The 4-H Environmental Education Program began at Rock Eagle 4-H Center in May of 1979. Recognizing the need to expand the use of the center to groups beyond 4-H programs, the Georgia 4-H Leader, Dr. Tom Rodgers, hired Diane L. Davies as the program’s coordinator. Given an annual budget of $300 and six months to establish the program, she had little time to waste.

The first year, the program served more than 2,000 students. During the next seven years, that number grew to more than 5,000 students per year. In 1986, additional staff were hired and the program was expanded to the Jekyll Island and Wahsega 4-H Centers. In 1987, the Tybee Island 4-H Center was added. The Environmental Education Program was expanded to day use at 4-H Tidelands Nature Center on Jekyll Island in 2000 and to the newest residential center at Fortson 4-H Center in 2005.

Today, the program is one of the largest residential environmental education programs in the nation, serving thousands of students from throughout Georgia and the Southeast. In the 2011-2012 school year more than 44,000 participants were engaged in the statewide Environmental Education Program. Georgia 4-H Environmental Education reached its 1,000,000th participant in October of 2013.

Part of the million? Share your story here.
Greetings from the coast! Our fall is going great and I hope your year is just as rewarding. We have a few updates to report:

- Our canteen prices have changed so please consult our website for current prices.
- The Sea Turtle Center is now $8.00 for chaperones and students. Teachers are free with identification. You must have your school’s tax exempt form if you are from Georgia. Out of state schools must pay tax.
- Tidelands Nature Center is now $4.00 to visit with your school.
- We celebrated our one millionth participant in the Georgia 4-H Environmental Education in October. The program was started by Diane Davies at Rock Eagle in 1979. Jekyll 4-H started having camp in 1983 and the Environmental Education Program began in 1987. We are proud to be part of so many people’s positive experiences in the outdoors.
- If you are on the books for this year please plan for group sizes of **14 total**. We assume (for staffing purposes) that there will be 12 or 13 students in a group with 1 or 2 adults. Extra adults will not fit on our mini-buses but are welcome to follow in private cars.
- And now for the Right Whale in the pond, the upcoming changes at the 4-H Center. The Jekyll 4-H program is entering into a partnership with the Jekyll Island Authority this summer. Unfortunately, we still do not have the information we need to make solid plans for 2014/15 school year. We have been assured our 4-H Environmental Education programs will continue but we expect construction as some point. We do not know the scope of the construction but we expect new dorms and updated facilities. Many schools have dates for the 2014/15 year and we will confirm the reservations and pricing when we are provided with that information. Please stay tuned to our website for updates and if you are on the books you will be contacted immediately with any changes. We plan to be part of the second million!
- Please check out our Facebook page at **Jekyll Island 4-H Center**. Richard does a great job of keeping it updated with fun, educational information and great pictures.
- The classrooms in the pavilion have had a facelift and look much nicer.
- We are sad to report the passing of our corn snake, Ruby. She had been a great ambassador for the reptile world for many years. We do have a new soft shell turtle and a small yellow rat snake named Scotch.

Please give us a call if we can help you plan a trip or with any questions you may have regarding our program. If you are on the books for this year you can plan on a great trip. This year’s Environmental Education staff is one of our best. I have no idea how we find these people but they are terrific. Enjoy your school year, and I hope to see you at the beach!
Georgia 4-H Museum Honors Environmental Education Program
Founder Diane Davies
By Sharon Dowdy

Thirty-four years ago, Georgia 4-H State Leader Tom Rodgers gave Diane Davies $300 and six months to create an environmental education program for children. She turned that $300 into a nationally recognized program that has served over 1 million children in Georgia's public schools, private schools and home-schooled students. The Georgia 4-H community came together to honor that achievement last week [October 29\textsuperscript{th}] with the rededication of the Rock Eagle 4-H Center's Natural History Museum, now named for Davies.

Learning from nature

Now a retired 4-H specialist, Davies drew inspiration for the program from her childhood in the foothills and mountains of Pennsylvania and the connections she made between her schoolwork and time that she spent outside. "I thought that I had been given the greatest gift of my life - to be able to use the outdoors as a dynamic, living laboratory to teach math, science, language arts, social studies and history," she said. "The children were hungry for this kind of experience, and the teachers understood the value and the importance of connecting children to the land, so they can learn from it." The newly named Diane Davies Natural History Museum is one resource in the toolbox Georgia 4-H Environmental Education instructors use to teach children about the world around them. The museum was first housed in the Barkuloo-Rich Building at Rock Eagle, but soon outgrew the space. "We had several natural history exhibits in the building and displays in the adjoining classrooms," remembered Davies. "But the ceilings were so low that we couldn’t plan for larger and more expansive exhibits."

