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## Swamp Song: a Natural History of Florida's Swamps by Ron Larson

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## REVIEW

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**Swamp Song: A Natural History of Florida's Swamps.**—Ron Larson, 1995. Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 248 p. ISBN 0-8130-1355-0. \$19.95 paper.—This book attests that Florida's swamps are wondrous places. Alligators bellow, colorful butterflies and songbirds flit among the lush vegetation, and little-seen fish and amphibians feed in relative obscurity. Giant cypress trees tower over the calm waters creating secret gardens of pineapple-like bromeliads and other epiphytes. Along the swamp's margins and sweeping across the wet prairies bloom delicate, white spider lilies. Biologist Ron Larson provides a panoramic view of these rich habitats that, for many, symbolize the natural richness and diversity of Florida.

Wetlands are ubiquitous in Florida, covering more than 4.4 million hectares. They cannot be represented by a single habitat. They comprise floodplain forests, cypress domes, marshes, and bogs. From north to south across Florida, they encompass snaking strands of tupelo and gum trees, vast forests of old-growth cypress, subtropical forests embellished with orchids, and the, once seemingly endless, sawgrass marshes of the Everglades. Larson describes each part of the whole in turn, carefully providing the details of their flora, fauna, and different hydroperiods.

Larson's observations delve more deeply into the denizens of the swamp than mere descriptions of well-known species such as the wading birds and the snakes, although they are not ignored. He explores the web-spinning of spiders, how fungi grow, the mating habits of damselflies, and frog songs. His text treads far beyond a mere catalog of the biota of swamps.

Although this book is a celebration of Florida swamps, it is equally a urgent call to defend what is left of them by helping us understand their importance. Florida's wetlands are a relatively recent development, if you think in geologic time. Formed just 5,000 years ago, over the last 100 years they have been relentlessly dredged and filled with little restraint. Larson reports that over 20 years, from 1955 to 1975, an average of three hectares of swamp were destroyed every hour. The destruction of many wetlands continues, even as millions of dollars are spent to save and restore other wetlands, such as the Everglades and the Kissimmee River Basin that feeds it.

Larson's accounts of Florida's swamps are educating and entertaining, and will renew the resolve of all who care about the protection of natural resources. The book is enhanced by beautiful color photographs, useful diagrams, maps, and an extensive index and list of references. It would be a useful addition to any library.—**Tom Palmer**, 1805 26th St. NW, Winter Haven, Florida 33881.