

# OUTDOORS

## Book a beachcomber's delight

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Dunnage. Sea heroes. Nurdles. Surf-wax.

Just when you thought you'd walked the beaches and knew what to look for, you hear these words.

They're identified in "Florida's Living Beaches, a Guide for the Curious Beach Comber," by Blair and Dawn Witherington, two Floridians who helped remind me that I've not read every Sunshine State guidebook on the shelf.

The book covers beach features, plants, birds and other animals, shells and similar topics just like many other beach guides do. But it also includes a chapter called "Hand of Man," which is where those odd words come from.

Who dah thunk to ID the trash you find when walking the shores?

For the record, dunnage lumber is jet-tisoned cargo from ships of days gone by. (You can see a picture of it - a broken piece of wood, basically - on page 288 of the book.)

Sea heroes are also called "drift toys." Remember those tiny plastic soldiers you'd put atop your sand castle when you were a kid?

Nurdles is the colloquial name for industrial resin pellets of high-density polyethylene - precursors for plastic prod-

ucts, the authors tell us on page 292.

Surf-wax? It's a lumpy coconut-scented wax ball-like thing surfers use for foot-traction on an otherwise slippery board.

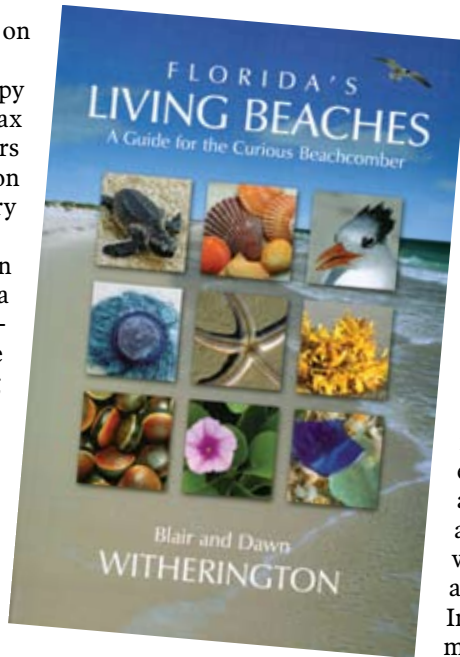
I became hooked on this book after just a few moments of thumbing through it in the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge bookstore. I immediately liked seeing these items and the book's style - simple explanations, photos along side, boldfaced words. I had to read the rest of it.

It's comprehensive. It's easy to use. It answers any question a beachcomber might have, plus those beachcombers may never have thought of.

"We had questions ourselves about some of the man-made items we were finding," the Witheringtons told me in an e-mail when I asked what inspired them to include garbage in their guide.

"We didn't look at them as just garbage. With some research, we found that a lot of the items traveled a long way, which taught us oceanography and of our own human foibles."

The couple, who grew up on Florida's beaches and were married 10 years ago in



June, are professional naturalists. But I adore how their child-like curiosity is pervasive throughout the 312-page book, which has 950 photos.

I think we can thank Dawn Witherington for that. She's a graphic design artist and scientific illustrator with an extensive training at art institutes. He's a research scientist with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute. Not a bad mix.

Lise Couture Bryant, a member of the Ding Darling Wildlife Society who runs the bookstore at the National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel, promotes the book to anyone - tourists, snowbirds and outdoorsy types like me who have long ago stopped buying beach guides.

Not that I knew it all. I just thought I knew most of it. But "Florida's Living Beaches" reminded me that there's an entertaining aspect to relearning things and discovering something new, too.

Bryant noted that the guide is user-friendly. Its size isn't formidable so you can carry it on the beach, and the organi-

zation of the book - the blending of her graphic eye and his scientific one - makes it easy to find what you want fast.

She invited the couple to the wildlife society's Thursday afternoons' lecture series. Every Thursday at 1 p.m. from January through March in the visitor's center, someone speaks about something interesting.

The Witheringtons are on for March 6. But with so much information they could discuss, what will they focus on?

"Beach quests," they wrote in an e-mail. "Some of the cool things a beachcomber could find if they're at the right place at the right time."

"Those finds can become a symbolic justification for many beach visits. It's addicting."

So is their book. ■

- Betsy Clayton is a freelancer based on Pine Island and also is Lee County Parks & Recreation's waterways coordinator. Contact her at boatingbybetsy@yahoo.com.

### If you go

- >>What: Presentation on beachcombing by Blair and Dawn Witherington, authors of "Florida's Living Beaches" (Pineapple Press, \$21.95)
- >>When: 1 p.m. March 6
- >>Where: J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge visitor center auditorium, Sanibel
- >>Cost: Free (come early to get a parking space and seat)
- >>Info: (239) 472-1100 or www.dingdarlingsociety.org

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