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VOL. 1, NO. 8 • DECEMBER 2022

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## Cypress Rudloe

Gulf Specimen

By CHARITY TUMBLESON  
Reporter

Cypress Rudloe was always in a boat growing up from the age of 6.

The son of Anne and Jack Rudloe, who founded the Gulf Specimen Marine Laboratory in Panacea, Rudloe got his first boat from his dad at the age of 14 which was an aluminum boat.

"Childhood was very interesting because it was more of a fishing community than what's left in Panacea now," Rudloe says, "Growing up that's kind of where my whole love of the water came from."

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PHOTO BY CHARITY TUMBLESON

Cypress Rudloe of Gulf Specimen in Panacea.

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The Sun Monthly is published monthly by The Wakulla Sun at 12 Arran Rd., Crawfordville FL 32327.  
 Periodicals postage paid at 12 Arran Rd., Crawfordville FL 32326-2017.

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from **sheriff Miller and the Wakulla County Sheriff's Office**



# What happens to abandoned pets



By JOANN SANDERS

Have you ever wondered about the protocol for leaving an animal at the shelter after business hours? Wakulla Animal Services has two small chain-link kennels located beneath a portico just outside the shelter gate. They are designed for dogs, and are to be used only in the event of an emergency occurring outside of normal business hours. You'll find a form to fill out giving the shelter important information about the pet, as well as a phone number you can call to alert the officer that a dog is there. When you follow these guidelines, it will help us to keep the dog safe until he's back home with his family.

Sadly, we can recount many instances in which animals have been surrendered to the shelter in the dead of night with none of the guidelines having been followed. Although not easy to read, these scenarios are a reality for your local animal shelter, and reflect the stories of just a few

of the pets abandoned outside the shelter gate with no information.

- A dog in active labor, her newborns falling onto the cold, hard dirt as they're being born. The pups are blind, helpless, and some of them are squirming away from the warmth of their mother. She has no way of retrieving them because the owner has tied her to a utility pole with a short leash, abandoning her there without telling anyone.

- A tiny deceased kitten, crawling with ants, who died of unknown causes because no one was there to hear her cries for help.

- Three cats were put into boxes and left outside the gate during Tropical Storm Nicole because their owner "needed to downsize." One of them was 15-years old and declawed.

- Aggressive dogs have been abandoned by owners who feel they've run out of options. This scenario poses a significant risk to staff members (essentially strangers) who are responsible for retrieving the animal from the kennel. If you have an aggressive dog that consistently poses a risk to people or other animals, please contact your veterinarian for assistance.

If you find a stray and it is not injured or aggressive, please try to keep it safe until the shelter reopens. The overnight kennels are for

emergency use only.

Cats should never be left in the overnight kennels because they can escape, making them vulnerable to roaming dogs, coyotes, or traffic. If you need to surrender a cat, it should be confined in a secure carrier or trap, and brought to the shelter during business hours.

A stray animal should always be taken to the shelter in the county in which it was found. An animal found in Wakulla County should be taken to Wakulla Animal Services, while an animal found in Leon County should be taken to Tallahassee Animal Services.

In the event you need to surrender a family pet to the shelter, please visit us personally during business hours. Information such as name, age, and personality will go a long way in helping us to find your fur baby a new home.

If you have an emergency outside of normal business hours, please call 850-445-6480 and follow the prompts.

Wakulla Animal Services is equipped and ready to assist when you need help with an animal-related issue. We believe that when we work together, we can make a difference in the lives of Wakulla County's homeless pet population. As always, thank you for your continued support of our small, hometown shelter!



