Acadiana

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Arboretum Showcases Native Plants, Wildlife

VILLE PLATTE — Do you know the difference between the southern magnolia and the sweetbay magnolia? How about the cucumber tree magnolia? And the bigleaf magnolia or “cowcumber” as it is so-called? What is a toothache tree? A Homo sugar tree? A jack-in-the-pulpit? The answers to these questions and many others can be discovered at the Louisiana State Arboretum — 300 acres of hills, steep ravines and creeks where more than 150 plants native to Louisiana can be seen in their natural surroundings.

Guided tours of the facility are offered by the Office of State Parks year-round to give the visitor a better understanding and appreciation of the area. Scheduled tours are held on Saturdays and Sundays. In addition, groups of ten or more people may schedule a tour by prior appointment.

Preservation Area Manager Jim Robinson is in charge of the tours which give the visitor an overview of the entire complex. Robinson also encourages the visitor to walk along all or part of the over two miles of nature trails within the arboretum. The trail system is well marked and easily traveled. Each plant species along the trail is labeled.

The Magnolia Maritima (Upland Hardwood) Forest is the dominant vegetation, but limited areas of pine and Bottomland Hardwood Forest are also included, Robinson says.

A booklet on each plant is provided at the arboretum office where additional information about the facility is also available. In addition to viewing the plant life, the visitor, if he is quiet, also has a good chance of seeing a variety of native wildlife, including white-tail deer, wild turkeys, raccoons, opossums, fox, skunks, bobcats and numerous species of birds.

Films on Louisiana wildlife are shown each Saturday at 8:30 p.m. by the arboretum staff at Chicot State Park adjacent to the boat dock at South Landing. It is recommended that visitors bring along insect repellent during the summer months.

The Louisiana State Arboretum is located on Louisiana 804, approximately eight miles north of Ville Platte in Evangeline Parish and a mile and a half past the main entrance of Chicot State Park.

The facility is open to the public free of charge daily from 8 a.m. until 5 p.m. Picnics are allowed in the park with prior permission from the manager.

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Small, edible mushrooms can be found almost anywhere.

Colorful fungi are plentiful in the moist, shaded habitat.