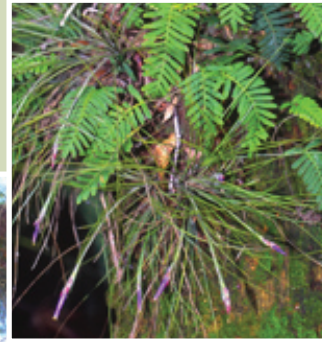


Most visitors enjoy hiking the Jelks Preserve during the cooler, less humid months (November – March), but hikers can enjoy the seasonal landscape differences, blooming wildflowers and changing birdlife at any time. Strolling along the 3.3-mile outer loop trail allows visitors to experience a mosaic of native habitats, beginning with scrubby flatwoods at trail marker #1 to oak hammocks at markers #2 and #4, and pine flatwoods at #6. Hikers may also encounter seasonal marshes and sloughs along the trail. While walking, take time to observe wildlife and the great variety of plants.



Prairie iris (left) typically flowers in March before the rainy season.



Commonly called “air plants”, epiphytes grow on other plants but are not true parasites. Pictured here are native epiphytes, the resurrection fern and the southern needleleaf (above) and the cardinal air plant (left).

Photos by Bruce Holst



The Myakka River is bordered by cabbage palm and oak hammocks along much of its banks at the Jelks Preserve.

Our thanks to the Natural Heritage Fund for Sarasota County for their assistance in providing amenities at this preserve.

For further information on how to help, contact Sarasota Conservation Foundation Natural Heritage Fund 941-918-2100.

Jelks Preserve, 2300 N. River Road, Venice, FL 34292



A ruby-throated hummingbird hovering near coralbean.
Photo by Fran Palmeri

Jelks Preserve

Open Daily
7:30 a.m.- 8:00 p.m.
(April - October)
7:30 a.m.- 6:00 p.m.
(November - March)


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Spring flowering Carolina jessamine winds around wax myrtle and saw palmetto in the pine flatwoods.



A self-guided tour

Trail marker #s indicate points of interest

#2 Take this trail or the one at **#4** and walk under the dense canopy of oaks dripping with epiphytes (plants that grow on, but are NOT parasitic to other plants). Notice the red blanket lichen on the tree trunks. Lichens, a symbiotic relationship between fungi and photosynthetic algae or bacteria, indicate good air quality. Look for the “lichen line” on tree trunks near the river. It represents the depth of the most recent floods. At the end of these trails, rest and enjoy the spectacular view of the “Wild and Scenic” Myakka River. You may see West Indian manatees, gliding swallow-tailed kites or basking American alligators.

#6 Compare the open habitat of the pine flatwoods with the closed canopy of the oak hammock. Notice the variety of grasses and wildflowers in this sunny area, compared to the uniform groundcover of saw palmetto under the oaks in the hammocks.

#8 Walk southeast of this marker and you may find yourself at the edge of a seasonal marsh. During or following the rainy season (June – October), wading birds may be gleaning plants and the mud for food. Blue-flowering iris and the fragrant white blossoms of Walter’s viburnum herald the onset of spring, while the flowering of the climbing aster beckons fall.

Just north of **#9** the trail bends along the edge of another seasonal wetland that supports various wildflowers during the rainy season, including the violet bay lobelia and yellow tickseed. Beware of the alligator hole in the southwest portion of this wetland!

#11 – 12 The large seasonal marsh north of this trail fills with water during the rainy season. This is also a great time to spot wading birds like great egret, tricolored heron and great blue heron stalking prey. With the lack of fire, this marsh may support natural woody vegetation, such as the buttonbush, that is valuable for wildlife.

#12 – 19 Enjoy the return walk through the various habitats. For further exploration, take some of the cross trails to discover other natural habitats and more wildlife.