Seeking funds in creative ways

Davies and then Georgia 4-H State Leader Tom Rodgers garnered funds to build the current museum from a single donor, Days Inn of America co-founder Deen Day Smith. "The money was given as a challenge grant to challenge other donors to give," she said. "Before the building was completed, I started working with a wide variety of donors to secure funding for the planned exhibits." With her strong will and determination, Davies used creative and unconventional ways to gain support, like asking the Georgia Egg Commission to fund the dinosaur egg exhibit. "I approached them saying, kids are already interested in dinosaurs, this is one way you can get them interested in eggs," she said. The commission funded the exhibit. To plan the exhibits, Davies sought the help of experts like Lloyd Logan and Josh Larem in the University of Georgia Zoology Department. "Lloyd had done some work for the Smithsonian Institute and other organizations on exhibit design. Many of the ideas for the initial exhibits, I sketched out on a napkin at the Taco Stand in Athens with Lloyd," recalled Davis. "Later, I was able to hire a full-time exhibit designer who built most of the exhibits that are currently in the building."

For the whole article visit this webpage.
Now There Are Even More Ways to ‘Like’ Jekyll 4-H!

Jekyll 4-H is excited to have joined the world of social media! Now you are able to receive updates and view pictures from your favorite Georgia barrier island whenever and wherever you are. Launched on January 20th, Jekyll’s new Facebook page was welcomed by over 100 ‘Likes’ in less than 24 hours and over 400 ‘Likes’ just one month later!

Jekyll 4-H’s Facebook page features regular opportunities to learn and interact with our environmental education and summer camp programs. You can check out fish caught during our surf fishing and seining classes in ‘Catch of the Day’, get a closer look at plants and animals observed on the island in ‘Jekyll Flora and Fauna’, and learn more about our teaching animals used in herpetology classes in ‘Meet our Animal Ambassadors’. You can share your knowledge by trying to identify the organisms in ‘Can you identify this critter?’, trying to figure out the object pictured in a macro close-up in ‘Can you figure out the big picture?’, and suggesting what an animal might be thinking in ‘Caption Contest’.

Jekyll 4-H’s Facebook page is also a great place to keep up to date with noteworthy happenings on the island, class updates, and pictures of instructors and staff past and present. For example, our most popular post to date was an opportunity to suggest a name for our recent octopus. The name that received the most votes from the top six user submitted names was ‘Rocktopus the Octopus’!

Our new Facebook page is also fast becoming a great resource for teachers and county agents to grab pictures and stories to share with students and 4-H Club members to get them excited about an upcoming environmental education field study or week of summer camp. We would love for you to join us if you haven’t already! Help us spread the word by asking your friends and family to check us out! If you are unable to get your feet wet and sandy with a trip to Jekyll tomorrow, the Jekyll Island 4-H Center Facebook page is the next best place to visit today!

Check us out @ www.facebook.com/JekyllIsland4HCenter.
For overnight school groups attending our Jekyll 4-H program, consider selecting a teacher-led activity offered by our public/day-use 4-H Tidelands Nature Center facility (also right here on Jekyll). Teacher-led options include canoeing on the adjacent salt marsh pond, or a scavenger hunt/walk through our live coastal species exhibit area. Live exhibits include; fish, crabs, alligators, turtles, snakes, a sea turtle, shark, and more! Or for smaller school groups, you might elect to expand your Jekyll 4-H Center class options by selecting herpetology or dock study as a teacher-led activity at Tidelands. This would leave another time slot open for your Jekyll 4-H class selections. Express your interest in a Tidelands’ teacher-led class option when working out your class schedule with Donna Stewart, Center Director or Richard Chewning, Environmental Education Coordinator at our Jekyll 4-H Center.

For homeschool families, check out our Tidelands Homeschool Days, offered select Fridays in the fall and spring. We offer varied coastal ecology themes for each date, so you can sign up for more than one program! For a sample of recent fall programs; check out: [http://www.tidelands4h.org/documents/HomeschoolFall2013-Schedule.pdf](http://www.tidelands4h.org/documents/HomeschoolFall2013-Schedule.pdf). Stay tuned for our upcoming spring 2014 homeschool schedule. Or you can check out our summer/day camp program schedule; open to homeschool families as well as the general public. Please stay tuned for our upcoming 2014 summer program schedule. Check postings on our website home page: [http://www.tidelands4h.org](http://www.tidelands4h.org).

