

# A Year In Our Nature

## Nature Calendar for Southwest Florida

By Master Gardener Mary Jane Cary

Southwest Florida does not experience the same iconic seasonal changes of falling leaves, icy winters, and spring rains like our northern neighbors. But if you watch our nature's landscape, and observe the arrivals, behaviors, and departures of our wildlife neighbors, you'll discover our distinctive yet subtle Southwest Florida Gulf Coast seasons.

To explore our natural surroundings, request our companion [Hiking In Our Nature](#) Guide. Then, whether you are paddling our waterways, playing at the beach, or simply relaxing in your own backyard, enjoy our seasons with your natural neighbors. For wildlife viewing tips around our state, visit UF's [Florida Wildlife Happenings](#).

**Have a wildlife sighting to share? Email us at [CollierMG@ifas.ufl.edu](mailto:CollierMG@ifas.ufl.edu).**

*Click on a month below to go directly to its event calendar.*

[January](#)

[April](#)

[July](#)

[October](#)

[February](#)

[May](#)

[August](#)

[November](#)

[March](#)

[June](#)

[September](#)

[December](#)

## January

### Birds

- ☆ Male [Cardinals](#) begin territorial singing later in the month
- ☆ Nesting activity can be seen by [Ospreys](#), [Sandhill Cranes](#), [Hawks](#), and [Owls](#), including [Barred Owls](#)
- ☆ [Roseate Spoonbills](#) nest in Florida Bay
- ☆ Look for [Red-Tailed Hawks](#) perched in trees along highways
- ☆ Huge clouds of [Tree Swallows](#) should be visible around sunset roosting over large marsh areas

### Fish



In oyster beds near mangrove nurseries along Henderson Creek, juvenile [Goliath Grouper](#) *Epinephelus itajara* like this one can be found. They feed and shelter here within 100 yards of the same spot for their first 5-6 years of life, feeding and growing until they reach 3 feet in length. These fish then disperse into the Gulf and Caribbean to re-establish a new relatively small home territory where they dine on crustaceans, mostly crabs. Click on this youngster's photo at right to learn more about this largest Grouper species.

# A Year In Our Nature

## Nature Calendar for Southwest Florida

### January – Continued

#### Mammals

☆ Gray foxes, bobcats, and raccoons begin breeding this month.

From January through the end of March, the [Florida Manatee](#) *Trichechus manatus latirostris* grazes and rests in our warm coastal and inland waterways. This subspecies of the West Indian Manatee is native to Florida, and designated as Florida's State Marine Mammal. During most of the year, they move slowly through seagrass beds in freshwater rivers and canals, brackish estuaries, and saltwater bays around Florida, Central and South America, ranging as far south as Brazil. But in the winter months, they congregate in Florida's warm springs and [coastal waters observation sites](#), since they are susceptible to cold-related illness. They must surface to breathe, and must have freshwater to drink, but these herbivores have good eyesight and hearing.

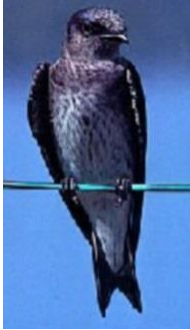


# A Year In Our Nature

## Nature Calendar for Southwest Florida

### February

#### Birds



**Purple Martin** *Progne subis* scouts arrive in Southwest Florida before they appear anywhere else in North America. This largest member of the [Swallow family](#) winters in Brazil, in the same area as the endangered [Swallow-Tailed Kite](#). Both species migrate through the same Andes pass to Central America, the Yucatan Peninsula, then east to Cuba, before arriving here to begin nesting in late February. Purple Martins eat on the wing, preferring flying insects, beetles and dragonflies. [They nest in tree cavities](#), but rely on us to provide martin houses or gourds, so now is the time to raise those shelters. Young martins hatch during March and fledge by the end of June. Click on the photo at left to hear their pleasant chatter. Then see [UF article WEC49 Purple Martins](#), and visit the [Collier County Purple Martin Society](#) for more information.

