Butterfly of the Month**



## **Red Admiral**

In recognition of Valentine's Day, it's fitting that our Butterfly of the Month is the Red Admiral. This striking butterfly has upper wings that are a deep chocolate brown (almost black). Thought to have obtained their common name for their resemblance to the uniforms worn by the British navy in the 18th century, these butterflies have an upper front wing with an orange stripe that runs diagonally across the middle with white dots towards the outer edge and back wings with an orange band that runs along the back edge. (See Photo #1.) The underside wings have a dark brown pattern that is marked by a red stripe, a small blue ellipse, and white spots. (See Photo #2.) When the butterfly perches with its wings shut tightly, the red and white markings are hidden; the remaining mottled brown pattern protects the butterfly from predators through camouflage. (See Photo #3.)

This medium-sized butterfly flies year-round in Florida, favoring moist woodlands, uplands, open weedy areas, and gardens. Adults feed on tree sap, fermenting fruit, bird droppings, and mud puddles. They will nectar at common milkweed and asters when other sources of nutrients aren't available. During the late afternoon, males perch on ridgetops or high shrubs and trees, watching for females and chasing other butterflies who enter the territory.

Females lay pale green eggs singly on the top of its host plants' leaves. In our area, host plants include False-nettle (*Boehmeria cylindrica*) and Florida pellitory (*Parietaria floridana*).

Caterpillars are variable in color with colors ranging from yellow to black, with black bodies speckled with white especially common. Caterpillars has six groups of branched spines on each segment of their body. Caterpillars shelter in a folded leaf nest comprising host plant leaves tied with silk. Several young caterpillars may live together but older caterpillars are solitary and form their own shelter.

Red Admirals are migratory butterflies and we tend to see them more frequently in our area in the fall

through early spring than in the summer. Scientists in Europe and the United States are working with citizen scientists to better understand the migration patterns. Why not help? Contribute your sightings to help deepen our knowledge about this stunning and interesting insect.

# **Host Plant Of The Month**



# False-nettle (Boehmeria cylindrica)

False-nettle (*Boehmeria cylindrica*) is a short-lived, 1-3' perennial herb in the Urticaceaea (nettle) family whose native habitat includes cypress swamps, floodplain forests, wet thickets, stream banks, marshes, wet prairies and margins of ponds. It is also characteristically found in ditches and disturbed places. With insignificant, tiny whitish-green flowers that appear on spikes in the summer and late fall, this plant's interesting foliage makes it a great companion for some of our native sunflowers like *Helianthus angustifolius*. It is also an important host plant to Red Admiral, Question Mark and Eastern Comma caterpillars as well as several species of moths. Notably, this plant lacks the stinging hairs that many of its cousins in the nettle family have.

Internet resources note that this plant may have value as a leafy green vegetable and at least one article reports that the plant contains antimicrobial chemicals. Additionally, historical records indicate that Indigenous peoples used the plant to make fibrous materials, including string for wampum (the Delaware), bowstring (the Ojibwa), and for fish spears (the Micmac).

This plant prefers light shade and moist soil. If you have the right conditions, why not plant some as part of a wonderful butterfly garden?

# SHOP NOW

# **Garden Swag**



"Feeding birds means feeding yourself! Birds are part of nature and feeding nature is nothing but feeding yourself!" — Mehmet Murat Ildan

#### COME GET YOUR SWAG-ON!

February is for the birds! While it's considered a special month for bird enthusiasts, everyone can get involved by simply setting up a bird feeder or birdbath in their garden. As winter starts to wane, many bird species begin their preparations for the upcoming breeding season. With food sources still scarce in many regions, birds may be more visible as they search for sustenance. This can be a great time to set up bird feeders and observe a variety of species up close. Different birds prefer different types of feeders. Tube feeders are great for small birds, while platform feeders can attract a variety of species. Birds need water for drinking and bathing and a birdbath can attract birds that might not visit feeders. Change the water frequently to keep it clean and prevent mosquito breeding.