ATTENTION:
Lead teachers setting up Jekyll 4-H overnight environmental education field studies. Ask about teacher-led class options at our 4-H Tidelands Nature Center!

For those interested in taking a trip to Jekyll with your family, consider visiting our 4-H Tidelands Nature Center anytime of the year! Our Tidelands facility is open to the general public year round providing public/private school, homeschool, and summer programs, canoe/paddle boat rentals, kayak tours, nature walks at various locations around Jekyll, as well as our live coastal species exhibit area! Our exhibit area is open Monday through Friday from 9:00 am - 4:00 pm and Saturday & Sunday from 10:00 am - 2:00 pm.

For more information on our Tidelands facility, including teacher led options for overnight groups staying at our Jekyll 4-H center, homeschool, day groups, summer programs; as well as our public kayak tours, nature walks, and exhibit area, please give us a call at (912) 635-5032.
Rocktopus the Octopus

This past season we welcomed a critter never before seen in the Jekyll 4-H animal labs: a common octopus (*Octopus vulgaris*).

The octopus was adored by students as well as instructors and made its way into not only our marine science curriculum, but also our hearts. Its journey to the 4-H center began when Ray Thompson, a 2012-2013 E.E. instructor, was teaching a North End class on Driftwood Beach. Ray and her students went to inspect something near the rip-rap rocks. They discovered the common octopus which would later be named Rocktopus the Octopus. The name was chosen after a fierce competition via the brand new Jekyll Island 4-H Center Facebook page, in which 40% of the votes decided on its name.

The common octopus is found throughout the Atlantic Ocean and is a voracious hunter, eating crabs and mollusks. Unfortunately, octopodes have short life spans, living only 1-2 years in the wild. Seeing as there was no way to tell the age of our octopus, we believe Rocktopus the Octopus lived a happy 3 months with us at the 4-H center before the end of its life. Rocktopus the Octopus will surely be missed!
Please Help Us Thank Our Staff

A special shout out to all the staff that make the center run. Our housekeeping, maintenance, kitchen and administrative staff work year round to clean, repair, cook, and pay the bills for summer camp and the 4-H Environmental Education Program. Most of our staff has been with the center for many years and all of them are invaluable to our program. Thanks!

Spotlight on…
Richard Chewning II

A typical day in this staff person’s life goes something like this; find out at 8:05 am an instructor is sick and will not be teaching the 8:15 am class, speak with a teacher coming in 2 weeks that needs their schedule by noon, teach the 8:15 am class for sick instructor, help with canteen, greet incoming schools, help with K.P., send schedule to school, observe instructor teaching at 1:15 pm, identify bizarre worm found on beach, update Facebook, help Donna with her computer, reset the wireless network, help student find wallet left somewhere on center, get info for schools coming in 3 weeks, check with teachers at dinner, go up to room, help with broken projector at 8:00 pm, get supplies for sick student at 11:30 pm and go to bed.

The amazing thing is that Richard Chewning does all of this with a smile. Richard has served as our program coordinator for 7 years and exemplifies what is meant by excellent customer service. We all appreciate his good nature, great work ethic and devotion to the program. Thanks Richard!
Lichen is a Fungus and Algae; Most People Would Agree That They’re Likin’ One Another!

By Dana Thomason

“Nothing in the universe exists alone. Every drop of water, every human being, all creatures in the web of life, and all ideas in the web of knowledge are part of an immense, evolving, dynamic whole as old, and as young, as the universe itself.” - unknown

A quote that encompasses the idea that every living organism is connected, tethered to one another with a common resolve, to survive and live to see another day. Nature provides us with numerous opportunities to view these remarkable relationships between two or more organisms. An individual may be looking outside a window, taking a stroll down a busy city sidewalk or even biking down a nature trail and simply bypass connections existing in nature. The 4-H Center on Jekyll Island grants students and chaperones the chance to observe nature’s relationships through practical environmental education programs. “Learn by doing” – a slogan that expresses 4-H’s importance to not only gain knowledge on certain coastal ecology topics but to bridge the act of learning with hands-on outdoor environmental education courses. This connection can further develop into relationships established between student to student, chaperone to student, and Jekyll 4-H staff to student. The most significant relationship lies between youth and the environment, a mutualistic relationship, destined to ensure the success of our environment.

