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GUEST EDITORIAL (

In Search of a Fiddler Crab



Most of us remember them. Thousands of minuscule crabs scurrying across Ding Darling Drive, covering the sandbars so completely it was as if the ground itself were moving. The males lugging around their enormous claws, the females scrambling down tiny holes along the shoreline as you approached, all thriving in numbers unimaginable.

Not any more. The fiddler crabs, like the canary in the coal mine, have vanished. Unlike the charismatic mega-fauna the Florida panther and the manatee, the fiddlers have disappeared unnoticed. Their relatives, the horseshoe crabs and the ever-present mangrove crabs, are following suit. Estuaries perish slowly, insidiously, one small fragile species at a time.

The battle lines are drawn. From Sanibel and Fort Myers to Lehigh Acres and all the way up the Kissimmee River valley to Orlando, local communities are now engaged in a life-and-death battle for their estuaries. Difficult and costly decisions will have to be made, and made quickly. We will have to choose between cheap septic systems, which are helping to feed harmful algae blooms, and expensive but environmentally sound sewer systems. We will have to choose between green lush lawns and a healthy Gulf of Mexico. To reduce global warming and its effects, all of us will have to learn to live by burning far less carbon.

This is *Times of the Islands'* annual issue dedicated to wildlife, and I applaud the magazine for bringing attention to some of Florida's most cherished citi-

zens. In this issue, you'll find a photo essay by photojournalist Glenn V. Ostle focusing on a variety of species that call the Sunshine State home. You'll learn about a local foundation that gives ospreys a helping hand and a Sanibel school that teaches kids and adults about what's under the sea. Other stories shine a spotlight on animals that aren't native to Florida but are being protected and preserved by some area animal lovers, such as the lemurs at Myakka City's Lemur Conservation Foundation and the lions and tigers at Sarasota's Big Cat Habitat and Gulf Coast Sanctuary.

A few weeks ago, I caught sight of the majestic bald eagle that nests near the Dairy Queen along Sanibel's Periwinkle Way. My thoughts turned to Rachel Carson and her single-handed fight against DDT. Fifty years ago, our bald eagles were in serious trouble. Today, because of changes that were made, bald eagles are making a comeback.

There are still a handful of fiddler crabs remaining, hanging on by a thread. We saved the eagles, now let's do the same for these tiny helpless crabs. Change is never easy and it never comes without costs, but this time, change is absolutely necessary.

Charles Sobczak
*Local author, real estate agent,
and environmental advocate*