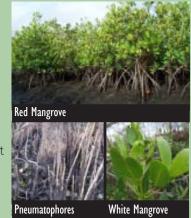
# **Ocean Ridge Nature Area**

This 12-acre natural area protects mangrove habitat and provides public use amenities including a boat basin, a 1,300-foot nature trail and boardwalk, and an observation tower.

# Mangrove Magic

The most abundant tree species found at Ocean Ridge Natural Area are the mangroves.

Mangroves are tropical trees that thrive in salty environments along the water's edge. They have adapted to living in the harsh marine environment by developing unique ways to deal with salt. Mangroves are an important part of a healthy wetland habitat. They provide nursery grounds for commercially important fish and shellfish species such as shrimp, lobsters, and snook. Mangroves also serve as nesting sites for herons,



egrets, and other wading birds. Three species of mangroves can be found in the Ocean Ridge Natural Area. Red mangroves, usually found closest to the water, develop large, tangled roots and long, cigar-shaped propagules (seedlings). A red mangrove filters out salt at the root surface, allowing only fresh water into its system. A black mangrove has many finger-like projectiles, called pneumatophores, that surround the base of the tree. The pneumatophores are part of the tree's root system and take in oxygen directly from the air. Black mangroves excrete salt through special glands on the leaf surface. White mangroves grow on the highest ground and use lenticels (pores) in their lower trunks to obtain oxygen. They can also develop breathing "peg roots," or pneumatophores, although not as many as the black mangroves. White mangroves also excrete salt through their leaves.

## The Beginnings of a Maritime Hammock

Mangroves are not the only plants to be found at the Ocean Ridge Natural Area. A maritime hammock was established on a half-acre of land near the observation tower. A hammock is a place of tall trees, leafy shrubs, and cool shade. It is believed the word "hammock" comes from the Native American word hammocka, meaning "shady place." Approximately 1,000 trees and shrubs and 4,000 grasses and upland plants were installed in mid-2006 to create the maritime hammock at the Ocean Ridge Natural Area. The gumbo limbo trees that were planted will eventually spread shade across the area when the trees reach their mature height of 60 feet. They are easy to spot - just look for the trees with the bronzy-red peeling bark. The smaller shrubs, including wild coffee and beautyberry, will fill in the understory. Beautyberry is perfectly named as it produces vivid purple berries in the summer and fall. The yellow-flowered dune sunflower and the pink-flowered railroad vine will carpet the ground with colorful blossoms all year long.

# The Winds of Change

Hurricanes are a force of nature that changes the South Florida landscape from time to time. The pounding waves reform the ocean shoreline and the howling winds snap trees in half. An area that was once shady now feels the sunlight. Small plants, once hidden by the taller trees, now have a chance to grow bigger and taller, and to thrive in the openings created by a hurricane. This force of nature visited Ocean Ridge Natural Area in October 2005 as Hurricane Wilma crossed the state with winds as high as 112 mph. Many of the mature black and white mangroves were snapped in half by Hurricane Wilma. Although the damage looked bad, new shoots appeared on the trees in mid-2006 as nature repaired what nature destroyed.

#### Birds of a Feather...

Where there are wetlands, there are wading birds. Florida is home to more large wading birds than any other state - nearly 20 species. The great egret is a tall (3-1/2 foot) white bird with a yellow bill and black legs. During the breeding season these birds have long, lacy, white plumes on their backs. The yellow-crowned night

heron is a patient hunter. It waits for a fish to pass within range of its bill and then quickly nabs it and swallows it head-first. As its name implies, this heron is largely nocturnal. During the day it roosts in trees or reed beds. A young little blue heron can easily be mistaken for other birds because it has white feathers. Only when it becomes an adult does the plumage change to slate blue. The little blue heron eats more insects than the larger herons and can sometimes be seen in just-plowed fields searching for exposed insect larvae.



