

St. Johns River



St. Johns River (Mary Brabham)

This narrative derives from an interview conducted with Dr. Roger and Janet Grimshaw at their home near the St. Johns River on October 29, 2001. Roger and Janet are avid naturalists who are aware of the surrounding environment and the changes they see occurring. This interview describes their experiences with the wildlife around the St. Johns River and their concerns for the river's future.

Personal History



Painted Bunting (Roger Grimshaw)

Roger and Janet Grimshaw moved to their home near the St. Johns River in 1994. The two had been living in Seminole County for a number of years, but when they felt their neighborhood becoming crowded, they decided to look for a quieter place to live. They found what they were looking for in an old house in Indian Mound Village near the banks of the St. Johns River. Both Roger and Janet are enthusiastic birdwatchers, so the idea of living in a place that might attract many birds was appealing. Janet was especially interested in having a house near the river because she has fond memories of living near a river when she attended Stetson University. This river runs near the college campus and was an attraction for ospreys, which would also build their nests there. They have not been disappointed in the birds that have visited their garden, having logged over 126 different species in their immediate area.

As part of their birdwatching, Janet and Roger will go canoeing on the St. Johns River. They prefer canoeing the river rather than using a motorboat. Janet says about canoeing on the river:

“Well, the canoe works so well on this river because it’s so shallow so far in. You can do almost anything without any fear, except for fear of powerboats. Most of them are pretty decent and slow down. You go into some places and you think, ‘This is just like what the Indians saw however many hundreds of years ago.’ Some parts have really not changed. It’s just too swampy and too hard to get to probably.”

When they do go canoeing, Roger and Janet will often start out at Mullet Lake Park and canoe down the river while stopping off at the lakes along the way.

History/Information



Black-necked Stilt near the river (Roger Grimshaw)



Indian Mound in Indian Mound Village (USF)



The St. Johns River (Dunn, Hampton Postcard Collection, USF Special Collections)

The St. Johns River spans 350 miles, making it Florida's longest river. The river's headwaters are in the marshlands of Indian River and Brevard counties. The river then flows north to where it empties into the Atlantic Ocean in Duval County, near Jacksonville. The St. Johns has three drainage basins: upper, middle, and lower. Indian Mound Village, as well as the city of Sanford, is in the middle basin. Near Sanford the river widens and forms Lakes Harney, Jesup, and Monroe (Source: "St. Johns River: A Vital Part of Florida's Environment, Economy, Culture and History" by the St. Johns River Water Management District. Available at: <http://sjr.state.fl.us>).

The neighborhood where the Grimshaws live is Indian Mound Village, named after the nearby midden left by early Native American inhabitants. Based on stories that he has heard, Roger says that the mound was once much larger than it currently is and stretched to the present Celery Avenue. However, as the area was being settled, people used the earth in the mound for landfill because of its good drainage quality. Janet has found some reports about the mound that indicate that it was not until 1911 that people decided to stop using the mound to get landfill.

The historical information that Roger has about the area indicates that during the 19th Century the local surroundings were once known as Speer's Landing and some of the land was once owned by Walter Gwynn. According to Roger, the area was then developed and used for celery farming. An indication of this history is nearby Celery Avenue.

In the area near Indian Mound Village there are a number of conservation areas that are owned by the St. Johns River Water Management District. Roger believes that these conservation areas have helped to attract a large bird population. As mentioned earlier, Janet and Roger have logged over 126 species in the immediate area. Some of these include painted buntings, eagles, ospreys, Carolina wrens, catbirds, hummingbirds, barred owls and great horned owls. Some of the mammals that visit their neighborhood include opossums, foxes, swamp rabbits, bobcats, and armadillos. Roger says that there are occasional reports of bears in the neighborhood, but he has never seen one.

Development

The area near Indian Mound Village has moved from agricultural production to residential development. According to Roger and Janet, the neighborhood was originally planned for numerous homesites. However, it was never developed as was originally intended, leaving a large unused concrete gate and scattered houses. Janet adds that the original home lots were rather small, which led to people buying two lots or more. Currently, the neighborhood is a mixture of older and newer homes. The Grimshaws house is probably the oldest in the neighborhood, having originally been built as a lodge for people coming to fish in the St. John River and to hunt in the area.

The surrounding area, including the city of Sanford, is continuing to grow both residentially and commercially. Janet says that this development is pushing into the river area; however, there has been some citizen action to try to stop it from coming too close to the river. Near to Indian Mound Village is the bridge for State Road 415, which is a major route for people that commute from Deltona to Sanford. Roger believes that this bridge will



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eventually be widened, which is a concern for him. He says that this bridge poses a hazard for local wildlife, with bobcats, raccoons and birds ending up as roadkill. The bridge also creates significant noise for the area.

In addition to the increasing residential and commercial development, the local airport has been expanded in recent years. Roger says about the airport:

“There have been a lot of changes at the airport since we’ve been here. There are a lot of chartered flights now. They are going to be lengthening the runway and buying up some property to the east. They (the airport) cut down an eagle’s nest a number of years ago and paid a significant fine... There is a fair amount of noise at times depending on wind direction and flight patterns.”

The St. Johns River is also affected by the growing number of people in the area. Both Janet and Roger say that one of the most notable differences in the river is an increase in people and traffic. One of their biggest concerns is the increasing development near the river, especially south of Indian Mound Village. Roger says:

“...South from here not any of that is protected. Some of it is industrial and some of it could potentially be taken up by the airport. They don’t have a good history. It’s about three miles from us to Lake Jesup, and almost anything could be built there. We still have to see... Sanford has different zoning requirements than the county. Sanford might want to allow a greater density of development.”

The Future

Both Janet and Roger are concerned with the increasing residential and commercial development in the area and on the St. Johns River. Janet says about her hopes for the future of the area:

“They just have to develop it wisely and realize that it’s an asset and try to make as little impact as possible. But if you can just put it in there without totally changing the whole landscape by bulldozing the whole thing, then putting houses in and re-planting trees. In this time of the fragile environment there isn’t much left of certain riverside stuff... Leave it intact as much as possible. I would hope they would have the foresight to do that because it’s really beautiful for everyone going down the river. The less we dump into it, the better.”

If there is careful planning with the development of the area that allows for the natural environment to stay intact, then the river might be able to retain its natural attractions. Roger believes that the natural surroundings and the high number or unique birds that it attracts could create a potential market for eco-tourism. However, for that to occur, the river would need to remain an environment that supports wildlife.

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