- ☆ Breeding activity begins for [Wild Turkeys](#) and [Northern Bobwhite](#)
- ☆ [Swallow-Tailed Kites](#) begin returning to Florida from South America
- ☆ From late February through mid-April, watch for [Prothonotary Warblers](#) to begin nesting in Bald Cypress tree cavities, after arriving from the Tropics
- ☆ [Snowy Plovers](#) begin nesting in February on open beach, laying their eggs in shallow sand scrapes or sea shells. Their nesting season continues through August. [Please follow these tips](#) to enjoy the beach while enabling our shorebird parents to keep their little ones safe.

#### Mammals

- ☆ [Eastern Moles](#) are breeding in tunnels under our lawns
- ☆ [Striped Skunks](#) also begin their breeding season

#### Plants

Have you spotted these little beauties blooming all over Collier County? This native wildflower is [Leavenworth's Tickseed](#) *Coreopsis leavenworthii*. Eleven species of *Coreopsis* are considered native to Florida, so the entire genus is the [Florida State Wildflower](#). This short-lived perennial readily reseeds, and blooms from now through May in pine hammocks, savannahs and disturbed areas as well as in swales and pollinator gardens. Want to see more wildflowers? Head out to one of these [Corkscrew Swamp Region Wildflower Trails](#) or follow the blooms along [Florida's wildflower trails](#).



#### Reptiles

- ☆ [Alligator Snapping Turtles](#) start mating, and nest through spring
- ☆ [Gopher Tortoises](#) are seldom seen outside their burrows now

# A Year In Our Nature

## Nature Calendar for Southwest Florida

### March

#### Amphibians

- ☆ Male [Frogs and Toads](#) move to ponds, streams, and ditches to breed during rainy nights

#### Birds

- ☆ [Mourning Doves](#) nest now through November
- ☆ [Mangrove Cuckoos](#) return to the Keys
- ☆ Watch for [Ruby-Throated Hummingbirds](#) feeding on the tubular blooms of native [Coral Bean](#), [Firebush](#), [Scarlet Salvia](#), and non-native [Shrimp Plant](#), [Firespike](#) and other pollinator plants.
- ☆ [Black Skimmers](#), [Least Terns](#), [American Oystercatchers](#) and [Wilson's Plovers](#) begin nesting on area beaches in March, and continue through August.

#### Fish

If you're snorkeling in the shallow waters of Rookery Bay, or diving and fishing the Ten Thousand Islands, perhaps you'll spot a [Polka Dot Batfish](#) *Ogcocephalus radiatus*. About a dozen batfish species live in sub-tropical waters worldwide, with three of these species found locally.

Their coloration can vary, as shown in these [Florida Museum of Natural History photos](#). This triangular-shaped fish has warty-looking tubercles instead of scales, and uses its pectoral fins to "walk" on the sandy bottom. Batfish use a unicorn-like projection between their eyes to attract their favorite foods: small crabs, shrimps, mollusks, worms, and juvenile fish. They can grow to 15 inches in length, and can be found in waters as deep as 230 feet.



#### Mammals



Last chance to see [Florida Manatees](#) *Trichechus manatus latirostris* in the [Caloosahatchee River](#) this winter. This [Lee County manatee-rich waterways map](#) can guide boaters toward routes which avoid potential encounters or toward optimum viewing locations.

Thanks in part to boaters who [mind your manatee manners](#) around these gentle creatures, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission announced a [preliminary record high manatee count](#) during the 2015 winter season. Statewide, 6,063 manatees were counted, including 2,730 on Florida's Gulf coast. Aerial surveys are conducted annually, and this year's high count shows that our conservation efforts are working.