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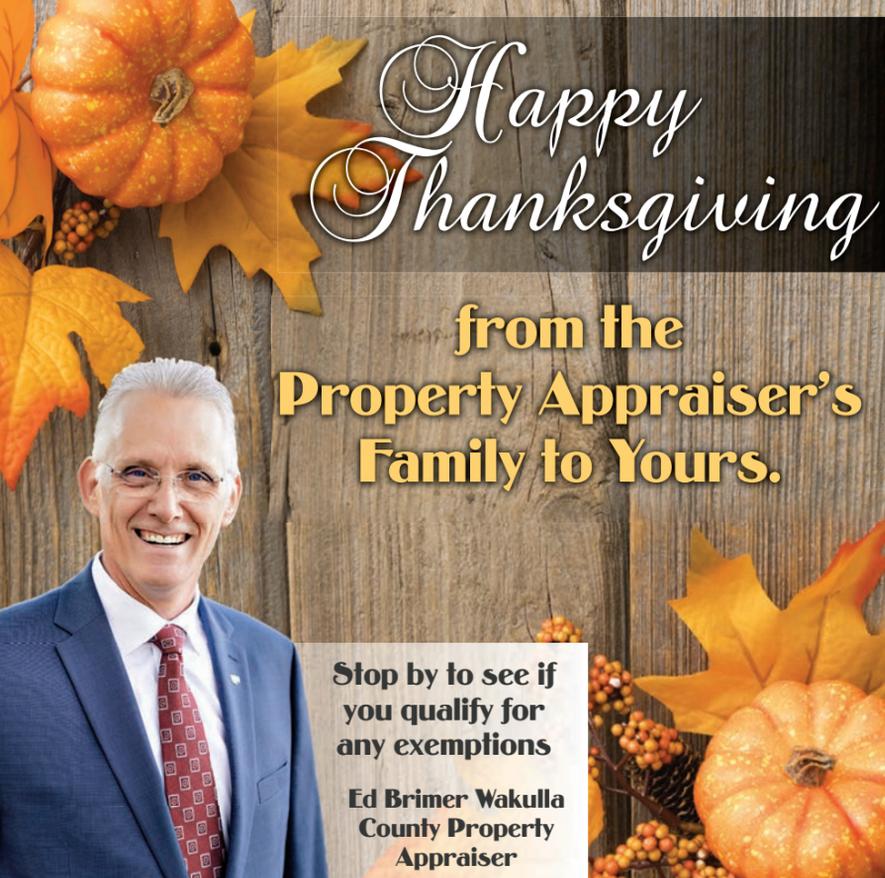




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LISA CRAZE AND STAFF

WAKULLA COUNTY TAX COLLECTOR'S OFFICE



Wakulla County Tax Collector

# Year-end charitable gifting and you



By **BRIAN ENGLISH**

Are you making charitable donations at year's end? If so, you should know about some of the financial "fine print" involved, as the right moves could potentially

bring more of a benefit to both you and your chosen charity.

Keep in mind, this article is for informational purposes only and is not a replacement for real-life advice. Make sure to consult your tax, legal, or accounting professionals before modifying your charitable gifting strategy.

Evaluate the Impact How can you maximize the impact of your gifts? First, consider giving to a qualified charity with 501(c)(3) nonprofit status. Also, visit CharityNavigator.org, CharityWatch.org, or GiveWell.

and learn about how effectively it utilizes donations. If you are considering a large donation, it is often wise to ask the charity involved how it will use your gift.

If you're still working, you may want to check with your employer. Some companies match charitable contributions made by their employees, an often-overlooked opportunity to give back.

your gift.<sup>1</sup>

Remember, itemized deductions may only have tax benefits when they exceed the standard income tax deduction, so be sure to check on the standard deduction amount for your tax filing year.

## SHOW YOUR APPRECIATION

Many charities welcome noncash donations. In fact, donating an appreciated asset can be a tax-savvy move. You may wish to explore a gift of highly appreciated securities. Selling securities can lead to taxable event. As an alternative, you or a financial professional can write a letter of instruction to a bank or brokerage, which can facilitate authorizing a transfer of shares to a charity.

This transfer can accomplish three things:

- You can manage paying the tax you would normally pay upon selling the shares.
- You may be able to take a current-year tax deduction for the full

fair market value of the shares.

- The charity gets the full value of the shares, not their after-tax net value. This can be a winning strategy all around.<sup>2</sup>

## A POLICY OF GIVING BACK

Do you have a life insurance policy? If you make an irrevocable gift of that policy to a qualified charity, you can get a current-year income tax deduction. If you keep paying the policy premiums, each payment may become a deductible charitable donation. (Deduction limits can apply.) If you pay premiums for at least three years after the gift, that could reduce the size of your taxable estate. The death benefit may be transferred out of your taxable estate, in any case.<sup>3</sup>

You should consider determining whether you are insurable before implementing a strategy involving life insurance. Any guarantees associated with a policy are dependent on the ability of the issuing insurance company to continue making claim payments.

Several factors will affect the cost and availability of life insurance, including age, health and the type and amount of insurance purchased. Life insurance policies have expenses, including mortality and other charges. If a policy is surrendered prematurely, the policyholder also may pay surrender charges and have income tax implications.

