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Once crowded with exotic plant species, these wetlands were restored by removing non-native shrubs and trees and supplementing them with natives.

Prior to restoration, invasive, exotic plants choked out nearly all of the native plants that you see before you. Brazilian Pepper and Shoe Button Ardisia were the main culprits—restricting the movement of wildlife and water and growing so thick that native plants could not survive.

Thanks to the removal of invasive plants, native mammals, like the ones below, and other wildlife can often be seen from the boardwalk.



Grey Squirrel



Marsh Rabbit



Wetland Wood Turtle



Raccoon



Chipmunk



Before their removal, trees in parks and wetlands were the main barrier to the boardwalk. Look for many of these sturdy trunks as you walk along the boardwalk.



Cardinal Ardisia



Southern Sweetbrier



Red Maple

## Return of the Natives

Native plants are now thriving at Freedom Park, but it's not just the trees. Be sure to look up and catch a glimpse of the many native bromeliads growing on those trees.

## Fighting Florida's Leafy Invaders

The bent and twisted trees around you are the result of invasive plants... species that have been intentionally or accidentally introduced into Florida from other parts of the world. Thanks to its ideal climate, exotic plants are common in Collier County. You likely encounter them daily in your yard, along roads, even in your parks. In fact, almost one-third of the plants growing wild in Florida are from other parts of the world. Lacking the natural enemies—Insects, diseases, wildlife and weather extremes—that keep them in check in their native countries, some species can grow out of control and become serious problems.

## You can help control the invasion.

- Start at home. Identify the plants in your yard, remove invasive exotics and grow native plants instead.
- Never empty your aquarium into a lake or river.
- Volunteer to remove exotics from natural areas in your community.
- Become informed and share your knowledge.
- Support organizations that restore native habitats.
- Let your elected representatives know that you support the control of exotic species.