- ☆ Look for [Red Foxes](#) emerging from remote beaches

#### Reptiles

- ☆ [Snakes](#) become active and move to favorite feeding areas

# A Year In Our Nature

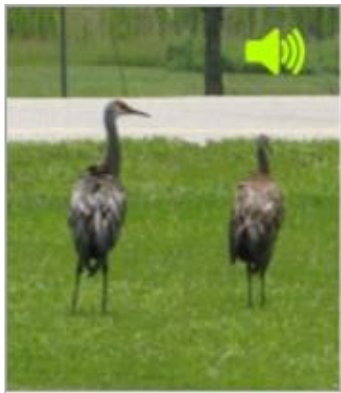
## Nature Calendar for Southwest Florida

### April

#### Amphibians

- ☆ [Green Treefrogs](#) begin calling

#### Birds



Our seasonal [Greater Sandhill Cranes](#) *Grus Canadensis tabida* are bidding a fond farewell to their resident neighbors, the [Florida Sandhill Cranes](#) *Grus Canadensis pratensis* at [Pepper Ranch Preserve](#) and [Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary](#), to head for their Northern US and Canadian summer homes. Flights of 10 or more cranes, traveling around 25-30 mph, typically cover 250 - 300 miles/day. They live in [open wetlands](#) with their lifelong mates, dining on grains, small vertebrates like mice and snakes, and invertebrates like insects and worms. Click on the photo at left to hear their distinctive call, then [follow their migration](#). Safe journeys, and we'll see you next fall!

- ☆ [Least Terns](#) show up on SFL beaches like [Lovers Key State Park](#) to begin nesting
- ☆ [Northern Bobwhites](#) nest now through September
- ☆ Migrant warblers, such as [Black-Throated Blue Warblers](#), [Blackpoll Warblers](#), and [Cape May Warblers](#) concentrate on coasts after cold fronts during their northward journeys from the Caribbean
- ☆ Watch for [Blue Grosbeaks](#) and [Summer Tanagers](#) as they migrate from Central America to northern US states for the summer, while our local [Brown Thrashers](#) begin nesting

#### Insects

- ☆ Plant [Parsley](#) for [Black Swallowtail Butterfly Larvae](#)
- ☆ Plant [native Milkweeds](#) for [Monarch Butterfly Larvae](#)

#### Invertebrates

Over 450 million years ago, there were [Horseshoe Crabs](#). Of the four species still found worldwide, only one species, [Limulus polyphemus](#), is found in North America along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts from Maine to Mexico. These creatures are more closely related to arachnids, like spiders and scorpions, than crustaceans, like crabs, lobsters and shrimp. But they are completely harmless: they use their long spike-like tail to flip themselves over if they are accidentally overturned.



Horseshoe crabs aerate the sea floor as they feed, coming ashore to spawn between March and November. Although nesting in Florida can occur virtually year-round, peak spawning occurs from April through August when the moon is in full or new moon phases. This is good news, since horseshoe crab eggs are a food source for fish, and over half the diet of 11 species of nesting shorebirds. You can help by [reporting horseshoe crab nesting locations](#) to wildlife biologists.

# A Year In Our Nature

## Nature Calendar for Southwest Florida

### April - Continued

#### Mammals

- ☆ [Black Bears](#) begin moving about after winter inactivity
- ☆ In April and May, watch for young [River Otters](#), [Minks](#), and [Long-Tail Weasels](#)
- ☆ [Bats](#) begin their [maternity season on April 15](#), congregating into colonies to raise young, remaining together until mid-July

#### Reptiles

- ☆ Most [Snakes](#) begin mating rituals
- ☆ [American Alligators](#) begin searching out new territories and mates



# A Year In Our Nature

## Nature Calendar for Southwest Florida

### May

#### Birds

- ☆ [Brown Pelican](#) and [White Ibis](#) young now visible in nests
- ☆ Some of [Florida's Bald Eagles](#) begin migrating north
- ☆ Breeding begins for many [resident and summer songbirds](#)

#### Fish

- ☆ [Bluegill](#) are bedding at the full moon
- ☆ [Redbreast Sunfish](#) and [Spotted Sunfish](#) begin spawning in rivers

#### Insects



If you discover these black-and-white striped caterpillars munching on the leaves of the fragrant Swamp Lily *Crinum americanum* that are blooming now, be sure to welcome these "convict caterpillars." They are the larvae of the [Spanish Moth](#) *Xanthopastis timais*, a beautiful and beneficial creature.



Crinums are also a favorite buffet item for the [Eastern Lubber Grasshoppers](#). Watch for hatching in the spring and strive to control the young grasshoppers before they become adult eating machines!