Whatever your situation, getting advice from a tax or financial professional can help you give wisely as the year comes to a close. We're here to help find a strategy that works for your situation.

1. IRS.gov, 2022
2. IRS.gov, 2022
3. Forbes.com, April 25, 2021

**Brian can be reached at (850) 926-7487.**

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# Cypress Rudloe

## From Front Page

One of the challenges for Rudloe growing up in the community pertained to bullying. This led him to take an interest in the martial arts at 14, which he continued with for 20 years.

“It was a huge turning point. It helped save my life because I was kind of a troubled teen,” he says. “It’s been turning into almost like a family tradition over the years,”

Rudloe’s brother Sky started up the Train. Fight. Win. gym in Tallahassee, which specializes in mixed martial arts.

In his early life, Rudloe worked at Posey’s in St Marks.

“It was like something out of a Jimmy Buffet song, it was really authentic,” he says. At one point in his life, he wanted to open up his own bar/restaurant.

But after working in that scene for years, Rudloe had a change of heart. When Posey’s got wiped out by Hurricane Dennis, Rudloe was already working part-time at the Marine Lab to help his mom out with the packing.

Around 2008 his mom Anne Rudloe got diagnosed with cancer. “That’s when I stepped up between me and my dad running the place because my mom was completely hands-off at that point,” he says.

At the time the Marine Lab had a leaky roof with no funds to cover it so Rudloe decided to throw a fundraiser called Sharks and Chablis. “The first year we had the place packed – there were a thousand people here. That’s kind of when I gave up on my old

lifestyle and it was a turning point for me,” he says.

Now Sharks and Chablis is an annual fundraiser for the aquarium held in the spring, and usually brings in 300 to 400 people each year, and is the aquarium’s largest fundraiser.

Rudloe then started attending events and festivals setting up booths promoting the Marine Lab. One day he got a call from a family promoting the Thomasville Wildlife Art Show.

“It was a whole different world,” he says, “I remember seeing a jaguar walk by and it runs on stage and there’s my dad talking to Jim Fowler.” (Fowler was a zoologist who hosted the documentary TV show “Mutal of Omaha’s Wild Kingdom.”)

Through the art

show, Rudloe was able to build the Sea Mobile, a mobile aquarium that traveled through South Georgia and North Florida to schools to teach children about marine sea life and environmental ecosystems, which Rudloe ran for six years.

As time went on and his dad got older, Rudloe ended up falling more and more into the role of director at the Marine Lab. Rudloe finds himself having less time to get on the boat and collect marine life.

“That’s the best part of the job, honestly. Even now I love it I still go out scuba diving,” he says. “And it’s not just hanging out on boats – the other side of the science is amazing here.”

The Marine Lab on the biological supply

side of the business supplies students with marine life to study.

“Literally hundreds of students are getting our sea urchins to learn about cellular mitosis,” he says.

Currently one of the many projects Rudloe is working on with a man named Brian Lapointe, a research professor who is a leading expert on algae.

“We’re going to build a giant algal tumbler system to treat all our water, and it’s all through an innovative technologies grant,” he says. “This place sets your goals it’s a challenge and if you work anywhere it needs to be a challenge.”

On top of that, the Marine Lab has gained an AmeriCorps grant. This program is a national service program that gives the opportunity to individuals to work for non-profit or-

ganizations in turn for on-the-job experience, a living stipend, and an educational award upon a year’s completion.

“We’re trying to get 10 positions filled right now,” he says. “That’s a whole other one that could really change how we operate here and could be a huge benefit.”

One of the many other things the Marine Lab has to offer that Rudloe helped create with his college friend Tom Harrah is the intern program the Lab offers for college students.

“We started an intern program through FSU and that’s been a very rewarding part of this job,” he says, “I meet some really interesting people. I’ve gotten to see a lot of young professionals come through the doors in the biology world and get their start

here – and they far surpass it.”

Another of Rudloe’s goals is to keep the doors open, “which has been the goal for 20 years,” he says, “but it’s coming along.”

The other worry he has is the Lab adapting to the future, rising sea levels, and hurricanes.

“All that good stuff which has been a challenge so far but we usually figure out a way,” he says.

Even though Rudloe has many goals for the future of the Marine Lab at the end of the day he says his main goal for Rudloe “is seeing that little kid’s face lighting up and seeing a starfish or shark feeding for the first time ever, that’s important.”

