

DOWNSTREAM



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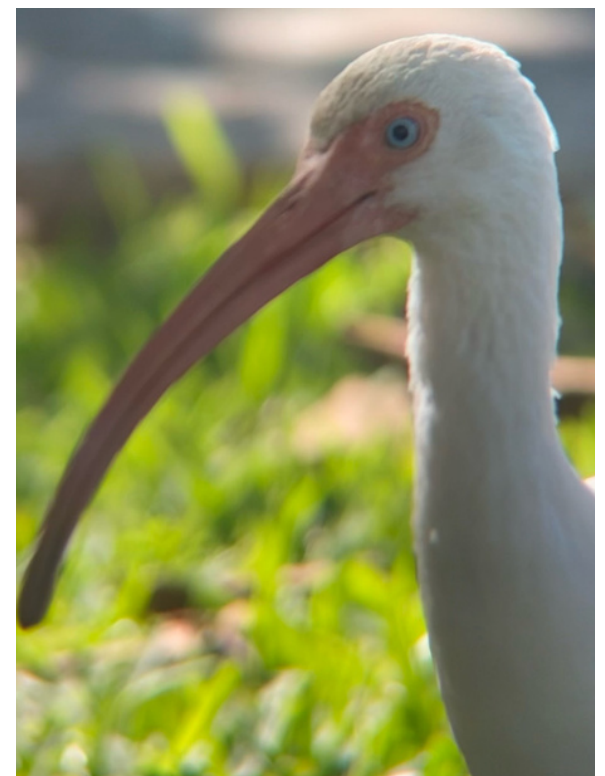
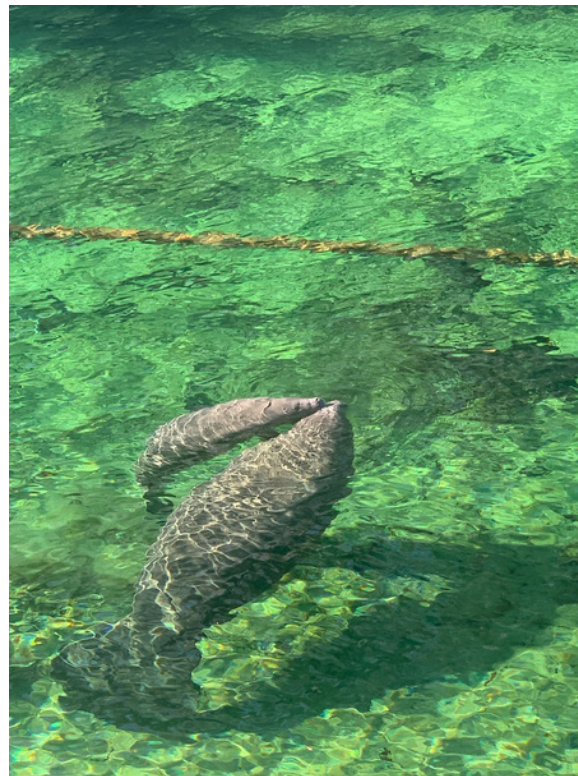
Biology Course Explores Florida Wildlife Over Winter Break



A Biology course called "Wildlife Adaptations in the Anthropocene" made the long drive to Florida over winter break. Led by Professors Matthias Leu and Dan Cristol, the course explored the wildlife of Florida, including the manatee and its status as an endangered species, past and present conservation issues in the Everglades, the recovery of alligators after DDT pollution, and how numerous species have dealt with human incursions into their habitats. Students had the opportunity to camp in the Everglades, have a mock town hall debate, develop bird identification skills and see manatees in the wild. Read some of their reflections on the trip below!

"Any biology textbook will tell you that humanity has altered the world, but you will never begin to comprehend the magnitude of this change until you witness it firsthand. A weeklong field course in Florida opened my eyes to the world outside of Virginia... During my two years at William & Mary, I have looked at many problems in the environment. This was the first time the problem could look back at me."

"As I remarked to Matthias Leu on the last day in Florida, "I feel like I learned a whole semester's worth of knowledge in just one week." We debated invasive species ethics, learned about government policy failures and successes, and spotted more bird species than I can remember. Beyond the facts, debates, and ethics, I felt that I got a better understanding of the culture of conservation both within and outside scientific communities."



Photos courtesy of Wildlife Adaptations in the Anthropocene students



The Birds Are Back in Town

While winter brings colder weather to Williamsburg, it also brings migratory birds back to the shores of Lake Matoaka. Professor Dan Cristol weighs in on some of the birds you might see on the lake this season.

All photos by Madeline Reinsel



Blue Herons have nested on the lake in years past, and winter here as well. Professor Cristol remarks that though there were no nests last year, they may return to nesting this winter. Groups of herons may have several nests in the same tree, and Professor Cristol adds that they will eventually kill the nesting trees with their feces.



Hooded Mergansers come to Lake Matoaka in the winter, when pairs of the birds join together to form larger flocks. The species is breeding farther and farther south, but does not yet seem to be breeding in Virginia. They nest inside hollow trees with holes made by pileated woodpeckers, and eat small fish. Professor Cristol is hopeful that someday a pair will stay and nest on the lake.



Bald eagle sightings are very common in the Williamsburg area, and especially on Lake Matoaka. Young eagles take four or more years to sexually mature, and spend time looking out for aging eagles that they can eventually challenge and claim territory from. Juvenile eagles eat exclusively dead fish and birds. Professor Cristol thinks it is odd that Lake Matoaka doesn't have a mature nesting pair yet.



Cormorant populations are increasing nationwide and as a breeder in Virginia. Currently small numbers of them spend the winter on campus - in other locations, they nest in the thousands. They prefer roosts of dead trees, but Matoaka doesn't have enough dead trees to support large numbers of the birds.

ART MEETS SCIENCE

The Keck Lab hosted an environmental art show in November, organized by students in Professor Alan Braddock's Art and Ecology course. Students submitted artwork along the theme of "Romance and Decay", and artwork was displayed at the Keck Lab from November through finals. You can view a selection of the artwork below.



Fading Away by Amelia Seabury



Final Resting Place by Amelia Seabury



Gerald by Liz Liner



Kayak Scene in Fall by Faith Ronquest



Fresh Meets Salty and Waters of Italy by Mikayla Fulcher