

The Wild Life

Written and illustrated by Cathy Gray.

Hawksbill Sea Turtle

(*Eretmochelys imbricata*)

These beautiful marine-dwelling reptiles are 30 to 36 inches long. Carapace (shell covering) is brown to greenish with a golden pattern.

They have paddle-like front legs. They live in coastal warm, shallow waters with rocky bottoms, coral reefs and bays in the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. They have a diet of invertebrates including mollusks and crustaceans.

This turtle is an endangered species because of people poaching (illegally killing) them for their meat, eggs and shells. The shells are used to make tortoise shell jewelry.

Great Blue Heron

(*Ardea herodias*)

This Great Blue Heron is large; it's 39 inches to 52 inches long. It is mostly gray with black markings. The Great White Heron (shown) is a subspecies and is white with a yellowish bill and greenish-yellow legs. Distinguish the Great White from the Common Egret by the Great White's crest. It's voice is a guttural squawk.

The White Heron lives in southern Florida in lakes, ponds, marshes and rivers; the Blue Heron lives in mangrove forests in the Florida Keys. Diet is fish, frogs, small mammals, reptiles and, infrequently, birds.



Monarch Butterfly

(*Danus plexippus*)

Beautiful and somewhat common, the monarch butterfly has wings of brownish-orange with dark edges, creating a stained-glass look. There are white spots on the wing borders. The caterpillar is black, white and yellow striped. Find them near milkweed plants and meadows.

They frequent areas from Canada to Mexico and Australia. The caterpillar eats milkweed; the butterfly likes to eat nectar and pollinates many plants in the process. The pupa, caterpillar and adult butterfly are poisonous to all predators, such as birds. Monarchs can fly as far as 2,000 miles for migration. Females travel northward in the spring, laying eggs as they go - forming a "relay" to the north. There are many generations a year.



Common Raccoon

(*Procyon lotor*)

This raccoon is usually grayish-brown with gray and black underneath and 24 to 37 inches long; the face is masked in black with a white outline. It's tail is ringed with black and brownish or grayish rings. It is seen in woods and wetlands, most often along wooded streams and in urban areas from central Canada south to Panama except for some areas of the western United States.

Plant materials such as fruits, seeds, and acorns make up more than half of the diet; invertebrates, especially crayfish and clams and then other foods such as grasshoppers, bird eggs, young frogs, fish, mice and other mammals. Raccoons are dexterous with their paws; they can turn doorknobs and open refrigerators. Their favorite den location is high above the ground in a hollow tree and they will climb down a tree either head or tail first.

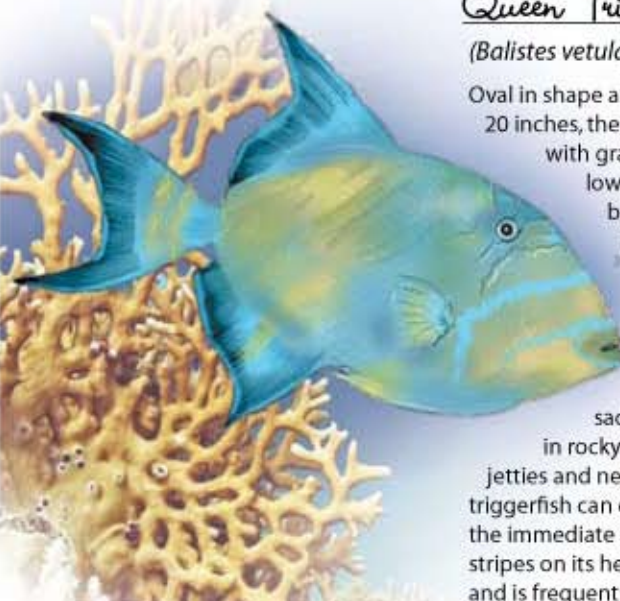


Queen Triggerfish

(*Balistes vetula*)

Oval in shape and growing to 20 inches, the triggerfish is blue to green with gray on the top, with a yellow-orange underside. It has blue lines that are outlined in yellow starting at the eye. There are two bright blue stripes starting at the mouth and blue bands at the tail.

It lives from Massachusetts south to Brazil in rocky and coral reefs, pilings, jetties and nearby areas. The queen triggerfish can change color to blend into the immediate surroundings, but the blue stripes on its head stay blue. It is abundant and is frequently used as a food fish.



Fern Forest Nature Center

Could there possibly be a designated Wilderness Area with walking trails in heavily populated northeast Broward County?

Yep -- it surprised us, too. But Fern Forest Nature Center in Coconut Creek, near the intersection of Atlantic Boulevard and Lyons Road, is a delightful way to spend an afternoon.

The 250-acre-plus site features four trails that offer abundant opportunity to see wildlife such as dragonflies, butterflies and many species of birds, as well as an environmental glimpse into the past. Call 954-970-0150 for hours and directions to the nature center.