“To be able to put an imprint on somebody that lasts their entire life means there’s something valuable here,” he says.

The Sun Monthly is a free paper delivered to every address in Wakulla County. We also publish The Wakulla Sun, the locally owned weekly newspaper. Copies of the newspaper are available at boxes around the county for \$1. Subscriptions are \$35 per year (see form on Page 15).

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# Misconceptions about aging



By GREG GAST

Healthy aging is a hot topic. Whether you're concerned about weight gain, sex drive or chronic diseases the key to healthy aging is a healthy lifestyle. Eating a variety of nutritious foods, practicing portion control and including physical activity in your daily routine can go a long way toward promoting healthy

aging.

Many people make assumptions about aging. What is it like to grow old? How will old age affect me? It will help to understand the positive aspects of aging.

**Here are five common misconceptions about aging:**

**1. Depression and loneliness are normal in older adults.** Some may find themselves feeling isolated and alone. However, these feelings are not a normal part of aging as growing older can have many emotional benefits. Studies have actually shown that older adults are less likely to experience depression than younger adults. Long-lasting relationships with

friends and family and a lifetime of memories to share with loved ones is the usual case.

**2. Older adults need less sleep.** A common misconception is that a person's sleep needs decline with age. Older adults need the same amount of sleep as all adults—7 to 9 hours each night. Getting enough sleep keeps you healthy and alert. It can also help reduce the risks of falls, improve your overall mental well-being, and many more benefits.

**3. Older adults can't learn new things.** Older adults still have the ability to learn new things, create new memories and improve their performance in

a variety of skills. Aging often comes with changes in thinking, but many are positive such as having more knowledge and insight from a lifetime of experiences.

**4. It is inevitable that older people will get dementia.** Not true. The risk of dementia grows as people get older, but it is not inevitable. Many people live into their 90's and beyond without significant declines in thinking or behaviors that characterize dementia.

**5. Older adults should take it easy and avoid exercise so they don't get injured.** Studies have shown that there is a lot more to be gained by being active and a lot to lose by sitting

too much. Inactivity is more to blame than age when older people lose the ability to do things on their own. Exercise is not only great for your mental and physical health, but it can help keep you independent as you age.

Wisdom, resilience, and a well-rounded and mature perspective on life are often credited as the hard-earned rewards of aging. Growing old in itself is an accomplishment not everyone is able to achieve. Looking and feeling good past the age of sixty requires the combination of all the above.

Those who can anticipate life changes and adopt a "Yes, I know this is com-

ing and I know I can manage it" attitude tend to have a more positive and healthier mindset, experience fewer signs of depression, and continue to embrace and enjoy their golden years. Ultimately, attitude is the primary secret to aging gracefully.

Let me know what you think...

Send your questions to Real Life Counseling, 3295 Crawfordville Hwy., suite #4, Crawfordville FL 32327 in care of Gregory E. Gast, MS, LMHC, NCC. Your name will be changed and the answer to your question will appear in an upcoming issue of The Wakulla Sun.

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**FROM THE CLERK OF COURTS**

# Who audits the auditor?



By **GREG JAMES**

Hello from the Clerk's Office!

Happy Holidays and Merry Christmas!

Article VIII 1(d) enshrines an important responsibility upon the Clerk's Office... "the clerk of the circuit court shall be ex officio clerk of the board of county commissioners, auditor, (emphasis mine) recorder and custodian of all county funds." A number of statutes such as Chapter 28.12 and 125.17 also speak to the important role of the Clerk as the accountant and auditor for the Board of County Commissioners.

Over the last 22 years, the Clerk's Office has conducted a number of important financial reviews, audits and investigations. Some of those identified fraud, waste or abuse of taxpayer dollars and some of those audits were focused on improvements to processes, procedures and internal controls.

On February 19, 2019, the Board of County Commissioners approved the County's first Fraud, Waste and Abuse policy. The Clerk's Office also created an anonymous hotline for reporting any fraud, waste or abuse. The hotline number is 850-926-0356. If you are aware of any, please report it so we or the appropriate agency can investigate it.

Earlier this year, on March 1, I signed the charter for the County's first formal Internal Audit Department. The Internal Audit Department has the full support of the Board of County Commissioners who allocate a budget for this department for the first time in FY2022-2023. We are also in the process of creating a webpage dedicated to the Internal Audit Department

where we will post our audit reports for the public to see.

