

## WILDLIFE OF VICTORIA PARK

By John Serrao

### LAKE ASHBY PARK

Judging from the positive comments I've been receiving, I guess many of you have been able to visit the natural areas that have been the subject of this column over the past month. My goal has been to highlight some of the lesser-known gems that remain open to visitation at this time and are within a half-hour's easy drive from Victoria Park. Last week's subject was the Buncombe Hill Nature Trail in Tiger Bay State Forest's Indian Lake Recreation Area, and the one before that was Lake Colby Park in Cassadaga. Here's another place that I'm sure you'll enjoy – Lake Ashby Park.

This Park is about 18 miles from Victoria Park in the New Smyrna-Samsula area. It features a ½-mile raised boardwalk over one end of beautiful Lake Ashby and almost 2 miles of trails through quiet, diverse woodlands. The boardwalk enters a magnificent cypress swamp with huge, ancient trees surrounded by their picturesque "knees". There are also interpretive posts on the boardwalk describing some of the other interesting plants.

At the end of the boardwalk, bear right and then turn right again onto a short trail through pines, oaks, palms, and sweet gum trees that ends in a small loop and returns along the same route. Then you can walk to the shore of the lake and search for osprey, bald eagle, anhinga, herons, egrets, and other birds. On a recent visit I watched 3 pileated woodpeckers chasing a red-shouldered hawk through the forests bordering the lake. You can also canoe or kayak on the lake.

To get to Lake Ashby take route 44 east toward New Smyrna. About 10 miles past the Fair Grounds, turn right (south) onto route 415 and drive about 4 miles to Lake Ashby Road on the left. Go about  $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile to Boy Scout Camp Road, turn left again, and go another  $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile to the Park's entrance on the right. Drive to the farthest part of the parking lot and just follow the signs to the Boardwalk and Lake.