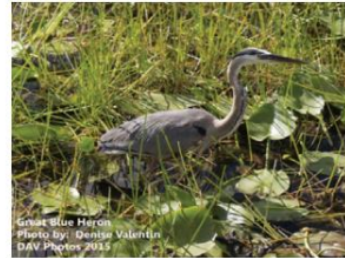


The Importance of Aquatic Plants for our Local Wildlife Habitats

Aquatic Plants

There are many native aquatic and wetland plants found in South Florida. Aquatic plants play an important role for wildlife habitats. Wildlife habitats include water, food, shelter and space, and our rivers, ponds, lakes, wetlands and Everglades are one of our most important wildlife habitats.

Aquatic plants are among the most productive ecosystems in the world. Thousands of species, ranging from birds to panthers and manatees depend on Florida's freshwater habitats. It is very important that we preserve the healthy habitats for native fish, wildlife and plants. The state's population is increasing daily and our freshwater habitats are in peril from over development. Also of concern are non-native plants that displace native plants, disrupt the waters natural process and degrades wildlife habitat.



Water

Water is important to everyone and everything on this planet. Aquatic plants reduce water pollution by sequestering carbon dioxide and fertilizers (nitrogen and phosphorus) which improves water quality. Aquatic plants also increase or decrease oxygen levels in the water based upon availability of light. Too many floating plants may block the sunlight from reaching submerged oxygen-producing plants below them.

Food

Food is also essential to all living animals and plants. Food can be plants, animals and/or nutrients in the soil. Aquatic plants convert nutrients in the water and soil into plant matter which then becomes food for both fish and plant eaters. Fish, insects, snails and other crustaceans thrive in aquatic plant beds, which provides food for birds and waterfowl. Many of the submerged plants produce seeds and tubers (roots) which are eaten by waterfowl. The carbohydrates and oxygen produced by plants are so important to wildlife, that without them, wildlife living near, on or in the water might die.

Shelter

Aquatic plants provide both shelter and cover for both wildlife and their food sources (fish, insects and other invertebrates that are eaten by local and migrating wildlife). Shelter is considered the wildlife's home or nest. It also includes "cover" which can be a group of plants, leaves, rocks, water or shade where wildlife can hide or move without being seen by other wildlife or predators. Birds in the wetlands need cover and shelter to raise their young. Cover also helps wildlife to hide from weather conditions. All living things need shelter.

Space

Animals and plants must have space in order to survive. If too many animals live, eat and drink water in the same space, those items can be used up and the animals may not survive. If plants overcrowd other plants, then they don't get the necessary light, water or nutrients they need. Overcrowding leads to competition for food which can then lead to malnutrition and the spread of disease and parasites.



The South Florida Aquatic Plant Management Society

The Hydrophyte

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