



NURTURE IN NATURE

Take a two-hour pontoon boat ride through the breathtaking Dora Canal. Step into the majestic Ocala National Forest and discover the elusive red-cockaded woodpecker. Come face-to-face with Smokey the Bear and learn how to prevent wildfires.

STORY: JAMES COMBS **PHOTOS:** COURTESY OF DEBI DYER

development and tourism department. “Many of them came from outside the state. This is a wonderful way to get people outdoors and let them appreciate the abundance of beauty Lake County has to offer. We are excited about promoting ecotourism in Lake County.”

BIRDS, FLOWERS AND MORE

James Currie, host of NBC Sports’ *Nikon Birding Adventures*, is returning to the event. The South African-born birding expert’s popular television show focuses on rare and unusual birds in exotic locations such as Ecuador, Costa Rica, and the Dominican Republic, as well as parts of Florida. He also hosts *Aerial Assassins*, which airs on National Geographic.

Currie will be the keynote speaker during a dinner at Lakeside Inn on Oct. 4. The following two days, he will lead a Hobie kayak paddle trip that launches at 7:30a.m. at the Astatula Boat Ramp.

Jeffrey Gordon, who is president of the American Birding Association and field editor of *Bird Watcher’s Digest*, will also appear at the event. He will talk to the public at a Meet-the-Experts reception on Oct. 4 at Lakeside Inn. In addition, attendees can have lunch with Gordon on Oct. 5 at Mission Inn Resort and Club for \$25.

Other notable guests will include Dr.

Walter Taylor, a board member of the Florida Wildflower Foundation who will discuss Florida wildflowers; Fred Bohler, a wildlife specialist who will present a workshop about facing fear of spiders; and Cathy Brown, owner of Clermont-based B.B. Brown’s Gardens who will take guests on a tour of the Florida Scrub-Jay Trail.

Numerous workshops will be offered throughout the three-day event. Attendees can learn about interesting topics such as Florida-friendly landscapes, endangered plant conservation, tagging Monarch butterflies, basic birding identification, how to grow a butterfly garden, and insider tips for the best Lake County birding locations.

In addition, renowned field experts are leading several field trips, allowing visitors to explore some of Lake County’s most natural wonderlands up close and personal. Enjoy guided nature and birding hikes at Oakland Nature Preserve, hike for pitcher plants along the Hilochee Wildlife Management Area, and take pleasure in a guided nature walk at Lake Louisa State Park.

Dyer says highlights of last year’s event were the exhibits and shows. Making an appearance this year is Kim Titterton of the popular Swamp Girl Adventures. She will educate festival-goers about some of Florida’s creepy, crawling critters. Attendee

The second annual Wings and Wildflowers Festival, set for Oct. 4-6, will give nature lovers and outdoor enthusiasts many opportunities to familiarize themselves with Lake County’s natural beauty and local wildlife. While the festival is being held at Hickory Point in Tavares, programs and specialty trips are being offered at some of the county’s most picturesque natural areas, including the Green Swamp, Dora Canal, Ocala National Forest, and the Scrub-Jay Trail.

Organized by the Lake County Office of Economic Development and Tourism, the event is a wonderful way to explore real Florida — the one without screaming theme parks, crowded beaches, and endless tourist traps.

“Last year, we had more than 3,000 people attend,” says Debi Dyer, program supervisor of the economic



can also meet Trouper the Raccoon, the famous animal from the adventure book *Trouper: The True Adventures of a Blind Raccoon*, the first in a series of wildlife storybooks detailing the life of this brave animal. Trouper is a survivor of animal cruelty.

Numerous activities will be offered for children, including face painting, a butterfly tent, and an appearance by Smokey the Bear. Kids can also attend various workshops and learn about native Florida wildlife, including bees, spiders, alligators, bears, turtles, and snakes.

“People who come to this event will fall in love with the real Florida,” says Yvonne Powers, coordinator assistant of the economic development and tourism department. “Putting on an event of this caliber definitely requires a county-wide effort, and we appreciate all the support and help of

those who have given their time and talents to assist in this.”

For a detailed listing of all activities, programs, workshops, and field trips, please visit www.wingsandwildflowers.com. You can also call the Lake County Office of Economic Development and Tourism at 352.742.3924.