Roll on by Little Red Wagon Native Nursery's Gift Shop and select from our variety of bird feeders and bird baths to support birds all year round! It may take some time for birds to discover your feeders so be patient and consistent with your feeding, and soon you'll have a variety of feathered visitors.

#### **SHOP NOW**

#### **GIVE YOUR VALENTINE THE GIFT OF NATURE!**



Giving a Little Red Wagon Native Nursery gift card for Valentine's Day is a thoughtful way to allow the recipient to choose their own plants, gardening tools, or nature-related items, ensuring they get something they truly love. Little Red Wagon Native Nursery gift cards do not expire and are available from \$10 and up. You can purchase the gift card online and have it emailed or printed. Show you care about their interests and the environment, by giving your loved one a meaningful and memorable Valentine's Day present.



Gifting an annual membership to Butterfly Tampa allows your Valentine unlimited access to Butterfly Tampa's living exhibits, bug zoo and botanical gardens. Members will also receive 10% off all plant and gift shop purchases as well as discounts on Little Red Wagon Nature Camps all year!

Memberships can be purchased as gifts and scheduled to be sent to the recipient on the date you choose!

PURCHASE GIFT CARDS

**PURCHASE A MEMBERSHIP** 

# **Nectar Plant of the Month**



## Aquatic Milkweed (Asclepias perennis)

Most people know that Milkweed is the only plant that Monarch caterpillars will eat. Fewer know that various species of Milkweed also act as a host plant for Queen and Soldier caterpillars. With 21 species of Milkweed native to our state, why not include some in your garden? Here is one of our absolute favorites:

Aquatic milkweed (*Asclepias perennis*) is a great Florida native EVERGREEN Milkweed that will typically grow to a height of only 2 feet and 1 foot wide. Its bright white clusters of up to 25 flowers top individual stems and are an important nectar source for our native bees, wasps, and butterflies. It is also a favorite of the Red admiral butterfly, our butterfly of the month as pictured above.

As its common name implies, Aquatic Milkweed occurs in a variety of wetland habitats, including floodplain swamps, marshes, and semi-shaded forests that experience dry and rainy seasons.

As a result, Aquatic Milkweed can tolerate 2-3 months of drought in our Florida sandy soils and also does very well in extremely wet and nearly underwater conditions during the Florida rainy season.

Aquatic Milkweed can survive lower amounts of direct sunlight than our other native species and will maintain its leaves throughout the year. Although it can become somewhat lanky, it is still a terrific plant to include in your butterfly garden as it's an important winter food source for Monarch, Queen, and Soldier caterpillars.

Aquatic Milkweed can tolerate shade although it will bloom better in full sun. This wildflower is commonly propagated for home gardeners and is quite hardy. I plant it in areas around my yard that get a mix of sun and shade as well as some areas that are full sun. I see blooms many months of the year. The plants do well in pretty much any condition Florida seems to throw at it, so why not try some in your butterfly garden?

Caution: Please wear gloves when handling all milkweeds. Their white milky toxic sap can irritate skin and cause chemical burns to the eyes. (Note: if you get it in your eyes, please see an ophthalmologist right away.)



# **Design with Vines/Edimentals**



#### **Native Strawberry** (Fragaria virginiana)

Native Wild Strawberry (*Fragaria virginiana*) is a herbaceous perennial that grows low about 4-8" tall and spreads readily by runners making it a nice groundcover. It is rare to find in Florida. It will tolerate full sun to partial shade and prefers sandy areas. It has showy, white flowers in the spring that attractive bees and some butterflies. It yields small but tasty edible fruit in the summer that when mature they are bright red and only about  $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$  inch in diameter. It's deer and drought tolerant but you may have a race with the birds and other wildlife to get to the fruit before they do. The plant is a larval host for the Gray hairstreak butterfly They can be eaten right off the plant or collected and made into jellies or jams. The leaves are high in

Vitamin C and can be brewed to make tea. They also work well in hanging baskets as another way to include them in your garden.

#### SHOP NOW

# **KIDS' CORNER**

## **UPCOMING NATURE CAMP FUN!**

Nature doesn't take a break and neither do we! Kindergarten to Grade 5 kids can explore and discover nature during school breaks with our nature camps.

