



## Did You Know?

# Tarpon Club ... *Coming Soon*

WILDFLOWER  
PRESERVE

*Made possible by*

LEMON BAY  
ESTABLISHED 1971  
CONSERVANCY

*'Protecting Charlotte Harbor and Lemon Bay'*

Fossil research shows that tarpon have been swimming in our oceans since prehistoric times.

Tarpon can reach sizes up to 8 feet and can weigh up to 280 pounds.

The life span of a tarpon can be in excess of 50 years. The oldest tarpon in captivity lived to be 63 years old.

Due to its majestic appearance of size and color, the tarpon is nicknamed "silver king."

Tarpon are primarily found in shallow coastal waters and estuaries, but they are also found in open marine waters, around coral reefs, and in some freshwater lakes and rivers.

Tarpon range from Virginia to central Brazil in the western Atlantic, along the coast of Africa in the eastern Atlantic, and all through the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean Sea.

Because of its strength, stamina, and fighting ability, the tarpon is one of Florida's premier game fish.

Tarpon have a special ability to gulp air at the surface when they are in a habitat that doesn't provide enough oxygen.

In their larval stage, tarpon are transparent, have a ribbon-like body and prominent fanglike teeth, and are less than an inch long.

Tarpon can only be fished recreationally in Florida. The majority of recreational anglers practice catch and release since the fish is not considered to be of any food value. However, anglers can possess them for trophy purposes at the cost of \$50.00 per tag, per fish. Without this tag, possession is illegal.



Picture provided by Dr. Bill Dunson  
Juvenile Tarpon at Wildflower Preserve

For more information please call Lemon Bay Conservancy at 941-830-8922 or visit their website <http://www.lemonbayconservancy.org/>.

On September 8, 2011, Lemon Bay Conservancy, our community's only local 501(c)(3) area coastal lands and waters protection trust, purchased the former Wildflower Golf Course, having raised \$800,000 in one year's time. LBC members and friends from Charlotte County, Manasota Key and Boca Grande, along with fisherman, environmentalists and concerned citizens accomplished this incredible purchase and transitioned the Wildflower Preserve concept from a dream to a reality.

During the initial trail building and restoration possibilities process, in 2011, LBC member and tour guide Dr. Bill Dunson made an unusual discovery at the Wildflower Preserve. Three of the preserve's 9 ponds are in fact tidal ponds and we learned that they are a mangrove protected nursery home for juvenile tarpon and snook. The near oxygen free brackish water there is most suitable to the survival needs of the very small tarpon. Lemon Bay Conservancy board members are very excited about the discovery of these native juvenile tarpon areas. LBC is about to embark on a Mote Marine - LBC partnership to improve the Tarpon habitat at Wildflower Preserve beginning this fall. LBC understands protecting the Tarpon population, which is crucial to the economy of Boca Grande and surrounding areas, is a very important mission.



The plant and trail restoration process at Wildflower Preserve is already in progress. Thanks to over 73 volunteers who have put in more than 2,000 man hours, amazing things are already being accomplished. Trails have been built and are being maintained, many invasive plants have been removed, and 10 trail benches have been built and strategically located throughout the property. In addition, a Butterfly Habitat is being developed; the bird habitat is being improved which includes a bird blind observation area with feeding stations. Volunteers are taking water samples of the Preserve's 9 ponds on a regular basis with an eye to improving the "baby tarpon incubator".



Now, in Spring of 2012, Lemon Bay Conservancy is actively meeting with and working with renowned Tarpon and Snook scientist Dr. Aaron Adams of Mote Marine. Dr. Adams is very excited about the refurbishment of the natural tidal waterways of Wildflower Preserve and their incredible value to protecting and preserving our Tarpon and Snook populations. He is working with LBC for the Wildflower restoration process to proceed in phases to maximize the habitat and protections for the young tarpon. Lemon Bay Conservancy President Jim Cooper is enthusiastic about upcoming plans to implement a tarpon-tagging and tracking program that would be run in conjunction with Mote Marine Laboratory and Dr. Adams. The Wildflower habitat is important to the tarpon because it takes juveniles 10 years to mature. During their early development phase the juvenile tarpon spend a period growing in Wildflower's mangrove protected ponds feasting on mosquito fish which are abundant in the area.



On May 4, 2012, Dr. Adams and company visited the Lemon Bay Golf Club, and examined the likely spot for constructing a PIT tag antenna for monitoring juvenile tarpon tagged within the Wildflower Preserve. At the meeting: Aaron Adams, Senior Scientist at Mote Marine Laboratory, and Director of Operations for Bonefish & Tarpon Trust; Jo Ellen King, Membership Administrator at Bonefish & Tarpon Trust, and graduate student (University of Florida) who will be conducting the tarpon tagging research at Wildflower; Bill Dahms, board member of the Lemon Bay Golf Club; Chip Copeman, General Manager of LBGC. Aaron, JoEllen, Bill, and Chip surveyed likely locations for the antenna, and chose a perfect location.

By placing the antenna at Lemon Creek in August 2012, and beginning the tagging program, we will establish the abundance and movements of juvenile tarpon prior to restoration. By continuing the program after restoration, we will provide the first data on the effects of juvenile tarpon habitat restoration on juvenile tarpon.



Recreational anglers travel from around the world to Charlotte Harbor to fish for tarpon. But this fishery needs healthy juvenile habitats to continue. You can help by contributing to this important project.