

St. George Island Visitor Center

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“I saw a lovely thing today, when I went out into the yard to play

I saw a lovely butterfly on a Hollygo bush so high.” – A Very Old and Charming Children’s Song

St. George is a barrier island. A delicate spit of sand in a large and sometimes unforgiving Gulf of Mexico. Some 28 miles long and just two miles wide at its widest point. About four miles from a mainland and a million miles from big city trials and tribulations.

But, because she’s mighty delicate, care should be taken to not disturb Mother Nature’s balancing act. There is limited vegetation in the center section and visitors are urged not to remove any of that vegetation. Fragile sea oats and even weeds (such as the Yellow Camphor Weed) serve as the “adhesives” that help hold sands in place. The low grasses and tall slash pines that can be seen in the State Park are even greater assets when it comes to keeping things in place.

Sand dunes can take decades to form. Two youngsters playing “King of the Mountain” can destroy one in minutes. That’s why “dune walkovers” were built at many locations. Please use these special beach access points. Also, this is a unique pet friendly island but can you kindly inform Lassie that dune digging is off limits.

Birds and butterflies can be seen all across the island. More than 300 species of native and migratory birds have been documented. There are few things quite as colorful as yellow butterflies feeding on Purple Blazing Star Plants. In the fall of year, towards the end of October, the island is covered in Monarch Butterflies. During their annual migration to Mexico they make a must needed rest stop at St. George, the surrounding area and the St. Marks Wildlife Refuge (Wakulla County). Volunteers have been tagging the large mosaic patterned beauties for years and have documented their lengthy journey.

Island residents and visitors are grateful for the new, four-mile-long bridge connecting the island to Eastpoint on the mainland. So are the birds! There used to be a “causeway” to the island. For no logical human reason the least terns and snowy plovers didn’t recognize the inherit dangers of nesting on the sides of the road. Their takeoff and landing patterns often taking them directly into the path of oncoming vehicles. Unfortunately, a losing confrontation. Caring drivers crawled but the unknowing drivers with lack of reading comprehension sometimes didn’t.

It is so nice NOT to see the feathered casualties on the side of the road. -30-