Camp will be held from 8:00 am to 3:00 p.m. at the Tampa Bay Butterfly Foundation Gallery located at 4111-A Henderson Blvd. (beside Little Red Wagon Native Nursery). Camp drop off will be between 8:00 - 8:30 am and pickup between 2:30 - 3:00 pm.

## Love Bugs this Valentine's Day!

What better way to show your love for the tiny creatures that make the world go round than by celebrating them on Valentine's Day?! This special day off from school is designed for children to learn about, appreciate, and even embrace insects. Through hands-on exploration and interactive activities, your child will discover how insects impact our world in ways we simply can't live without.

Your child will LOVE this unforgettable day filled with bug-themed fun, friends, and tons of learning. Space is limited, so be sure to reserve your spot today!



**REGISTER FEB. 14** 



#### **SPRING BREAK CAMP: MARCH 17-21**

Spring break is a great time to learn about Beach bugs! Where the sands are hot, harsh, and constantly on the move. Yet here, where the shifting sands meet the gulf or ocean coasts of Florida, there's an abundance of insects that make their homes there. These bugs have evolved to succeed in the sand. But survival in this merciless landscape is hard won! We will learn about bug adaptations to coastal sand environments, roles they play in these sandy environments, what they eat and so much more about their microworld! The Florida Aquarium will also be presenting their "No Bones About It" program which includes bringing some common Florida invertebrates for campers to see and touch up close. There will be theme related arts and crafts, guest appearances from our bug and animal ambassadors and each child will have the opportunity to release a butterfly into our garden. We will also visit our very own Bug bungalow, Nature Center and Butterfly garden where we have our very own sand dune to explore!

**REGISTER: MARCH 17-21** 

#### **APRIL SHOWERS: APRIL 18**

Celebrate the magic of spring with our oneday April Showers nature camp! Campers will explore how rain nurtures life—not just for plants and animals, but for us too. Through exciting activities of crafting rain catchers, exploring the water cycle, and planting native wildflowers, they'll discover the essential role water plays in our daily lives and ecosystems. The Florida Aquarium will also be presenting their "No Bones About It" program which includes bringing some common Florida invertebrates for campers to see and touch up close. The day also includes bug hunts, handson experiments, and creative art projects that highlight how we can conserve and protect this precious resource.

**REGISTER: APRIL 18** 

## SUMMER CAMPS: JUNE 2 - AUGUST 8

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Our Summer Nature Camps were voted Best Summer Camps by the Guide to Florida for the last three years in a row! Little Red Wagon Nature Camps are a great opportunity for children entering Kindergarten to Grade 5 kids to learn, grow and make new friends--the perfect way to keep kids engaged and inspired during their summer break. Each week will have a different theme so kids can discover nature all summer long! Children will participate in hands-on activities exploring Florida's native plants and animals, enjoy creative crafts and journaling to spark imagination and reflection. Day passes will be available after noon on the Friday prior to camp, if the camp is not full/sold out. **Spaces are limited, so register soon.** 

## \*\*\*CAMP FEES\*\*\*

#### BUTTERFLY TAMPA MEMBERS: \$300; NON-MEMBERS: \$325

#### DAILY DROP IN RATES:

#### **BUTTERFLY TAMPA MEMBERS DAY PASS: \$75; NON-MEMBERS DAY PASS: \$80**

## Click here to purchase a Butterfly Tampa Membership.

**REGISTER: SUMMER CAMPS** 



Walking Stick insects have the ability to regenerate body parts like legs, especially to escape predators. This ability is called autotomy.



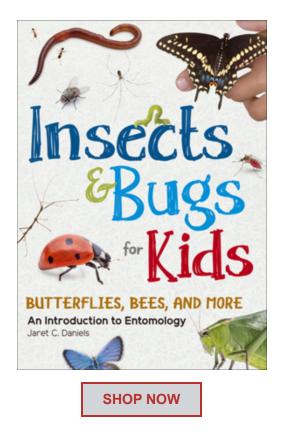


#### Make Your Own Walking Stick!

Transform an ordinary twig into a one-of-a-kind walking stick. Start by heading outside to find a stick that's just right—big, small, crooked, or straight, every stick has its own story! Take a moment to enjoy the fresh air while you search. Once you've got your stick, it's time to make it your own. Choose the color legs and antennae. For extra flair, add a splash of color with paint, wrap it with yarn or string for a cool grip, or glue on some beads and gems. Your walking stick can be as simple or as unique as you like.

