**Wildlife at the Garden**

American Redstart

 Bird life at the St. Johns Botanical Garden and Nature Preserve abounds, as the lush habitat here attracts both resident and migrating birds. In addition, our nature preserve features a lush deciduous riverine forest , a much less common habitat than the surrounding pine flatwoods, which are common in Florida. Such a habitat is very attractive to a wide variety of warblers, a huge group of small, often brightly colored birds with beautiful songs. The American Redstart is a kind of warbler, and one of the few that is easily recognized. Well, at least the males are easily recognized, as they are mostly coal black with bright orange patches on the sides, wings, and tail. The females are tan/gray with yellow patches in the same general locations as the males, making them look much more like other warblers.

 The Redstart is a resident of open woodlands across much of North America in the summertime, where it nests, and a resident of Central and South America during the winter. They are also found in Southern Florida and the Keys, as well as Caribbean Islands in the wintertime. They may migrate thousands of miles, and that is when most Floridians may see them, either in the Spring or Fall. They eat insects primarily, including a wide variety of moths, flies, wasps, and leafhoppers, but also eat berries when they are available. They have been observed, “flashing their colors,” presumably to startle insects so they may catch them as they move. They eat many insects off of twigs, but may also catch them in the air. They are very territorial birds and may make QUITE a racket as they defend their territory! And they have numerous natural predators, including hawks, owls, crows, jays, and snakes.

 Recently, a flock of Redstarts was observed foraging in the parking area of the Garden, which was the first time they have been seen here with certitude, though we are home to a variety of other species of warblers. Bird watchers are always welcome at the Garden, and because the birds are so active early in the morning, special arrangements may be made with the to enter before the Garden opens at 9 AM. Don’t forget those essentials of birdwatching: Binoculars, Notepad, Coffee, and Donuts!