

NON-NATIVE FISH LABORATORY OPEN HOUSE

APRIL 9, 2011

Submitted by Murray Stanford, Kelly Gestring, and Jennifer Ketterlin

An estimated 215 people attended the Non-Native Fish Laboratory's Open House on Saturday morning, April 2, 2011 and enjoyed a special event. Visitors saw many of Florida's established exotic freshwater fishes and the principal native sport fishes on display in eleven aquariums ranging in size from 50 to 500 gallons. We handed out numerous copies of the large and small exotic fish posters, handouts, and brochures to the public and the Non-Native Fish Project's large display board was set up to provide information on the Project's objectives and activities. The series of 2'x3' photographs documenting the research supporting the introduction of Butterfly Peacock, the collage of "Butterfly Peacock hero shots", and the exotic fish paintings by Diane Peebles and Duane Raver hanging from the rafters received many compliments and stimulated numerous discussions. The kids-favorite "Touch Tank" held Swamp Eels and a small sailfin catfish they can try and catch and hold. Once the kids (and parents!) got past the idea the eels weren't snakes and weren't going to bite or shock, there was no stopping them from trying to hold the slippery eels! The electrofishing boat was on display and Project staff were on hand to answer questions.

Two wild-caught snakes, a Burmese python with attitude and a Northern African python were also on display as examples of the many non-native terrestrial species present in Florida. The Burmese python startled several guests early on by striking at the cage but keeping people a short distance away from her cage allowed everyone a good look without upsetting the snake too much. Non-native reptile identification guides produced by the University of Florida and snake identification guides produced by FWC were handed out and information on the identification and native range of the pythons was included as part of the display.

As part of the Open House/ Free Fishing Weekend, one of the ¼ acre ponds at the Lab is stocked with a variety of exotic and native sport fishes and set up for kid's fishing. John Cimbaro of the South Regional Fisheries Project and Murray set up the fishing stations around the pond, and John coordinated the fishing event. Enthusiastic volunteers



including Steve Marshall (South Region), Steve Weinsier, Joel Wolf, Brett Cardinal, Mike Ready, Andy Roberts, and Andy Fuhrman from Allstate Resource Management, Adam Grayson from Lake and Wetlands, and David Finley and Scott Richardson of Boynton Beach all helped make the fishing event run smoothly. The weather was great and the fishing was good with catches of hard-fighting Channel Catfish up to 4 lbs., Mayan Cichlid, and native bream. All the kids had to do was to hang on! Approximately 100 kids and 50 adults participated in the fishing event. The fishing was so fast and furious that accurate records couldn't be kept but we estimate the kids caught in the neighborhood of 400 fish for an average catch of almost 4 fish per child. Almost everyone caught at least one fish and several kids caught 8-14!

Everyone was very appreciative of our efforts in hosting this Open House and many went out of their way to express their thanks. Today's turnout (215 people) was just the right amount. There was a steady flow of people through the Lab and no one had to wait in line to fish. The turnout was excellent particularly since the only advertising we do is to place signs out front 5 days before the event!



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The Northern African Python (pictured) and the Burmese Python attracted many visitors.



Some of our loyal volunteers (Steve, Dave, and Scott).

Thanks guys!



The displays were of interest to people of all ages.



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This Swamp Eel was no match for these two brave young girls!



An estimated 150 kids and adults fished the ¼ acre pond.



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A nice Mayan Cichlid!

Photo courtesy of Allstate Resource Management.



Mom and daughter teamed up to land this scrappy Channel
Cat.

Photo courtesy of Allstate Resource Management.



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This young man caught a bunch of cats!



Everyone was a happy camper!

Photo courtesy of Allstate Resource Management.