All of this might lead someone to ask, well, who audits the Clerk's Office? Does the Clerk's Office need to be audited? Certainly! The Clerk's Office is responsible for a number of tasks ranging from financial matters to court matters to official records, among others. The organizational complexity and wide-ranging responsibilities of the Clerk's Office requires that we have oversight too. Because of this I would suggest that we are probably one of the most audited agencies in the county.

Our accounting and auditing practices and procedures are subject to the rules and regulations of the State's Auditor General (Chapter 10.550), the United States Government Accountability Office's Government Auditing Standards, the Governmental Accounting Standards Board's (GASB) rules and regulations, and the Institute of Internal Auditors' International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing. Our court practices and procedures are subject to the Office of State Courts Administration's Rules of Judicial Administration. Our official record practices and procedures are subject to the Florida Statutes. Everything we do is governed by some standard or best practice that must be followed. And there are entities that are watching to determine if we are or not.

There are many agencies that audit the Clerk's Office. Some of these audits occur annually, some every few years or as needed. Here is a list of agencies that audit the Clerk's Office:

1. Auditor General of the State of Florida (AG) – multiple audits of various programs and reports
2. Board of County Commissioner's (BOCC) – an independent external auditor audits the financial records of the BOCC and each constitutional officer.
3. Department of Children and Families

(DCF) – child support services activities

4. Department of Financial Services (DFS) – court-related child support grant expenditures

5. Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles (DHSMV) – security of data internal controls

6. Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) – court-related IT security

7. Department of Revenue (DOR) – child support indirect cost audits

8. Florida Clerk of Courts Operations Corporation (CCOC) – annual court-related budget review and performance reports

9. Internal Audit Department – the County's IA may audit any Clerk financial, performance or management activity

10. Office of Program, Policy, Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) – court-related revenue collection and case performance audits

11. Office of State Courts Administrator (OSCA) – court-related state reporting system (SRS) audits

12. Various state and federal agencies – audits of grant funds as needed

As the auditor for Wakulla County, I appreciate and value the importance of "being audited". Every organization that is audited can gain value and learn from each audit by receiving feedback and suggestions on ways to improve their business practices and activities, financial or otherwise. Audits are not intended to be "gotcha" moments. They are intended to either ensure things are being done right or to find ways to improve. Our goal is to continue to improve and become the premier model of exceptional government. If you know of ways we can improve in fulfilling our responsibilities and providing excellent customer service, please let me know.

*Greg James is Wakulla County Clerk of Court.*

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# Caring for caregivers



By **SAMANTHA KENNEDY**  
Extension Director

According to the Family Caregiver Alliance, an estimated 44 million Americans aged 18 and older provide unpaid assistance and support to older people and adults with disabilities who live within their community. The value of this unpaid labor force is estimated to be at least \$306 billion annually, nearly double the costs of home health care (\$43 billion) and nursing home care (\$115 billion) combined. My mom recently experienced a mental health crisis and my dad called me for help. He was overwhelmed and uncertain what to do and needed an extra

pair of hands to help deal with the frightening situation. My parents live at the opposite end of the state, so it was nearly a full day before I was able to rearrange my schedule and make it down there.

When I got there, I found my mom was calm, but as she started talking, I instantly understood the severity of the situation. She was having delusions, seeing people that were not there, recounting things in vivid detail that could not possibly have happened.

I was scared. I was confused. I had never seen this type of behavior before in my mom and I really had absolutely no idea what to do. Here I was, dealing with someone who looked like my mom but was acting like a completely different person. Do I call 911? What do I do?

The next day, she was very agitated again, and not in touch with reality. My dad called a crisis hotline and the very helpful woman on the phone told us we should take Mom to



Caregivers do their best to provide care to others, often at their own expense. Providing support and care to caregivers can help them better help those they care for.

the emergency room. After a CT scan, bloodwork, and a urinalysis, my mom was diagnosed with a urinary tract infection, which, I learned, can cause this type of behavior, especially in older adults.

After a few days of antibiotics, my mom showed improvement. She was no longer agitated and most of the delusions had gone. She seemed stable enough that after a week, I returned home. I am

happy to report that my mom is continuing to show improvement and the immediate crisis has passed. However, this experience has opened my eyes to the reality of just how fast things can change.

So many of us will become, either by choice or necessity, caregivers to others. And the shift may happen in the blink of an eye. We may not be prepared for it. I know I was not. My dad and I are still navigating

the waters of this new reality. While my mom's immediate crisis is over, she will need follow-up and ongoing care, as she is also dealing with memory issues.

