

Bill Boothe is an experienced naturalist, lecturer, published wildlife photographer, and ecotourism provider in Florida.

As a youngster, Bill was always collecting every creepy-crawly that he could lay his hands on, bringing them into the house, often without his mother's knowledge. He studied these prized catches in detail with the aid of magnifying glasses and the few field guides that were available at that time. He still has many of his original *Golden* and *Peterson* guides that he used to delve into the natural world. At age 12, Bill purchased with his allowance his first college biology textbook. And he knew he was hooked on nature.

As a college undergraduate, Bill majored in biology that stressed freshwater and terrestrial ecosystems. At every opportunity, he went on excursions into the many terrestrial and freshwater habitats of South Carolina and Florida where he encountered all manner of fauna and flora. During the course of these forays, he was exposed to another habitat he had not previously encountered, the watery realm of the Atlantic Ocean.

As a graduate student, Bill unexpectedly jumped into the underwater world of coastal South Carolina, specializing in invertebrate physiology and taxonomy. He worked as a taxonomist for over three decades with federal, state, and private organizations including the Smithsonian Institution.

Natural Encounters

In 1986, Bill switched gears and began on one of the most gratifying adventures of his life, the founding of Natural Encounters. Before ecotourism became popular, this environmental education and ecotourism business specialized in nature excursions, photography workshops, and environmental education classes on everything natural in Florida.

He has lived his second childhood ever since.

Bill has developed and taught a wide array of popular natural history classes that not only bring

the natural world into the classroom, but also brings students into the natural world. Many of his classes were so popular that students from all parts of southwest Florida attended. During the same time period, Bill led hundreds of trips to all parts of Florida from the Florida Panhandle to the Florida Keys and the Everglades.

Bill has been a frequent speaker and trip leader for numerous environmental groups of Florida and Georgia including the Audubon Society, butterfly groups, statewide Native Plant Societies, and Rare Plant Task Forces. He is a Florida Master Naturalist Instructor and has been a keynote speaker for Master Gardener and FWC/NRCS joint programs.

His main purpose is to share his knowledge with those who want to learn more about the natural world. Through his natural history classes and wildlife photography workshops, he has inspired others to become better stewards of our natural world. As an active supporter of environmental causes, he has donated time and images to conservation organizations. He has been a member of the Florida Native Plant Society since its establishment in the early 1980s.

During his natural walkabouts, he became increasingly interested in nature photography and began pursuing a newfound vocation. He soon was photographing every plant and animal he encountered. He has traveled throughout Florida in search of wildflowers that may bloom only a few hours of the day or a few days of the year. Since 1990, he has documented over 1800 of Florida's plant species. He and his wife Marcia have had the opportunity to travel to other natural areas in the southeast, Texas, New Mexico, and Indiana.

They now reside in the Florida Panhandle, an area where wildlife and wildflowers abound. Around every bend of the road, something new and fantastic beckons them to stop and take photographs of Florida's rare and beautiful plant and animal species. Through the camera lens, they share their vision of the inner beauty of nature that surrounds each of us.

He currently focuses his efforts in shooting images and presenting nature photo workshops, but he also presents lectures on rare and native plants, butterfly gardening, and plant and animal interactions. He is a professional nature photographer noted for his images of all creatures and

plants great and small, especially those that are rare and endangered. His photos have won numerous awards and have been published in nature-oriented books, magazines, and websites. Some of his images may be viewed at NatureInFocus.com.