- ☆ Peak flight month for [Schaus' Swallowtail Butterfly](#) in the Keys

#### Mammals

Local beachgoers at [Clam Pass](#) got a rare treat recently when they spotted a young male [Florida Panther](#) *Puma concolor coryi* in the [mangroves near the beach](#). A quick call to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission's [FWC Wildlife Alert Hotline](#) enabled an FWC panther team to move the healthy panther to the [Bird Rookery Swamp](#) near the Collier Extension.



A male panther ranges over 200 square miles, so re-locating this panther to more extensive habitat increases this endangered species' survival and mating potential. Panthers mate year round, reaching peak levels in spring. Female panthers' home range is 75 square miles, restricted by their need to protect and nurse their kittens. Their preferred diet is wild hogs and deer, supplemented with smaller prey like raccoons and armadillos. Visit [Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge](#) to learn more about [living in panther country](#).

# A Year In Our Nature

## Nature Calendar for Southwest Florida

### May - Continued

#### Plants



Hike one of the [Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park's Walking Trails](#), and watch for stands of the fragrant **Swamp Lily** *Crinum americanum* blooming in wetland areas this time of year. This hardy perennial is also easy to grow and enjoy in a lake-side planting, rain or swale garden, or backyard water garden. Wet, part-sun/part-shade areas are the right place for this beauty. Click on the photo at left to view a short video showcasing an area bog garden planted with these lovely natives.

The Swamp Lily, or String Lily, is a member of the amaryllis family, and has strap-like leaves growing from a bulb. The white or pink-striped blooms can occur virtually year-round in our area, swaying in the breeze 1 - 2 feet above clumps of persistent glossy green leaves.

To learn more, request UF article [FPS154 Swamp Lily](#).

#### Reptiles

Count yourself lucky if your landscape is home to Florida's only native lizard, the **Green Anole** *Anolis carolinensis*. Although not a chameleon, they can turn their totally green form entirely brown. As a result, they are frequently mistaken for the more common but **non-native Brown Anole** *Anolis sagrei*. From spring to fall, anoles lay eggs every two weeks among the leaf litter. Anoles live for about a year, dining on mosquitos, flies, beetles and spiders, and frequently fleeing capture by leaving their "disposable tail" behind.



- ☆ [American Alligators](#) begin to court and make loud resounding 'bellows'
- ☆ The height of [American Crocodile nesting in the Keys](#) happens at the beginning of this month
- ☆ [Sea Turtle](#) nesting season begins this month, and continues through August on area beaches. You are welcome to witness this annual process: you can help by [observing these guidelines](#).
- ☆ [Soft-Shell Turtles](#) and [Snapping Turtles](#) complete egg laying.



# A Year In Our Nature

## Nature Calendar for Southwest Florida

### June

#### Amphibians



**Invasive Cuban Treefrogs** *Osteopilus septentrionalis* breed in warm weather in canals, ponds, and cisterns. This invasive species began arriving in Florida from the Caribbean during the 1920s as stowaways in shipping crates, and has been expanding across Florida ever since. This frog resembles several of Florida's native tree frogs, but they are generally larger in size, and their eyes protrude more prominently.

Cuban treefrogs are predators of [Florida's native treefrogs](#), [frogs](#), [lizards](#), and some invertebrates. In many urban neighborhoods, residents report that Cuban treefrog populations have replaced their native frog populations. Because of this species' destructive habits, UF IFAS recommends that residents capture and humanely euthanize this species. Click on the photo above left for additional photos to assist with identification, and to listen to their call. And further details can be found in UF article [WEC218 The Cuban Treefrog in Florida](#).

#### Birds

- ☆ [Laughing Gulls](#), [Oystercatchers](#) and [Black Skimmers](#) nest on islands, beaches, even rooftops when preferred habitat is unavailable
- ☆ Be respectful of nesting [Mockingbirds](#), who may attack pedestrians who walk too close to nests

#### Fish

- ☆ Migrating [Tarpon](#) can be found almost anywhere in the Keys
- ☆ [Snook](#) begin moving into inlets and passes

#### Insects

Although birds, bats, butterflies, moths, beetles and other creatures contribute to pollination, [Bees](#) are likely the most important pollinators of native plants in Florida, shown here on a native Coreopsis. So to celebrate [National Pollinator Week](#), which occurs annually in mid-June, we're honoring the 316 different species from six families of bees that live in our state.

