



**CALUSA** NATURE CENTER  
& PLANETARIUM  
CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH NATURE

## Pine Loop Trail Guide

**Use this guide at the numbered markers along the Pine Loop Trail to learn more about the nature of Southwest Florida.**

1. Slash pine is a fire-resistant species with a thick, multi-layered bark that protects inner layers of the tree from frequent fires. The needles and cones are stored high along the branches to further reduce the chance of fire completely killing the plant, and even if the needles are burned in a crown fire, the tree usually

recovers. The sap from these trees has been used for many things, including turpentine and paint thinner. The wood is also a popular building material and was used to construct many of the earliest homes in Southwest Florida. Wild turkey and gray and fox squirrels eat the seeds in the cones.



2. Have a seat and in relax in this shelter. Listen and watch carefully: the pine flatwoods are home to many creatures, including the endangered indigo snake, anoles, skinks and spiders. Look for the tiny crablike spiders, called spiny orb weavers (left photo), which have a disc-shaped yellowish white abdomen with black spots and red spines. Another beautiful spider is the golden silk orb-weaver (right photo), or banana spider. The female has a large abdomen that is yellow-orange and black. Their large webs are thick and strong. Females often share their webs with the much smaller, dark-colored males.

3. Southwest Florida has fantastic birding, especially during fall and spring. Both seasons give rise to a great bird migration in which hundreds of varieties of songbirds and raptors travel to and from the northern U.S. and Canada to the Caribbean Islands and South America. They rely on a variety of habitats for their food, water and rest. Birds you might see year-round at Calusa are northern cardinals, red-bellied woodpeckers, red-shouldered hawks and various warblers, sapsuckers and owls.

4. Lichen can be found all over the world. It is a symbiotic relationship between an algae and a fungus. The fungus grows on a solid surface and provides a home for the algae, and the algae provides food for the fungus. Lichen can take many different shapes but the most common are *fruticose* (branch-like), *foliose* (leaf-like), *crustose* (crusty), and *leprose* (powdery). There are over 20,000 species of lichen, and about 6% of Earth's land surface is covered by lichen! They can live for thousands of years, and can grow in deserts, in the arctic tundra, and inside of solid rock. Look for the red and green bulls-eye pattern of the crustose lichen *Cryptothecia rubrocincta*, the Christmas Wreath lichen, on the tree in behind the post.



*Clockwise from upper left:*

*female northern cardinal, male red-bellied woodpecker, male northern cardinal*

5. The most common oak trees in Southwest Florida include the live and laurel oaks. Live oaks have dark bark with deep furrows that looks like blocks of bark. In front of you is a laurel oak with its typical lighter and smoother bark. Unlike most northern oaks, the leaves of the live and laurel oaks are small and usually oval-shaped. Live oak leaves are whitish underneath and

laurel oak leaves are green on both the top and bottom. Live oaks may live 500+ years but laurel oaks rarely live more than 100 years due to a fungus that causes decay in the middle of the trunk at around 30-40 years of age. Both live and laurel oaks produce acorns that are eaten by birds, squirrels, deer and many other species.






**6.** Throughout our grounds you may see two very common native vines, the Virginia creeper and the muscadine grape. Virginia creeper (left photo) is a climbing vine with leaves made up of five leaflets that grows green and purple berries that are toxic to humans but important food for birds. Muscadine grape (right photo), also called wild or fox grape, is a climbing vine with round, toothed leaves and spiral tendrils that grow small clusters of grapes used in making juice, wines, and jelly. Both vines grow in dense clusters that provide shelter for birds and small mammals.

**7.** The best time for finding animal tracks is after a rain shower or in the early mornings when shadows help to define the small impressions. When observing tracks, look for clear imprints in which you can count the number of toes and see a pattern in a series of steps. Even with unclear tracks, you can often identify them by the placement of the front and back feet or the size of the print and the space between prints. Can you identify some of the animal tracks in the cement display?

**8.** A mushroom is the fruiting body of a fungus, which means that it makes and spreads the spores that will grow into more fungi. The fungus is usually inactive underground or in rotting organic material until it rains and then the mushrooms emerge. Some mushrooms can be eaten but many are extremely poisonous to humans, and it can be extremely difficult to identify which ones are safe to eat. Unlike plants, fungi do not use sunlight to make energy for themselves. Fungi play an important role in the ecosystem by breaking down dead and dying plant materials and releasing the nutrients back to the soil. Can you find any mushrooms at this stop?



## Pocket Guide to Florida Animal Tracks

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<p><b>Track pattern</b></p> <p>White-tailed deer 2½" to 3"</p> <p>Coyote F: 2¼" H: 2"</p> <p>Red fox F: 2¼" H: 2"</p> <p>Florida panther 1½" to 2½"</p> <p><b>Track pattern</b></p> <p>Otter 1½"</p> <p><b>Track pattern</b></p> <p>Rabbit F: 1" H: 3½"</p>	<p>Wild hog 2" to 2½"</p> <p>Dog F: 2" H: 2½"</p> <p>Gray fox F: 2" H: 2½"</p> <p>Bobcat 1¼"</p> <p>Mink 1"</p> <p>White-footed mouse ¼" T</p>	<p>Spotted skunk F: 2½" H: 4"</p> <p>Beaver F: 3" H: 6" T</p> <p>Nine-banded armadillo F: 1¼" H: 2" T</p> <p>Great blue heron 6" to 8"</p> <p>Lizard</p>	<p>Opossum F: 1½" H: 2" T</p> <p>Striped skunk F: 2½" H: 4"</p> <p>Black bear F: 4½" H: 7"</p> <p>Nutria F: 1½" H: 3" T</p> <p>Turkey 4"</p> <p>Crow 2½"</p> <p>Snake</p>
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**Tracks not to scale**

Tracks will show considerable variations depending upon the condition of the ground (clay, mud, dust, sand, etc.) and movement of the animal.

F: Front track  
H: Hind track  
T: Tail marks may be present

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**9.** The southern redcedar is a type of juniper with needles that look like overlapping scales. Its wood is long-lasting and has a strong scent that many people enjoy. Cedar Key (north of Tampa) was named for the abundance of redcedar that were harvested for pencil manufacturing in the late 1800's. The male trees have tiny cones that produce pollen. The female cedar produces blue cones resembling small berries that are eaten by birds, rabbits, foxes and other wildlife. Squirrels may strip the bark to line their nests.

