

iPhone introduces new Florida nature app

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Jan. 30, 2012 - The Florida Museum of Natural History took Mother Nature digital this month.

A new iPhone app, "Nature Viewing Along the Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Viewing Trail," was released about a week ago. It allows outdoor lovers to identify diverse wildlife species throughout Florida.

The museum developed the app with both the UF Institute of Food and Agricultural Services entomology and nematology department and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

"The museum wanted to create a field guide that would be both beneficial for nature experts and novices," said Leeann Bright, marketing and public relations coordinator for the Florida Museum of Natural History. "The app provides detailed information about a variety of bird, butterfly and plant species that will help users identify them in the wild."

The app contains photographs and information for 200 bird, 106 butterfly and 247 flowering plant species that can be searched and filtered by name, color, shape, season, plant form and size.

Funds from grants given by the Florida Wildflower Foundation for \$40,000 and the Florida Museum Associates Board for \$9,500 allowed the museum to provide the app to the public free of charge, Bright said.

The app also includes a list of 491 sites along the Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail, which runs 2,000 miles from the Florida Panhandle to the Florida Keys.

Julie Dodd, a UF journalism professor, enjoys bird-watching and nature photography. She's been to many sites along the Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail, including the La Chua Trail at Paynes Prairie in Gainesville.

"One advantage to having this app is that it's certainly much more portable and lightweight compared to carrying a heavy bird-watching field guide," Dodd said.

She often carries her iPhone while hiking the La Chua Trail because she might take a picture to share with a friend, she said, and this is an app that can clarify what she's sharing.

The app is full of photographs taken by people around Florida, said Shari Ellis, project director at the Florida Museum of Natural History.

However, not just amateur work is featured.

John Moran, an award-winning Florida nature photographer based in Gainesville, donated a few photographs of his own, Ellis said.

In addition to the iPhone, the app will be available for download on iPads in late January and for Android devices in late February.

"We hope users of the app will start creating their own collection of photographs during their explorations, which will hopefully lead to more community involvement and expansion of the app in the future," said Ellis.