Thanks to the voluntary partnership among Florida's beekeepers and agricultural growers, [Florida's bee colonies are increasing](#), and other states are following our lead. With the assistance of the [Florida Department of Agriculture Pollinator Protection Program](#), and the [UF / IFAS Honey Bee Research & Extension Lab](#), Florida's beekeepers and agricultural producers are safeguarding our pollinators as they grow our state and nation's food. You can do your part by [becoming a Buzz-Watcher](#), [planting pollinator-friendly plants](#) and using [natural products to manage pests around your home](#).



# A Year In Our Nature

## Nature Calendar for Southwest Florida

### June - Continued

#### Insects - Continued

☆ That classic summer sound begins as [Cicadas](#) emerge from their underground growth period

#### Mammals

On a recent afternoon, Collier Extension Administrative Assistant Paula Springs was surprised to see this visitor looking in her Extension office window! Unlike many wildlife species, [Northern Raccoons](#) *Procyon lotor* are quite adaptable to life in in urban areas. Quiet mid-afternoon neighborhoods with landscapes featuring exotic fruits and ornamental plants provide welcome dining options, and daytime visits by these intelligent, curious creatures do not mean that they are rabid or dangerous.

Raccoon diets include fruits and plant materials, but also include crustaceans, small animals, eggs, pet food and garbage. For these reasons, [prevention is key for avoiding raccoon problems!](#) For more tips, request UF article [WEC20 Dealing with Unwanted Wildlife](#). Since raccoons are a common rabies carrier, request UF article [WEC239 Protecting your Family and Pets from Rabies](#).



#### Reptiles

☆ Nesting season for [Loggerhead Sea Turtles](#) continues

☆ [Gopher Tortoise](#) breeding season is at its height

# A Year In Our Nature

## Nature Calendar for Southwest Florida

### July

#### Birds

Steer clear of [Beach-nesting Shorebirds](#) when visiting the beach or walking pets. [Snowy Plovers](#) begin nesting in February, joined by [Black Skimmers](#), [Least Terns](#), [American Oystercatchers](#) and [Wilson's Plovers](#) in March, and continue through August. Although these birds nest on open beach, laying their eggs in shallow sand scrapes or sea shells, their nests are so well camouflaged that beach-goers can accidentally trample them, or cause the parents to abandon their chicks. Click on the Black Skimmer family photo at left to learn how to [Share the Beach with our Shore-birds](#), or visit [www.flshorebirdalliance.org](http://www.flshorebirdalliance.org) to volunteer as a shore-bird steward.



- ☆ [Swallow-tailed Kites](#), [Purple Martins](#) and [Tree Swallows](#) begin gathering for their winter southern migration
- ☆ Watch for [Frigatebirds](#) flying overhead
- ☆ [Shorebird](#) migration starts in mid-July, peaking in August

#### Insects



Local populations of [Mosquitos](#) frequently increase rapidly from July through September. As featured in our [April/May 2015 Green Gazette](#) cover story, we can take steps to protect our health and reduce the annoyance, while the [Collier Mosquito Control District](#) (CMCD) manages area wide populations.

Contact CMCD at [www.cmcd.org](http://www.cmcd.org) to [report a mosquito issue](#) or [request notification of scheduled treatment in your area](#). Then [choose your favorite mosquito repellent](#) from those tested by the [UF/IFAS Medical Entomology Laboratory](#).

- ☆ [Chiggers](#) are also abundant, so take precautions

#### Mammals

- ☆ Baby [Raccoons](#), [Armadillos](#), [Opossums](#) and [Bobcats](#) leave dens and begin following parents
- ☆ [White-Tailed Deer](#) mating season begins in the Everglades

# A Year In Our Nature

## Nature Calendar for Southwest Florida

### August

#### Birds

☆ First flocks of [Blue-Wing and Green-Wing Teal](#) arrive for the winter

#### Insects



Have you seen a new mound of sand in your yard during July or August? It may be a new nest of the female [Cicada Killer wasp \*Sphecius speciosus\*](#), shown at right tranquilizing a cicada before taking it home to feed her larvae during the winter. Several female wasps may lay eggs together in these 6"-deep burrows. These beneficial insects rarely sting, unlike other ground-dwelling wasps and hornets, like [yellow jackets](#).



