

## I remember Ormond Beach



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THOMAS J. DUNKERTON

The red-winged blackbird, a medium-sized songbird, is one of the most abundant birds in North America.

I'm a little younger than Methusala, but I was there in Ormond Beach when the mullet runs in the late fall were continuous schools so large they took days to pass... millions and millions of mullet, with big sharks swimming along with them. A shark's paradise, I guess.

There were 10-foot manta rays, leaping and gliding through the water like giant butterflies. Flocks of blackbirds were so dense it looked sometimes as if the sky had turned to ink, their cackling drowning out any other sound. Yes, times were different then.

My old stomping grounds, once so rich with wildlife, now lie beneath condos, houses and businesses. There's more prosperity; that's for sure. But the animals and fish that were so abundant in my younger days have just as surely dwindled.

What are we doing about it? Well, Florida has the largest conservation land-buying program in the world. In this area, we are the envy of other states.

Florida also has the largest number of threatened and endangered species in the country. The land the state buys provides habitats for these species. And, although they no longer occur in the enormous numbers they did in my youth, many species, like the mullet and the blackbird, remain common. What happens to them, and to the species that already are endangered, depends on what we humans choose to do in the next decades.

The future for our fish and wildlife depends on all of us working together. There's a blueprint in place: the Florida Wildlife Legacy Initiative. I believe Floridians will look back at this initiative as a defining moment in wildlife management in Florida. Unlike many programs, this initiative uses no regulations or rules to force people to behave one way or another. It is built on the belief that people – businesses, environmental groups, developers and landowners – will step forward in a spirit of good will to turn this blueprint into reality. Get ready, Florida. We'll be calling on you for help in the near future. **FW**