Scientifically, a symbiotic relationship is the close and often long-term interaction between two or more different biological species. Symbiosis is classified into three main categories based on the nature of the association: mutualism, parasitism and commensalism. Mutualism is the association to which both organisms benefit. An exceptional example of this type of association is smooth cordgrass (Spartina alterniflora), and periwinkle snails (Littorina irrata) inhabiting salt marshes along the coastline. Environmental educators at the 4-H Center lead students and chaperones through different zones at the salt marsh, primarily the low marsh, where this relationship is primarily found. Students learn that the snail benefits by consuming algae off of the Spartina as a food source, thus allowing the plant to produce energy for itself through a process called photosynthesis. In contrast, parasitism is the association involving one life form to benefit while the other is harmed. Students participating in the seining program have the opportunity to pull a seine net near shore on the beach and identify different aquatic organisms. A parasitic isopod was discovered living in one fish’s mouth in place of its tongue, consuming all of the nutrients and energy from the fish. The youth discovered that even the smallest animal may pose a threat and steal from organisms larger in size. Commensalism is the association where one organism benefits while the other is neither harmed nor benefited from the relationship. The maritime forest ecology program has a group of students, guided by an instructor, walk down a nature trail and simply be surrounded in a dense and luscious forestry environment. Students quickly noticed Spanish moss hanging off many live oak trees inhabiting the maritime forest and realize that a relationship exist between the two. In need of mechanical support, Spanish moss lacks a root system and relies on the branches of live oak trees for support. Only taking oxygen from the air and leaning on the tree for support, Spanish moss benefits while not directly taking nutrients or energy from the live oak tree. Maritime forest, salt marsh and beach ecology programs are the three core programs taught at Jekyll 4-H Center and not only demonstrates connections within each ecosystem but how each are linked together to create coastal ecology.

All in all, participating in one or all of the courses provided at the 4-H center gives the students and chaperones a chance to view how diverse and numerous relationships exist in the environment. Youth acquire knowledge from their indoor classrooms and environmental instructors apply it visually and tactly in the style of hands-on activities. Throughout their trip, students observe nature’s relationships and in return develop and reestablish bonds between friends, teachers, parents and Jekyll EE staff. In the scientific community, symbiosis correlates to organisms living together. It’s safe to say Jekyll Island 4-H Center offers youth and adults an opportunity to observe several symbiotic relationships while making their own connections during this remarkable process.
Meet the 2013 - 2014
Environmental Education Staff

Pictured above (left to right): Lindy Sanderson (Georgia), Elizabeth Simko (Virginia), Kirstin Prunchak (Iowa), Stephanie Anos (New York), Kaila Thorn (Florida), Ben LaPoint (New York), Belinda Merkelis (Illinois), Jacob Wolfe (Georgia), Noah Wyatt (Arkansas), Dana Thomason (North Carolina), Malloree Holcombe (Georgia), and Elijah O’Cain (Georgia).

The Jekyll Island 4-H Center’s EE Staff is composed of an incredible group of educators from all over the country. We are fortunate this season as over half of our instructors have worked previous seasons in the Georgia 4-H EE Program across the state! We are blessed to be working with and learning alongside such talented and passionate educators!

“The 4-H Environmental Educators are the heart and soul of our program. Their ability to engage students and bring learning to life never ceases to amaze me!”

Melanie Biersmith,
Extension 4-H Specialist
Staff Stories: Tales from a Boomerang  
By Kaila Thorn

Two years ago I worked here as an educator. I saw kids get excited at seeing the beach for the first time, watched as the puzzle pieces clicked when they answered a challenging question. I was able to see both relief and devastation at leaving the detritus behind in the salt marsh. I was taught how to dissect a shark and was reminded the significance of being the first to get to the top of the grandfather tree. I discovered the true menace that is the sand gnat and I worked with an incredible staff that taught me more about the world around me than I ever gave it credit for. Then I left for a year.

Teaching kids 5 days a week, 4-6 classes a day, learning 14 names a class can become both exhilarating and exhausting. So after a wonderful season I left the field and the beach, headed to North Carolina working with kids there for a year. We didn’t talk about the environment every day; they teased me when I became excited about a snake or the changing seasons around me. I loved working with them, yet at the end of the year a series of fortunate events lead me back to Jekyll. Returning has me more focused than before. I have a smoother rhythm to my teaching style, I am not shocked by anything that happens in class yet I’m excited at the new twists each class brings. I came back with a recharged energy ready to answer the plethora of 5th grade questions with confidence and the vocabulary of a 10 year old. I am trying to explore new areas of the Island, really get to know my co-workers and the environment we work in. Returning has set me up to go about the regular with more confidence and thus explore the irregular with purpose and energy. Taking a year off makes me a slightly different returner, yet it has helped me understand why the Jekyll 4-H program and the people that work here are a hidden gem.