☆ Thousands of [Great Southern White Butterflies](#) migrate through coastal areas

#### Invertebrates

☆ [Corals](#) along the Keys spawn at the full moon

#### Mammals

☆ Two-year-old [Black Bear](#) cubs wean from their mothers

☆ [Short-Tailed Shrews](#) begin a second annual breeding season

#### Reptiles

At Clam Pass on a recent morning, tracks in the sand made by a [visiting sea turtle](#) were visible reminders that a new nest of eggs had been deposited on the beach overnight. But who's the momma? Click on the photo at right to identify the species of our overnight visitor, then click on the photo at left to see a short video that describes her nest-making.



And since nesting season continues through October, there's plenty of time to make your own tracks to the beach to witness this annual ritual. Just [follow these guidelines](#) so we can all [share the beach](#) with our delightful natural neighbors.



☆ Young [American Alligators](#) and [American Crocodiles](#) begin to hatch

# A Year In Our Nature

## Nature Calendar for Southwest Florida

### September

#### Amphibians

- ☆ Listen for [Spadefoot Toads](#) after heavy rains

#### Birds

- ☆ [Bald Eagles](#) return to nest sites and begin courtship
- ☆ Prepare your [bird feeders](#) for returning [birds](#)



Master Gardener Pat Cicogna welcomed this [Barred Owl](#) *Strix varia* to her yard during this month. The pattern of alternating brown and white bars of feathers on its head, chest and back, and pale grey discs around its large brown eyes enables easy identification. Even more distinctive is the call they use for identifying territory and attracting mates, the low rhythmic “Who cooks for you, who cooks for you all?” Click on the photo at left to hear this call. And while many [owl species](#) are strictly nocturnal, the Barred Owl is sometimes active during the day.

Barred owls prefer [dense forests with large trees](#) for nesting, but seek out perches in relatively open understory, so they can see, and then fly to catch their prey. Their diet consists mostly of mice, shrews, voles, and rats, and we benefit as they manage these rodent populations in urban as well as more rural environments. And recent research has shown that barred owls are also effective predators for the unpalatable [invasive Cuban Treefrogs](#)!

#### Mammals

- ☆ [White-Tailed Deer](#) breeding begins in [South Florida flatwoods](#)
- ☆ [Florida Manatees](#) begin to congregate in rivers, bays, and near power plants

#### Reptiles

Collier Extension Administrative Assistant Paula Springs spotted this female [Eastern Chicken Turtle](#) *Deirochelys reticularia* examining a suitable nesting site in the Extension’s front courtyard. These reptiles are active during the day and throughout the year in South Florida, commonly seen swimming in ponds to dine on insects, crustaceans, tadpoles, and aquatic plants. They nest nearly continuously from September through March, with the average clutch of 9 flexible, oblong eggs hatching after 78-89 days. Watch for these social creatures basking in groups at waters’ edge during their 24-year lifespan.



- ☆ Watch where you walk on the beach: young [Sea Turtles](#) are hatching!



# A Year In Our Nature

## Nature Calendar for Southwest Florida

### October

#### Amphibians / Reptiles

- ☆ [Flatwoods Salamanders](#) breed with the first rains of October

#### Birds

- ☆ [Chimney Swift](#) migrations peak in South Florida
- ☆ Migrant [Blue Grosbeaks](#), [Summer Tanagers](#), [Black-Throated Blue Warblers](#), [Blackpoll Warblers](#) and [Cape May Warblers](#) begin appearing
- ☆ [Ducks](#) begin to arrive
- ☆ Watch for [Piping Plovers](#) on Keywaydin Island.