Share your creations with us and you may be featured on our social media! Email carissa@butterflytampa.com.

## **NEW BOOKS FOR KIDS JUST IN!**



Introduce children to 10 fascinating insects and bugs through this bug-themed board book. Children are never too young to begin learning about and appreciating nature. That's the idea behind the Nature Baby series of board books, and it's exemplified in Nature Baby: Bugs. Ideal for your family's youngest nature lovers, ages 0–5, the board book utilizes full-color photography and short, simple text to showcase 10 types of creepycrawlies.

Read it aloud, or put the sturdy book in small hands. Then let the fun begin. The colorful, beautiful design—along with pictures of the bugs captivate kids and will have them paging through Nature Baby: Bugs again and again.

#### LRW February Newsletter

Popular, proven format: the first book in the series, Rock Collecting for Kids (9781591937739), has sold more than 20,000 copies AdventureKEEN's bug-related products have sold about 90,000 units Market: Parents who want to instill environmental morals, encourage an interest in nature, and entertain their children-all at the same time All-inone source of information, facts, photos, and geewhiz tidbits in a concise guide Full-color photographs, illustrations, and range maps Part introduction to entomology and part field guide Not intimidating: colorful, appealing design with information geared toward children, ages 6-12 Applicable to all of the United States and southern Canada Children are fascinated with making discoveries in nature-and with creepy crawlies Bugs are in the news: with insect populations declining, more people are paying attention to and learning about these essential little critters Extreme value: massive information.



Bumblebees, lady beetles, butterflies, and more, the featured bugs represent some of the most interesting and important ones to know, making it a perfect gift for families that enjoy the great outdoors. So share the fascinating world of nature with infants, toddlers, and young children. These budding outdoors lovers are sure to treasure the Nature Baby series!

#### Inside You'll Find:

- · Full-color photos of real insects and bugs
- · Concise yet informative text to interest young readers
- Fun facts about 10 types of bugs



# "Diggin' in to Restore Butterfly Habitat in Tampa Bay"

Tampa Bay Butterfly Foundation regularly has a number of ongoing monthly volunteering opportunities.





#### **Butterfly Alley Maintenance**

Volunteers perform cleanup and maintenance of Butterfly Alley habitat (4110 W. Estrella St., behind Little Red Wagon Native Nursery).

## **VOLUNTEER: FEBRUARY 13**

#### **CENTER FOR CONSERVATION**



#### **CFC Habitat Maintenance**

The Florida Aquarium, Tampa Bay Butterfly Foundation and FWC's Suncoast Youth Conservation Center need volunteers to assist with habitat maintenance at Center for Conservation site of the Florida Conservation and Technology Center in Apollo Beach (529 Estuary Shore Lane) as well as their Adopt a Road site along Dickman Road.

# **VOLUNTEER: FEBRUARY 20**



#### **Encore Park! Maintenance**

Volunteers help to maintain a Tampa Bay Butterfly Foundationsponsored butterfly garden at Encore Park located at 1210 E. Harrison St. (Corner of Harrison St. and Hank Ballard St.).

# **VOLUNTEER: FEBRUARY 27**

# NATURE CAMP ASSISTANTS NEEDED

#### **Nature Camp Volunteers**

Sign up for a rewarding experience mentoring Kindergarten to Grade 5 children during our Nature Camps on school breaks. These are great opportunities for college environmental science students and High School students (who may earn hours for the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship program). Camp Volunteers must be available 7:30 am. - 3:30 pm. for the entire camp session.

# VOLUNTEER: CAMP ASSISTANT



#### Little Red Wagon Native Nursery

We currently need garden enthusiasts to help us support the efforts of Tampa Bay Butterfly Foundation's conservation, restoration, research, and education efforts.



