

The nature of living in Florida

By Barry Densa correspondent

Nature is a wonderful thing to enjoy and be a part of. I watch it all the time on TV. This way when I need a potty break, a cold beer, a nap, a sports score, or I'm being berated by my wife for not doing something constructive, I can turn it off, change the channel or make it louder. Then, when I'm feeling ecologically or zoologically motivated again, and my wife has left the house, I can turn it back on.

But, if one chooses to actively participate in nature, there are of course many wonderful activities in which to engage. One can fish, camp, hike, horseback ride, become dinner for a lion or a squeeze toy for a 300-foot anaconda.

Florida Wildlife

In Florida we can do much of the above and then some, here in the great wide, hot and fetid open. We can proudly throw our kids into the Loxahatchee River to wrestle the alligators.

"By gum, that there's my son. Oops! Watch it, Timmy, y'all only got one leg left now, hee, hee."

Florida is unique in many other regards, too. As we all learned in history class, the air conditioner invented Florida. Before the air conditioner, there were only swamps and Crackers. Crackers, as we all know, were once extremely pervasive and popular. So the Ritz company decided to make itty biddy little crackers and put them in a red box.

Crackers were then placed on supermarket shelves all over the country.

But their popularity is now waning. The fault undoubtedly lies in their internal make-up (which consists mostly of carbs -- which is ranked just under jungle rot on the things-I-don't-want-to-experience-or-eat-again scale.)

Swamps on the other hand are experiencing a popular revival, which is directly proportional to their rate of disappearance. The more they disappear, the more popular they become. This type of inverse ratio applies to many other types of relationships found in nature. For example, the longer I'm away from home, the more my wife misses me and the happier she appears. When I'm home, the unhappier my wife appears, and the more she can't wait for me to leave.

Nonetheless, now that the summer months are upon us, here in the great hot-like-a-sauna state of Florida, one of the more enjoyable activities that we engage in -- which is indirectly related to nature -- is lowering the air conditioner thermostat.

True natural order

And this is another example of an inverse and symbiotic relationship. The lower the thermostat the cooler we become. The cooler we become the higher our FPL bill. The higher our FPL bill, the hotter we become. The hotter we become, the lower we adjust the thermostat, and so on and so forth.

Even so, the rest of the country still wants to move here.

Nonetheless, nature is cool. And cool is what we want to be. So we go to the beach where the sand is hot, the water warm and salty, where there's sea lice, sharks, jelly fish, broken glass, rip tides, pelicans pooping as they fly by, and crowds of hot, uncomfortable people sweating in the sun.

Or, we go to our inland rivers (read: deep-water swamps) where there are mosquitoes, alligators, piranhas, hippopotamuses, no water safe to drink, log cabins abandoned by long-dead trappers who right now couldn't care less if they're famous, and more sweating people who can't wait to get back home to raise their FPL bill!

But it's an instinctual thing, this lust for and admiration of nature. After all, life arose, most scientists say, from the primordial swamp and ooze. And to the swamp and ooze we apparently want to return -- some of us with grown-up toys.

For example, many take four-wheel-drive vehicles with tires the size of Ferris wheels at the South Florida Fair into the swamp to splash around in the mud. By doing this, they are re-enacting the cooling ritual of many river dwelling mammals. And we know this is cooling because, as they emerge from the mud, they exclaim, "Wow, Bubba, this is so cool!" So why should we doubt them?

Still others, with mid-sections the size of Ferris wheels, will steep themselves in Jacuzzis, the temperature of which can cook a four-minute egg, only so that upon stepping out they can appreciate the relatively cool air around them -- until they get hot again, at which point they step back into the Jacuzzi and get even hotter.

Of course, all of the above only proves that while nature can be enjoyed by many, it's more kind to some, and less kind to others. Enjoy your summer and your nature.