



Break away on these short trips

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CORKSCREW SWAMP SANCTUARY

Irma battered butterflies

Not many seen in summer count; hurricane likely washed away eggs

Callie Schmidt Naples Daily News | USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

Five women walked along the wooden boardwalk, spotting everything from baby alligators to owls to purple pickerel weeds.

"I don't know why they call it a weed, because I think it's pretty, but I didn't get to name it," said Joan Dunn, a boardwalk naturalist.

A pig frog could be heard grunting in the background. But the five women weren't just out for a nature walk — they were there to count butterflies.

The women were one of five groups of about 20 volunteers who gathered at Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary on Thursday as part of the 20th annual North American Butterfly

See **BUTTERFLY COUNT**, Page 6A



A pearl crescent butterfly is seen during a guided walk at the Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary on Thursday. Volunteers helped conduct the 20th annual North American Butterfly Association Summer Count at the sanctuary in northern Collier County east of Bonita Springs.



Joan Dunn, left, teaches Dorine de Mena how to identify commonly seen species at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary on Thursday. Guided walks are offered at the sanctuary. PHOTOS BY MORIAH RATNER/NAPLES DAILY NEWS

Scott backer helped firm get SunPass contract

Vendor faces complaints in Florida, other states

Frank Gluck
 Fort Myers News-Press
 USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

The company behind Florida's troubled SunPass toll system won the lucrative, seven-year contract with the help of one of Gov. Rick Scott's top supporters despite allegations of favoritism and the company's history of problems, records show.

The state's Department of Transportation announced last week that it is withholding payments to that company, Conduent State & Local Solutions, in response to a backlog of about 90 million electronic toll charges.

On Wednesday, the department said the backlog of transactions had increased to 170 million. Late fees and penalties are on hold until the system is fully operational.

The New Jersey-based company has experienced problems in a number of states, including Texas, where some customers were sent bills and exorbitant late fees in error, an ongoing USA Today Network investigation found.

They include some mistaken — but nightmarishly high — late fees to drivers, and other problems Florida knew about before signing a seven-year contract in 2015.

The company won its contested bid for that contract with the help of Brian Ballard, a close Scott supporter and one of the nation's top lobbyists. Ballard is now helping the governor raise money for his GOP campaign to unseat

See **SUNPASS PACT**, Page 6A



Scott

Immigrants still apart at deadline

Hundreds of families divided by U.S. at