

County's First Black Bear Festival Roars

October 30, 2008 - 10:32AM

[By Lois Swoboda](#)

Franklin County's first ever Black Bear Festival was a smashing success.

The celebration, held Saturday, Oct. 18, was sponsored by Carrabelle Cares and the Florida Defenders of Wildlife. Joni Ellis and Carrabelle's own Lesley Cox were the coordinators.

There were displays of local arts and crafts, lots of food including BBQ and oysters from local vendors. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission brought an elaborate display, including a maze simulating the life story of a Florida black bear.

The Defenders of Wildlife had books on sale and lots of free literature for teachers and activities for kids including creating casts of animal tracks and a relay race to teach bear safety. Other booths offering educational experiences of many kinds were on hand.

Musicians, including regional fiddle champion Aisha Ivey, entertained throughout the day. Local dance troop Freefire gave a morning performance.

The Big Bend Wildlife sanctuary of Altha and St. Joe Beach was on hand with a raptor display that featured Olaha, a bald eagle, and Blue, the only blue-eyed great horned owl known to exist.

The Florida State University Marine lab brought a display of bay creatures.

Field trips to Tate's Hell and the coast offered birding and other wildlife experiences. Especially popular were junkets to Womack Creek Recreation Area where celebrity bear expert Adam Warwick offered tips on living with bears.

"We had a great response to the trips up to Womack," Marti Miller, recreation coordinator for Tate's Hell said. "We sent 20 people up in the van for the very first trip and at least six followed in their own vehicles."

Cox said that "when the day was done, over 500 people had visited the festival. We feel it was a great success. I've been hearing lots of wonderful comments about it. People really loved the field trips to Tate's Hell."