

WILDLIFE OF VICTORIA PARK

by John Serrao

TIGER BAY

If you drive east from DeLand along International Speedway (route 92), you'll notice several large signs for Tiger Bay State Forest. This 27,400-acre forest has several entrances, each with dirt roads that people can explore by car, bicycle, or foot. The main northern entrance has the most improved roads and plenty of wetlands and small ponds that support frogs, turtles, dragonflies, and even an occasional alligator. The 2 southern entrances off route 92 have larger ponds for fishing, but the roads have more potholes and rough areas. All of them provides excellent opportunities to experience peace, solitude, quiet, and nature's beauty.

A fourth entrance to Tiger Bay State Forest can be reached by driving a few miles farther east on 92 and turning left at the first main intersection (Indian Lake Road). This leads to a beautiful 60-acre sinkhole lake covered with water lilies and surrounded by wilderness. There's a small covered pavilion with picnic tables and a short raised boardwalk leading out over the lake. And this area contains the 2-mile Buncombe Hill Nature Trail.

Marked with green blazes, this easy trail goes through scrub, pine forests, and other typical ecosystems of central Florida. There's even a Self-Guiding Trail brochure at the trailhead that describes the trees, shrubs, and smaller plants that grow along the trail. Bring binoculars if you decide to walk the trail and you may be rewarded with sightings of brown-headed nuthatch, red-headed, pileated, and red-bellied woodpeckers, pine warbler, red-shouldered hawk, wild turkey, and other birds. Gopher

tortoises and racerunner lizards also inhabit this area, and there's always the chance of catching a glimpse of a bobcat, black bear, or white-tailed deer.