

Turtle Way:

Blowing Rocks Preserve promises a sanctuary for sea turtles

★ WERE IT NOT FOR THE WAVES CRASHING AND THE saltwater spraying up through the rocks in dramatic bursts, it would be completely silent on the beach at Blowing Rocks Preserve. Indeed, the place is tremendously tranquil and inviting in that I've-got-the-whole-beach-to-myself kind of way. No wonder the sea turtles dig it. This pristine sanctuary of seventy-three acres saved by local residents and donated to the Nature Conservancy in 1969 is located on Jupiter Island between the Atlantic Ocean and the Indian River Lagoon, about thirty miles directly north of West Palm Beach. The preserve is equal parts jungle and shore: A winding, tropical, hammock-covered

beach path is buttressed with all manner of mangrove wetlands species leading down to the dunes that roll along next to the distinctive Anastasia limestone rocks. Every summer, some fifteen thousand female sea turtles — loggerheads, leath-erbacks, hawksbills, and green turtles — emerge from the ocean along Florida's east coast to nest and lay their eggs in the sand. With no development and, most important, none of the nighttime lights that nesting turtles detest, Blowing Rocks is a perfect spot for these gals to come ashore, dig a body pit, and lay approximately one hundred eggs the size of Ping-Pong balls before covering the nest and heading back out to sea. After sixty days, Mom is long gone and the baby turtles hatch. If they

are lucky, it's high tide and the first things they see are saltwater plumes shooting up nearly fifty feet skyward through the blow-holes in the rocks.

There are other beautiful beaches along Florida's Gold Coast — the private stretches along Palm Beach's Billionaire's Row and the public sands of Juno Beach and Lake Worth — but none offer such a combination of explosive nature and priceless serenity.

★ For more information visit natureorg/wherework/northamerica/states/florida or call 561-744-6668. Blowing Rocks Preserve is open to the

public from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. daily, except major holidays. Beach access fee: \$2 per person, \$1 for Nature Conservancy members.

By **M.B. ROBERTS**

A Call For Ducks

★ Most winter mornings, Newton Cook, president of United Waterfowlers – Florida, Inc., heads for a marsh near his home in Tequesta, Florida. “It’s so beautiful, watching daylight come and seeing the marsh come awake,” says Cook. “When ducks travel thousands of miles from Northern states and land near your decoys, it’s incredible.”

But during the off-season, Cook stashes his shotgun and frequents less serene settings — government offices, hotel conference rooms — for a myriad of meetings on issues that affect the two hundred thousand-plus duck hunters he represents in the quest to protect and improve the quality of duck hunting. Often, debates about water quality and access to public land get his heart pumping as fast as a sudden flutter of Northern teals.

“There are conflicts,” says Cook, “a lot of pushing and pulling with the constant influx of people in Florida and the development of places that were once natural areas. But we have to preserve the habitats or there will be no more hunting.”

So, Cook perseveres, often finding common ground even with non-hunters. “The vast majority of everybody involved in these issues cares for the environment,” he says. “I haven’t found anyone yet who wants an unhealthy Lake Okeechobee or an unhealthy Everglades.”

For more information, visit unitedwaterfowlersfl.org or call 561-743-9217.



PHOTOGRAPH BY RON MODRA