# The Smaller Creatures of Ocean Ridge Natural Area

Many of the animals living in the Ocean Ridge Natural Area are small and can easily be overlooked by visitors. The 7-inch-long green anole is a master of disguise. It can change its

body color from green to brown to blend in with its surroundings. Males have a pink throat fan they extend out during territorial and mating displays. Don't confuse the native green anole with the exotic brown anole. The brown anole looks similar to the green anole. However, it can only change from light brown to dark brown. The webs of the crablike spiny orb weaver criss-cross the mangrove boardwalk. These small, non-poisonous spiders have a border of bright red spines across their backs. Spiders are often feared



and despised, but their hearty appetites help control the insect population. The mangrove tree crab is commonly seen crawling along the trunks of mangrove trees. These small crabs have sharp tips at the end of their legs that allow them to cling onto trees and other structures. They eat mangrove leaves and an occasional insect found in the tree canopy.

### Gentle Giants of the Waterways

West Indian manatees are found from the southern
United States through the Caribbean islands, eastern
Central America and northern South America.
Nicknamed "sea cows" because of their grazing style,
manatees are eating machines. They spend about five
to eight hours a day feeding. During that time
manatees may consume up to 10% of their body
weight. That's roughly 100 pounds of plants in a single
day. Their primary foods are aquatic grasses.

# Ocean Ridge Natural Area



The Ocean Ridge Natural Area is located approximately 1/4 mile south of the Ocean Avenue bridge along the Lake Worth Lagoon in the Town of Ocean Ridge. This restored 12-acre natural area protects mangrove and maritime hammock plant communities. Public use facilities include a two-story observation platform, a 1,300-foot nature trail and boardwalk, educational kiosks, and a boat docking facility with 9 boat slips on 2 floating concrete docks. Restroom facilities, drinking water, and parking for vehicles are not provided at this site. Access to the Ocean Ridge Natural Area is by boat, on foot, or on a bike.

#### **Volunteers Plant a Forest**

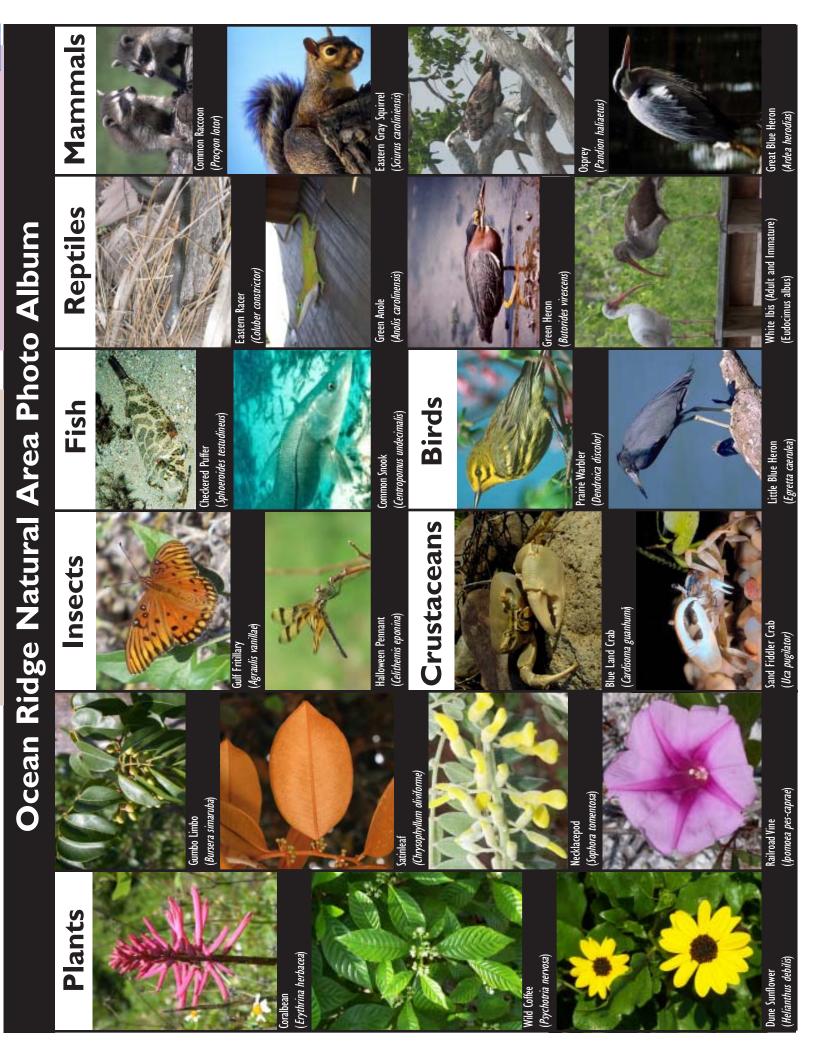
Planting more than 9,000 red mangrove seedlings is a big job. Luckily, the Department of Environmental Resources Management received help from more than 90 volunteers, who contributed 226 hours to planting red mangroves in the muck and mud of the Ocean Ridge Natural Area. The volunteers used metal dibbles to dig holes for the foot-long seedlings. The mangrove forest will eventually reach a height of 30 feet. The mangroves will provide habitat for fish, crustaceans, and wading birds. Thanks to the volunteers' hard work, the natural area is a better place for wildlife.