Being a caregiver is an important responsibility. We want to do what is best for the person for whom we are caring. But doing so often means we ignore our own needs. We put off important tasks or forego necessary time to relax and regroup. And

by doing so, we deplete our reserves. The more depleted our reserves become, the less effective we are as a caregiver.

By the time I left my parents' house, both my dad and I were exhausted: from worry, from uncertainty, from trying to figure out the best course of action moving forward. We created a tentative gameplan for the next few weeks, including things that my dad can do to better take care of himself as he goes about handling my mom's daily care.

Caregivers give care to others. But who gives care to the caregivers? It is important for all of us to take the time to care for ourselves, but if you know someone who is a caregiver to someone else, consider taking the time to extend a little care to them as well.

For more information about caregiving and mental health resources, please contact Samantha Kennedy, Family and Consumer Sciences agent, at (850) 926-3931.

PHOTO BY TYLER JONES, UF/IFAS

## On the Horizon The monthly calendar of events

### Thursday, November 24

- **HAPPY THANKSGIVING!**

### Saturday, November 26

- Intro to Tai Chi held at the Wakulla County Community Center from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. All ability levels are welcome and wear comfortable clothing. Any questions can be directed to Rich or Terri Bushman at 850-228-9214. This is held every Wednesday and Saturday.

### Monday, November 28

- The Wakulla Respite Program will be available for anyone with memory impairment at no cost from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Lake Ellen Baptist Church every Monday.
- Sopchoppy Lions Club meets the 4th Monday of each month at 6:30 p.m. at the Historic Sopchoppy High School.

### Tuesday, November 29

- Sopchoppy Community Dinner is held every week at the Towles House at 6:30 p.m. on Tuesdays.

### Wednesday, November 30

- A Line Dance class will be held at 1 p.m. at the Wakulla Senior Center, held every Wednesday.

### Thursday, December 1

- The VFW Auxiliary Bingo Night will be held at 7 p.m. at 475 Arran Road in Crawfordville. There will be concessions and raffles. This is held every Thursday.
- The Rotary Club of Wakulla County

will have their weekly meeting at the TCC Wakulla Center at 8:30 a.m. held every Thursday.

- The Wakulla County Tourist Development Council public meeting will be held at the Wakulla County Community Center at 9 a.m.

### Friday, December 2

- Christmas in the Park, sponsored by the Wakulla County Sheriff's Office, will be held at the community center from 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Santa arrives at 6 p.m. Hay rides, photos, bounce house, and family fun. Food will be provided by the WCSO.

### Saturday, December 3

- Panacea Farmers Market held in Downtown Panacea next to the Panacea fire station from 9 a.m. to noon. Local vendors will be selling homemade and homegrown items and food vendors will be there.
- 18th Annual Christmas in Panacea from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. next to the Plaza in Panacea. Visit with Santa from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. Parade of lights on Coastal Hwy at 6 p.m. There will be games, bouncy house, face painting, free refreshments, corn hole tournament, and a classic car show with monster trucks.
- Wakulla County Historical Society Annual Christmas Open House from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. at 24 High Drive in Crawfordville. Tickets are \$2 each for a chance to win a handmade, ceramic tree, drawing is held on December 3rd.
- Market Days at the North Florida Fairground 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Over 300 artists from across the country gathered

to showcase their handmade, one-of-a-kind creations.

### Sunday, December 4

- Market Days continues at the North Florida Fairgrounds from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

### Monday, December 5

- The Wakulla Caregiver Support Group will meet at Lake Ellen Baptist Church at 12:30 p.m.
- The Planning Commission meets in the commission chambers at 6 p.m.

### Thursday, December 8

- The Sopchoppy Depot Committee meets at the Depot, 34 Railroad Avenue at 4:30 p.m.
- The St. Marks City Commission meets at St. Marks City Hall at 6 p.m.

### Saturday, December 10

- The Sopchoppy Community Market held at Sopchoppy Depot Park from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Local vendors will be selling homemade and handcrafted items and food vendors will be there.
- St. Marks 16th Annual Golf Cart Christmas Parade. Line up at Bo Lynn's Grocery at 6:30 p.m., parade starts at 7 p.m.

### Monday, December 12

- The Alzheimers Support Group will meet at Lake Ellen Baptist Church from 9:30 a.m. To 10:30 a.m.
- The Sopchoppy City Commission

meets at Sopchoppy City Hall at 6:30 p.m.

