

National Geographic to Teach Villagers About Their Wild Backyard

By LIZ COUGHLIN | Daily Sun Senior Writer

Photographer, conservationist, author and National Geographic explorer Carlton Ward Jr. has trekked over 2,000 miles through the Florida wilderness. And he will take Villagers on a visual tour of the state's wildest places at the National Geographic Live presentation "Hidden Wild: Secrets of the Everglades" at 7 p.m. Tuesday at The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center.

"The main theme is looking at these amazing wild places we still have in the state of Florida and often hidden in plain sight, including some close to The Villages like Ocala National Forest, places like the Everglades that are vital to our lives but we don't know about them or the amazing wildlife and natural features of these landscapes," Ward said.

A large focus of the presentation will be the Florida Wildlife Corridor — a pathway of green space running through the state which helps connect wildlife populations.

"(It's important to) plan to preserve green space and to keep existing green spaces connected to maintain that balance. If we continue to develop without planning or conserving the green space, the consequence is we turn our natural areas into islands surrounded by development," Ward said.

For an animal that roams like a Florida panther, without the Corridor, it may no longer have access to that green space.

The presentation also will focus on the Florida panther, an endangered species and emblem of the Florida Wildlife Corridor. And it will mention Florida flora, like the ghost orchid, which also is endangered.

Florida Native Plant Society member, master gardener and master naturalist Nini Conner visited the Everglades over the summer to check off a bucket list item: to see the ghost orchid for herself.

She was excited to see a presentation about her home state.

"I'm a longtime Floridian, I wasn't born here but I've lived most of my life here so I've seen the need to preserve what's here so we can enjoy it, and it's important to keep some of those (wilderness) areas," Conner said.

Ward hopes to encourage more Floridians like Conner to see those places.

"I hope the talk will inspire the people in the audience to get out and explore their backyard and travel through the swamps and woods and rivers and streams surrounding life in Florida," he said.

For more information about the corridor, visit floridawildlifecorridor.org.

Tickets can be purchased online at thevillagesentertainment.com or at any Villages Box Office location.

Senior writer Liz Coughlin can be reached at 352-753-1119, ext. 5304, or liz.coughlin@thevillagesmedia.com.



Submitted photos

Carlton Ward Jr. presents "Hidden Wild: Secrets of the Everglades" at 7 p.m. Tuesday The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center. He has traveled over 2,000 miles through the state's wilderness.



In "Hidden Wild: Secrets of the Everglades," Ward will take Villagers on a tour of the state's wildest places