# Australian Pine Trees

#### Florida's Silent Green Threat

As Florida's human population grew, so too did its exotic plant population. Trees, shrubs and vines from throughout the world were planted by homeowners, farmers, developers, and government agencies. Without the natural controls (disease, insects) of their native lands, these plants spread rapidly throughout thousands of acres of Florida's wild places. Invasive exotic plants destroy native plant communities, creating ecological deserts made up of a single plant species. It is these plants, the baddest of the bad, that the Department aggressively removes from the County's natural areas. Hundreds of invasive exotic Australian pine trees were removed from the Ocean Ridge Natural Area and replaced with mangroves to improve the health of the wetland habitat.



Welcome to one of Palm Beach County's natural treasures! The Ocean Ridge Natural Area protects environmentally sensitive mangrove habitat. The natural area also provides recreational opportunities for residents and visitors who want to explore the good nature of Palm Beach County.

In September 1997 Department of Environmental Resources Management staff began researching potential locations for a "boater island" to provide a recreational area for boaters within the southern portions of the Lake Worth Lagoon. In June 2001 a lease agreement with the Town of Ocean Ridge was approved for Palm Beach County to restore mangrove wetlands, create recreational amenities, and provide for the long-term management of the Ocean Ridge Natural Area.

**Preserving Palm Beach County's Good Nature** 

This 12-acre natural area is part of a countywide system of natural areas, protected to maintain the diversity of biological communities and species in Palm Beach County. The natural areas are open to the public for educational use and passive recreational activities such as hiking, nature photography, and bird watching.

The Ocean Ridge Natural Area is home to the public for each state of the photography.



The Ocean Ridge
Natural Area is home to
hundreds of plant and
animal species. One of
the many birds found
among the mangroves is
the red-bellied
woodpecker. This 9-inch
long bird has an
abundance of red on its
head and hindneck but
very little red on its
belly. It is quite vocal listen for its rolling
chuurr double chiv chiv
as you walk along the
boardwalk. This
woodpecker is also
known as "zebraback"
for the striking black
and white markings on

# Rules and Regulations

Prohibited on the Site:
Smoking
Hunting
Firearms
Feeding wildlife
Alcoholic beverages
Pets or domestic animals
Bicycles or motor vehicles
Collecting plants or animals

The natural area is open from sunrise to sunset, seven days a week, including holidays.

There are no toilets or drinking water at this site.

In an emergency, call 911 or the Ocean Ridge Police Department at 561-732-8331.

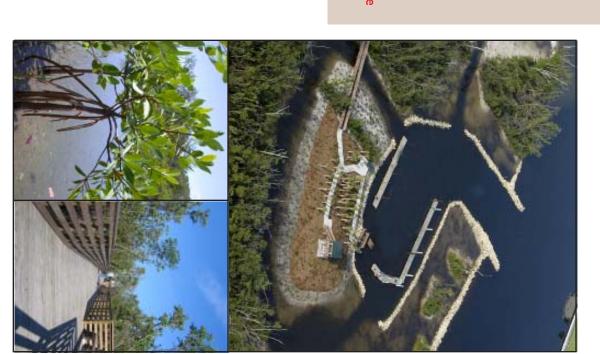


Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners

In accordance with the provisions of ADA, this brochure may be requested in an alternate format

Palm Beach County Department of Environmental Resources Management 2300 N. Jog Road - Fourth Floor West Palm Beach, FL 334 I I -2743 Phone: 561-233-2400 www.co.palm-beach.flus/erm

# Ocean Ridge Natural Area



A partnership with the Town of Ocean Ridge,
South Florida Water Management District,
Florida Department of Environmental Protection,
and Palm Beach County