- County commissioners meet in the commission chambers at 5 p.m.

### Wednesday, December 14

- The Wakulla County Garden Club meets at the Wakulla County Public Library hosting presentations and workshops about gardening in Wakulla soil at 12 noon.

### Thursday, December 15

- The Wakulla County Cancer Support Group meets in the Education Center of the Crawfordville United Methodist Church at 7 p.m. This group meeting is for men and women, regardless of the type of cancer. Spouses, caregivers, and friends are welcome. For more information, call 850-926-6050.

### Monday, December 19

- The American Legion Post 114 will be meeting at the Wakulla County public library at 6:30 p.m.

### Sunday, December 25

- **MERRY CHRISTMAS!**

### Saturday, December 31

- **New Year's Eve**

### Sunday, January 1

- **HAPPY NEW YEAR!**

# Cuban tree frogs – report this invasive pest



By **ERIK LOVSTRAND**

Be on the alert! An alien predator more than twice your size has invaded the neighborhood where you live. It is not fussy about what it eats and YOU are definitely on the menu. The creature has exceptionally good night-vision and hunts after dark, preferring to hide during the day. Everywhere this thing has established a breeding population, your kind has virtually disappeared. This is the real-life situation for many of our native treefrogs wherever the invasive Cuban treefrog gains a foothold.

According to Dr. Steve Johnson, a herpetologist with UF's Department of Wildlife Ecology

and Conservation, Cuban treefrogs probably arrived in Florida in the 1920s in Key West. They most likely came as hitchhikers in cargo from the Caribbean, where they are native. At present, they are well established throughout South and Central Florida up to a diagonal line that runs from Cedar Key to Jacksonville. There have also been individuals reported from several Panhandle locations and we could potentially have some established breeding pockets.

**The Problem:** The last time I visited my daughter in Orlando, I took a short evening stroll near her house. It was a warm, summer evening and frogs were calling everywhere. Sadly though, the only species I heard was the Cuban treefrog. In many areas where they have become well established, native species of treefrogs have declined dramatically. When you think about it, most frogs are generalists in their diet and they will grab pretty much any-



PHOTO BY MICHELLE HUBER

**Extra-large toe pads and overall size as adults helps identify the Cuban treefrog.**

thing that moves and will fit in their mouth. With a mouth that can be over an inch and a half wide, almost all of our native treefrogs are potential prey if they happen to be bug hunting at the same porch light as a much larger Cuban treefrog. Dr. Johnson notes that they have been documented to consume at least five different species of native frogs. On the plus side, several of our native snakes and a

few birds have also been documented to consume Cuban treefrogs. There are several other nuisance aspects related to Cuban treefrogs but the impact they have on our native fauna makes them a problem that requires some management action.

**What you Can Do:** If you suspect that you have one it would be important to get a photo for identification purposes and send it to Dr. John-

son at [tadpole@ufl.edu](mailto:tadpole@ufl.edu) for verification. If you are sure that you have one, the proper thing to do would be to humanely euthanize it with a two-step process described by Dr. Johnson: First, you use a plastic bag over your hand to catch the frog (this prevents you getting their noxious slime on your hands). Then liberally spray it on the belly or back with a first-aid spray containing 20% benzocaine.

The frog will absorb this through its skin and be unconscious in about one minute. After this, place the frog inside the bag in your freezer for 24 hours to be sure that it will not wake up. Remember though, always err on the side of caution if you are not 100% sure about a frog's identity, do not euthanize it.

The spread of Cuban treefrogs is directly related to human activities. They are able to hitchhike in potted plants, on cars and boats and many other common objects that people take with them when they travel. I have not seen one in Wakulla County yet personally but I would not doubt that they are here. I have found four in Apalachicola recently. Please report any sightings (photo required for positive ID) to Dr. Johnson in Gainesville so he can map their spread.

*Erik Lovstrand is a UF/IFAS regional Sea Grant agent in Wakulla, Franklin and Gulf counties.*

## Protect yourself during the holiday season



By **JARED MILLER**  
Wakulla Sheriff

As the holidays approach I would like to take the time to discuss with Wakulla County's citizens steps they can take to help safeguard

themselves from potential thieves during this season. This time of year typically sees a spike in thefts and burglaries. It's important to know that most thefts and burglaries committed in Wakulla County are crimes of opportunity and there are some basic steps you can take to help protect yourself.