#### Fish

- ☆ As Gulf water temperature begins its fall cool-down, [Snook](#) begin moving from outside beaches and passes toward inland back bays
- ☆ Watch for schools of [Redfish](#) along the shallow edges of channels and flats at low tide
- ☆ [Largemouth Bass](#) are active in cooler waters

#### Insects / Invertebrates



This colorful female [Basilica Spider](#) *Neoscona domiciliorum*, spotted recently at Clam Pass, is busy creating a string of egg sacs, which can feature as many as 9 thick silk beads, each protecting ten baby spider eggs. Her web is also a masterful creation resembling a three-dimensional dome like those found in cathedrals. Most [orb weaver spiders](#) like her are nocturnal, and their eyesight is poor, so they rely on vibrations produced within their web as insects and other small organisms become entangled in the sticky circular threads. Since they provide free pest management for your landscape, and pose little risk to humans or pets, welcome these colorful creatures to your landscape by minimizing pesticide treatments near their spun homes.

#### Mammals

- ☆ [Flying Squirrels](#) will be moving into pecan groves as the nuts ripen.
- ☆ Unravel the mysteries surrounding the mascot of Halloween: [Bats!](#)

# A Year In Our Nature

## Nature Calendar for Southwest Florida

### November

#### Amphibians

- ☆ Although [Southern Chorus Frogs](#) lay eggs in clusters on submerged vegetation from November to April, they may breed year-round in peninsular Florida.

#### Birds

- ☆ [Cedar Waxwings](#) appear on fruit-bearing plants, like Cedars and Hollies
- ☆ [Gray Catbirds](#) are skulking and cat-calling in [neighborhood thickets](#)
- ☆ [Kinglets](#), [Phoebes](#), [Robins](#), and other [Northern Songbirds](#) have arrived
- ☆ Watch for [Bald Eagles](#)' aerial courtship displays

#### Fish

As Gulf water temperatures cool in November, [Spotted Seatrout](#) *Cynoscion nebulosus* begin to school into deeper channels and inland back bays. But this species is quite dependent on healthy estuaries, since they live most of their lives within 10 miles of their birthplace. Juvenile seatrout prefer seagrass beds, tidal flats, saltwater marshes and mangroves, while adults are typically found in soft sandy bottom areas.



Like many members of the [Drum family](#), spotted seatrout can produce croaking or drumming sounds by contracting specialized muscles, called the sonic muscles, against their swim bladder. This behavior is best observed on spawning grounds from April to November, when males gather in large groups before sunset and drum to attract females.

#### Mammals

- ☆ [Florida Manatees](#) begin to move to relatively warm waters

# A Year In Our Nature

## Nature Calendar for Southwest Florida

### December

#### Birds

- ☆ Participate in the [Annual Audubon Christmas bird count](#) from December 14<sup>th</sup> – January 5th.
- ☆ [Great Horned Owls and Barred Owls](#) are courting. Listen for them.
- ☆ [Yellow-Rumped Warblers](#) will show-up at feeders if it is cold enough.
- ☆ [Snail Kites](#) gather in large roosts as nesting begins.

#### Fish

- ☆ [Oscars](#) are abundant in Everglades Water Conservation Area canals, taking worms, crickets, and beetle spins

#### Invertebrates



This colorful [Mangrove Tree Crab](#) *Aratis pisonii*, spotted on Keywaydin Island, is busy dining on her favorite food, Red Mangrove leaves. Crabs like this one are considered a “keystone” species for mangroves because of their key role supporting this community. They spend high tide in the mangrove canopy eating leaves, creating smaller leaf particles for their food web neighbors, like bacteria and fungi. Since they do not breathe air, they must periodically migrate vertically to the water’s edge to replenish the thin film of water covering its gills. They also venture to the shoreline during low tide to feed on insects and algae.

Mating many times during the year, the female crab holds all of the fertilized eggs on her abdomen until they hatch. She then returns to the water to release her larval young, most of whom serve as an important food source for juvenile fish living among the mangrove roots. Click on her picture to learn more.

#### Mammals

- ☆ [Florida Manatees](#) congregate in warm water refuges near power plants, like [Lee County’s Manatee Park](#), as well as [freshwater springs](#)
- ☆ [Right Whales](#) appear off east coast north of Sebastian Inlet