

Juno Beach Ecology Group

Pelican Lake Tree Tour

Oh, the stories these trees could tell! A huge thank you to Juno Beach's resident Debra Levulis, professional horticulturalist, who shed light on these stories during our one-hour Pelican Lake Vegetation Identification Tour on Wednesday (June 21, 2023).

Trees have Pronouns

Debra Levulis kicked-off our tour by pointing out the native Pidgeon Plum tree just south of the north gazebo. Pelican Lake's Pigeon Plum tree is rather easy to spot due to the large epiphyte-staghorn fern hanging from its branches. Believe it or not, some trees are male or female including our Pidgeon Plum tree! Female Pidgeon Plums provide fruit and shelter which attracts birds and other tree dwelling animals that may be interested in indulging in some berries. Too bad our tree is male!

But there's no need to worry! Across the lake lives the native-female Dahoon Holly tree. The Dahoon Holly produces small red berries for the animals to eat. This true holly tree is far superior to its non-native invasive counterpart, the Florida Holly (a/k/a Brazilian Pepper), which is on Palm Beach County's list of banned trees that should be removed from any Florida landscape.



Royal Poinciana Tree – blossoms better if not irrigated

Poisonous Plants

On the west side of the lake lives the exotic Calophyllum Beauty Leaf tree. The Beauty Leaf tree originates from Brazil, where it was once ground and used to make rat poison and poison darts. The sap of the Beauty Leaf tree is fatal once it is introduced to the bloodstream.

The Strangler Fig is a parasitic plant; although this plant is not poisonous, it is equally threatening. It seeks out a host tree or other large plant to attach itself to, grow roots and steal its resources. To tame Pelican Lake's own strangler, town staff are instructed to trim the fig's aerial roots or roots that protrude down from the existing plant and into the soil rather than vice versa.

Adjacent to the Strangler Fig is the Cardboard Palm hedge shrub. The Cardboard Palm is an offender due to its poisonous seed pods. These seed pods are known to cause serious illness in dogs when they are ingested.

Next to the native planting area grows the Oleander plant. Despite the beauty of its rosy pink flowers, it takes only seven Oleander leaves to concoct a tea that could kill a man, and less for a woman.

When a Rose is not a Rose

Neighboring our Strangler Fig stands the incorrectly labeled Wax Jambu Tree. Although mis-labeled as the related Rose Apple Tree, the Wax Jambu tree is best known for its red waxy fruit that tastes like a crisp pear.

Tourist Trees

Across from our Wax Jambu Tree are two Gumbo Limbo Trees, which are best known for their peeling, or "sunburnt" appearance. These trees are a great addition to the landscape due to their sturdy nature when confronted by harsh winds and rain during hurricane season. Although our resident horticulturalist and tour guide Levulis advocates for more Gumbo-Limbo Trees around the lake, she warns that maintaining a variety of trees helps

protect against a monoculture of trees that could be susceptible to disease or insect infestation.



Debra Levulis Plant Identification Tour

Native Plant Pilot Planting Area

A more recent feature of Pelican Lake is the newly planted Native Pilot Plant Area, which features many native blooming plant varieties including; Blue Porter Weed, Blanket Flower and Beach Sunflowers. The Coontie plant, although not flowering this time of year, is host plant to the endangered Atala Butterfly, who as if on cue, made its appearance for our tour. If not for the existence of Coontie plants, in places like the FPL natural area, the Atala Butterflies would not have a place to lay their eggs and may have gone extinct. The newly planted Cypress Trees were celebrated at Arbor Day this year. They are deciduous and lose their leaves annually.

Palm Trees

Pelican Lake features a variety of palm trees, two of which are the majestic Bismarckia Palm. The coconut palm trees are not native to Florida and will prevent one from achieving the highest rating for a Florida Friendly yard designation from the County. We have a number of Sabal palms around the lake that is our State tree.

Blossoming Trees

A fan favorite during our identification tour was one of the few blossoming trees featured around Pelican Lake, the yellow Cassia Fistula tree also known as the Golden Shower tree. This tree is famous for its beautiful bright yellow flowers that welcome pollinators, butterflies, and other insects. Another



flowering tree featured in our tour was the Royal Poinciana tree, which is best known for its red blossoms. Levulis mentioned that Poinciana trees subjected to too much irrigation can prevent the tree from blooming.

Majority Shade Trees

There are several Madagascar Olive trees around Pelican Lake that provide shade. Although these trees are non-native, they are not considered invasive. However, these trees produce messy berries that are not attractive to wildlife and have proved to be a pain to clean up. The magnificent oak tree near the south gazebo provides more food for wildlife and is a preferred species to non-natives.

Return to Landscape Plan

Ideally, we encourage Florida native plants around Pelican Lake or other beneficial fruiting or blossoming species. It is suggested that we plant native trees next to nonnative trees. Once the newly planted native trees reach a certain level of maturity, the nonnative plants can be removed without sacrificing Pelican Lake's appearance or shade filled sidewalks. Discussion on the tour noted that Pelican Lake had an excellent master landscape development plan by George Gentile, which was then ignored following the 2004-2005 hurricanes. Due to the devastation of these serious hurricanes, the priority of the town became to find plants readily available to replace the ones destroyed in the hurricanes rather than obtaining plants that would benefit the ecosystem.

Maintenance We recommend manual removal of the algae in the lake, and ongoing maintenance removal of some of the cattails.

Thank you to our neighbor and horticulturalist extraordinaire, Debra Levulis, for sharing her wealth of knowledge with us.

No JBEG meetings in July – enjoy the summer.

Newsletter written by Staff Writer - Ruby Dunn.



Ecology Group Board members, Science Advisor and Community Advocate: Jim Ferguson, William Kimball, Marianne Hosta, Ross Wilcox, Diana Davis and Red Dunn.