A former detective with Wakulla County Sheriff's Office once told me he could count on one hand the number of vehicle burglaries he had worked in which the suspect had forced their

way into a car. That is to say the victim locked their car, and the suspect either broke a window or picked a lock. Would-be car burglars usually enter into an area and move from car to car pulling on doors. When they find an unlocked door, the criminal enters into the car and sees what they might steal. The first two tips I can give you to help protect yourself from would be thieves is to lock your car doors and do not leave valuables (especially personal information or firearms) inside of your vehicle unattended. If you do these two things you can protect yourself from most criminals.

Next, if you plan on

being out of town for the holidays, take some simple steps such as placing a hold on your mail so it does not pile up in your mail box. And don't advertise the specific times you will be gone on social media. Most residential thefts and burglaries occur purposely when the homeowners are not around, and limiting signs you are not home will help keep your home and property more secure.

If you can afford to purchase security cameras, an alarm system, or motion sensor lights, I strongly encourage you to do so as it creates a great deterrent for anyone who would look to steal from you.

Lastly, for those in the community who celebrate Christmas or other gift-giving celebrations during this time, close your blinds or curtains so thieves cannot look inside and see any valuables you may have.

- Have a box or secure location for packages to be delivered so they are not simply left visible at a mailbox or on a porch.

- Do not put out boxes or packaging to new items until the day of trash pickup, so you don't advertise to everyone items now within your home.

- Just like your car, always remember to lock your home, at night and when you are not home. Because of opportuni-

ty. Do the best you can to make yourself a hard target to would be criminals and you'll be able to largely prevent yourself from becoming a victim. If you lock your house and car doors, don't leave valuables in plain sight or in your vehicle, and don't advertise when you will be out of town, you will drastically reduce your chances of being targeted.

I also want to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays, and to let you know that I am continually grateful for the opportunity to serve and work for this great county.

Your Sheriff,  
Jared F. Miller

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## Al Hartman, aka The Old Pro



By AL HARTMAN

There is a lot going on. Duck season is coming in for a short stint this month, Nov. 19 to 27. It then comes in again in Dec. 10 and runs until Jan. 29. Greater Amberjack has been closed in all Gulf waters until September. Deer hunting is opening in zone C Nov. 5 and running to Jan. 22. Go to [MyFWC.com](http://MyFWC.com) for more information.

With this warm weather please be on the look out for venomous snakes. They are really moving around. We were at the St. Marks public boat ramp last week

and caught a photo of a picture perfect Water Moccasin. She was very docile and showed no fear of us as I took some pictures.

She looked quite healthy. She had been eating well.

I wrote some time back about feral cats. There are now 1.5 billion feral cats in the U.S. A feral cat is a house cat that has run away or been displaced. I mean displaced could be by accident or by someone just discarding it in the wild. Please do not do this. If it becomes a bother, take it to a shelter. Cats, even the ones you have at home as pets, have a natural instinct to hunt. They will kill birds, rodents and baby rabbits for sport. They most times do not eat their kill, they most likely will set it on your door step or drag it

into the house to show off. But feral cats kill and eat their pray and it is becoming a problem. It is estimated that feral cats are responsible for the death of 25% of the wild birds in the U. S. yearly. Plus many small animals that we do not have a percent of.

I have two feral male cats that I've been feeding for over a year hoping to help keep the bird kill down here. It might be helping, but my squirrel population has dwindled. So it makes me think if I am really helping

out. Maybe. I still see a lot of birds here, but I don't know for sure! I would think if these feral cats were caught, could you domesticate them? Most likely not! It's to late for them most times and the answer is they need to be eliminated. Sorry, but it is our careless

thinking that caused it! So if you have a cat that is not wanted, give to someone that is willing to try.

We have so many creatures loose in Florida that do not belong here and have been dumped by people in the wild. We have lizards, snakes and mammals growing large populations in our woods and swamps. We are even finding cobras in our southern regions. Some were released by hurricanes and some by people just not thinking! A Boa caught in the Everglades recently measured 18 feet! A snake that size could kill small deer and alligators. And even worse children. Think first!

Happy Hunting and Fishing. Take a youngster. It will keep us hunting in the future!

# Merry Christmas Wakulla

Jesus is the Reason for  
the Season!

Wishing you a  
Joyous Holiday  
Season

“IT ALL STARTS WITH A CONVERSATION”



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