Staff Stories: Switching Centers  
By Ben LaPoint

It was a long drive to Georgia and an even longer journey to find the beginning of that road. “Are you sure you want to move to Georgia?” “What if it doesn’t work out?” Doubt pulls strongest when its voice is the ones you love. The way I saw it there was really no other option. The possibilities that my first experience in environmental education at the Rock Eagle 4-H Center held, how could I turn it down? Holding firm, I prepared myself for the chosen path ahead, set my back to the grandeur that is the Adirondacks and ventured from my home in upstate New York to find the South and a new life.

When I arrived a surprising comfort awaited me. There was little difference between home and the piedmont of Georgia. Beautiful scenery, wonderful people and excellent food, though the weather was, can I say, mildly different. I spent the better part of the next two years basking in the warmth and culture that the South has to offer, learning the art that is environmental education. I honed my skills on red clay of those gently rolling hills. Then it was time for a change.

I had visited the Georgia coast three times during my stay at Rock Eagle and it beckoned to me. It called me from afar and I needed to answer. Drawn to the indescribable beauty that is Jekyll Island, I drove towards where the sky touches the earth until it came out from underneath me. I was there. I was at the ocean, the lonely, ever ceaseless mistress of the deepest waters, twisting and thrashing, forever yearning for the moon who calls for her to reach into the stars. The forest lay awash in an emerald radiance unknown to those whose trees were my ladders to the sun. The living earth that scatters from beneath my feet as I move through the marsh. This was where I belonged. I knew I had a lot to learn before I was ready to teach my students, but, in a place like this how could it be anything but wonderful?
The Jekyll Island 4-H Center is happy to announce that the animal laboratory classrooms received an update this past summer. This remodel has allowed a host of new animal ambassadors to call the labs their home. One such critter is Sylvester, a six foot black rat snake (*Elaphe obsoleta*). Black rat snakes are Georgia’s second longest snake (the endangered Indigo snake is the longest), and eat a variety of prey including rodents, birds, lizards and frogs.

Sylvester is not the only new snake that now calls Jekyll Island 4-H Center home. A juvenile yellow rat snake (*Elaphe obsoleta quadrivittata*) has also taken up residence. The snake was found near the 4-H Center with a piece of tape stuck to his body. Thankfully, 4-H Center environmental educators and Georgia Sea Turtle Center veterinary staff were able to successfully remove the tape, however the nickname, Scotch, after scotch tape, remained. Like black rat snakes, yellow rat snakes are avid climbers and are often found in the trees of the maritime forest of Jekyll Island.

Snakes are not the only new reptiles in town. Jekyll 4-H Center also welcomed a common snapping turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*) hatchling named C.J. Snapping turtles are found throughout the Southeast wherever there is a fresh water source. Snapping turtles have relatively mild dispositions while in water, however, when threatened they will use their powerful beaks to “snap” or strike. When full grown, snapping turtles can injure humans with that powerful snap. Snapping turtles are omnivores, eating a variety of plants and animals.

On the theme of turtles, the Jekyll Island 4-H center also received Saxon, a 2 year old loggerhead sea turtle (*Caretta caretta*), from Tidelands Nature Center. Loggerhead sea turtles are the most common sea turtle off of Georgia’s coast. They feed on whelks, blue crabs and fish in Georgia’s waters. Saxon was a straggler, meaning he did not quite make it out of his nest, but was rescued by the Georgia Sea Turtle Center Beach Patrol. Saxon will eventually be rehabilitated and released into the wild.

We wish these and all of our animal ambassadors a long and happy life. The delight they bring all of our students with their presence helps the students learn about the importance of these animals in Georgia’s ecosystems.

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**Home is Where the Herps Live**

By Belinda Merkelis

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Sylvester posing for the camera

Sylvester likes his home top to bottom

Scotch just hangin’ around

C.J loves his little adventures in the grass

C.J spots Saxon. “When are my flippers gonna get that big?”
Georgia 4-H Mission

The mission of Georgia 4-H is to assist youth in acquiring knowledge, developing life skills, and forming attitudes that will enable them to become self-directing, productive and contributing members of society. This mission is accomplished through "hands on" learning experiences, focused on agricultural and environmental issues, agriculture awareness, leadership, communication skills, foods and nutrition, health, energy conservation, and citizenship.

Exploring and discovering, encouraging and challenging, that's what Georgia 4-H is all about. As a program of the University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences Cooperative Extension System, 4-H is part of the nationwide Extension network.

4-H'ers are known for sharing their research-based knowledge and technology to people where they live and work. 4-H combines federal, state, and local expertise and resources.