#### ABOUT THE TAMPA BAY BUTTERFLY FOUNDATION:

With a focus on Florida butterfly species and native plants, environmental education and local awareness in the Tampa Bay area, Tampa Bay Butterfly Foundation was established to support the conservation of butterflies and pollinators and the restoration of their natural wildlife habitats. By working globally with university research partners, providing educational and research opportunities and community outreach programs, and through multi-faceted fundraising efforts, the Foundation aims to elevate public awareness of the importance of butterflies.

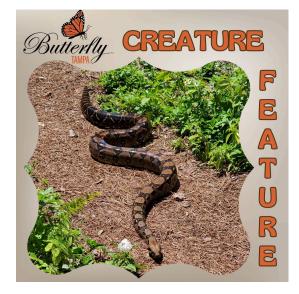
The Tampa Bay Butterfly Foundation Inc., a 501(c)(3), is an affiliate of the Butterfly Conservatory of Tampa Bay.

# **Education Exhibit**





# Reptile of the Month: Red-tailed Boa Constrictor



Meet Steve, our Red-tailed Boa Constrictor (*Boa constrictor*) and Feburary's Reptile of the Month at the Little Red Wagon Native Nursery! At over 6 feet long, Steve may seem intimidating at first glance, but this gentle giant has helped thousands of people overcome their fears of snakes through his calm and patient nature. Steve has been one of our most popular ambassador animals at various outreach events, kids' camps, and school visits where he helps educate the public about snakes. In their natural habitat, Red-tailed Boas are found throughout Central and South America, where they play an important role in controlling rodent populations. In the wild, they use heat-sensing pits along their lips to find prev at night.

These powerful constrictors thrive in various environments, from tropical rainforests to semi-arid regions, and are strong swimmers and climbers despite their large size. While not currently listed as 'endangered', these large snakes face ongoing conservation challenges like habitat destruction and poaching.

Visit us at the Little Red Wagon Native Nursery to meet Steve and the rest of our animal ambassadors.

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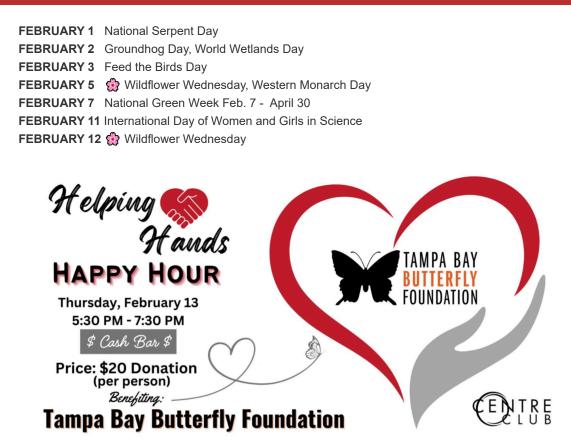
## Invertebrate of the Month: Florida Bark Scorpion

The Florida bark scorpion, despite its common name is not actually a native arachnid of Florida although common in Central and South Florida. It is a small brown to black colored species commonly found in wooded or semi-arid habitats. Its preferred habitats include forests, scrublands, and sometimes residential areas. These scorpions typically seek shelter under rocks, logs, or tree bark during the day and emerge at night to hunt for prey and are primarily nocturnal. Scorpions are carnivores, feeding primarily on insects such as crickets, beetles, and cockroaches. The Florida bark scorpion uses its venomous sting to paralyze and subdue its prey. While its sting can cause discomfort, it rarely poses serious threats to humans unless allergic reactions occur.

They play a crucial role in maintaining the balance of local insect populations by actively preying on pests, contributing to natural pest control within the Florida ecosystem. These scorpions are biofluorescent, meaning they glow under ultraviolet (UV) light. This is because their exoskeletons absorb UV light and reemit it as a visible light, usually a bright green to blue color. All scorpions are biofluorescent. Newly molted scorpions do not glow right away, but they will after they age. Scorpions glow under UV light, such as black light or moonlight. Scientists are not certain why scorpions glow, but some hypotheses include: making it easier to find a hiding spot, confusing pretty, making it easier to recognize one another. Their life span is at least 2-6 years although many live much longer, especially in the wild. They are approximately 2-3 inches long. Females give birth to 25-35 young after a gestation period of several months to over a year. The juveniles ride on the female's back until they undergo their first molt at about eight days of age. The juveniles can sometimes die from complications with the molting process. Females reach maturity in roughly 300 days after seven instars, but males mature at different rates with many reaching maturity after

seven instars around 235-280 days old. Females can reproduce via parthenogenesis, meaning without the need for fertilization of their eggs.

# **Monthly Calendar of Events**



Join us for a special evening of connection, conservation, and community at our happy hour event! For \$20 (plus Eventbrite fee and sales tax), you'll enjoy unlimited appetizers in the elegant setting of the Centre Club—all while supporting vital local conservation efforts through the Tampa Bay Butterfly Foundation.

The Tampa Bay Butterfly Foundation is a nonprofit organization dedicated to conserving Florida's butterflies and pollinators through habitat restoration, environmental education, community outreach, and research. By promoting the use of native plants and fostering conservation efforts, we aim to create a healthier, more sustainable environment for both wildlife and people.

Our mission goes beyond butterflies—we're working to equip our community with the knowledge and tools to safeguard our ecosystems and protect the natural beauty of Tampa Bay.

Join us to learn more about our work, connect with fellow nature enthusiasts, and raise a glass to conservation at our happy hour event!

Here's what you can look forward to:

• Live Animal Encounters: Discover the beauty of butterflies, reptiles, and other fascinating invertebrate species.

- Valentine's Bouquets by Pugs and Petals: Find the perfect floral arrangement for someone special for Valentine's Day and support a great cause.
- Silent Auction & Raffles: Explore unique treasures and exciting opportunities while contributing to conservation.
- Networking & Connection: Meet our team and connect with others who share your passion for nature.

Can't attend? You can still make a difference by donating to support our conservation efforts. Every contribution helps us protect local habitats and educate our community about the importance of preserving nature. This is the perfect opportunity to unwind after a busy day, enjoy delicious food, and make an impact. Bring your friends and join us for an unforgettable evening that combines fun, food, and the spirit of conservation.

#### Let's raise a glass to nature and the difference we can make together!

MAKE A DONATION

PURCHASE TICKETS

\*Business Professional Attire is required for entrance at the Centre Club. No Hats, Shorts, T-Shirts are permitted\*

For a minimum ticket price \$20/person to the cause (plus Eventbrite fee), you receive:

- 1 drink ticket for the 1<sup>st</sup> 50 to arrive
- Light Hors D'oeuvres
- Opportunity to network
- Animal encounters

Centre Club 123 S West Shore Blvd 8th Floor, Tampa, FL 33609 Thursday, February 13, 2025 5:30pm – 7:30pm

FEBRUARY 14 Happy Valentine's Day, Girl Scouts Cookies for Sale at LRW: 9 AM - 3 PM
FEBRUARY 16 Bird Health Awareness Week (16-21)
FEBRUARY 17 President's Day
FEBRUARY 19 Wildflower Wednesday at LRW



Come visit Tampa Bay Butterfly Foundation at the Tampa Bay Kids Expo on February 22nd. We will be providing activities for little ones and education for everyone! Plus, at 2pm, learn how you can attract butterflies to your garden with our very own guest speaker presenting! Before you leave, don't forget to purchase native plants to benefit our pollinators and help us continue expanding our conservation efforts. See you there!

Little Red Wagon Native Nursery is Tampa's only native nursery. Supporting Florida's native plant & wildlife ecosystem and our natural world, we are located at 4113 Henderson Blvd. in South Tampa. You can also visit us at LittleRedWagonNativeNursery.com Email: Info@ButterflyTampa.com Hours: Monday - Friday: 9:00 am - 5:30 pm | Sunday: 10:00 am - 5:30 pm

Visit Little Red Wagon Native Nursery

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