

SOUTH FLORIDA

APRIL 20 - 29, 2010

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Many birds that call South Florida home are found nowhere else north of Mexico or the Caribbean. For this reason, birders looking to build their ABA list arrive each year with the same targets in mind. Florida also has an abundance of more widespread birds that are easily seen there, as well as several subspecies of widespread birds that occur only in Florida. We had a wonderful trip this year and were able to find almost all of these species and subspecies, while enjoying some fine weather and taking in quite a bit of the real Florida that most general tourists never see.

Our trip began with a search for what has become the last-known Smooth-billed Ani in Florida. This species used to be fairly common and widespread in Florida, but its numbers have been rapidly declining in recent years. For several years now the only consistently seen birds were in one spot in Fort Lauderdale, and for the last year there has only been a single bird. After about 30 minutes of searching, and just as we were about to leave, we found it...sitting on a dumpster. Oh well, it didn't take away from our excitement and enjoyment of what was a life bird for most of the group.

Soon afterward we found ourselves at one of our most memorable birding destinations—Wakodahatchee Wetlands. As we walked the boardwalks at this Rolls Royce of a sewage pond, we were repeatedly stopped by one breathtaking discovery after another. Green Herons, Tricolored Herons, Glossy Ibis, and Mottled Ducks were all within a few feet of us in the morning light. Then we began seeing birds like Purple Gallinule, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Sora, and Roseate Spoonbill. The real highlights came when first we found a Least Bittern pair tending their nest (only 15 feet away!), and then a shrieking Limpkin came flying right toward us and landed in the marsh nearby.

The next day found us exploring the sparsely populated prairies and woodlands north and west of Lake Okeechobee. Our targets for this day were the endemic Florida Scrub-Jay, the range-restricted Short-tailed Hawk, and the always elusive Bachman's Sparrow. Our day began as we searched the edge of the Venus Flatwoods Preserve, and though we heard one or two very distant singing Bachman's Sparrows, they were nowhere to be seen. We were hardly bothered by this though, as we were enjoying wonderful views of Red-headed Woodpeckers, Eastern Bluebirds, and Northern Bobwhite. As we continued on, we got our first views of Swallow-tailed Kites. These elegant and striking raptors never fail to impress, and it seemed like we never went more than about 20 minutes between sightings.

As the morning was turning to day, we noticed the vultures starting to soar and knew that now was the time for Short-tailed Hawk. These hawks spend most of the day soaring high above the forest, searching for their avian prey in the tree tops below; the best time to see them is when they are first rising up out of their overnight roosts. As we wandered down a bucolic back road through the woods, we were enjoying a nice variety of butterflies and dragonflies and being serenaded by White-eyed Vireos and Carolina Wrens, when a

Short-tailed Hawk suddenly appeared right above us. It was an adult dark-morph bird, and it gave us a fantastic view as it circled low above us. This was by far the best view I've ever had on this tour. We later found a second bird, a light-morph this time, that gave us equally good views.

Buoyed by our success with the Short-tailed Hawk, we tried another formerly productive spot for Bachman's Sparrow. Though the sun had risen high and the day was warming, we soon found a singing bird quite close to the road. We all enjoyed fantastic scope views as it watched us from a partially obscured perch where it obviously felt concealed and safe.

Our final target bird of the day would not require nearly as much hard work or luck. Though the Florida Scrub-Jay is listed as an endangered species, it is still common and conspicuous in good habitat. Soon after our search began we found a very cooperative bird right on the side of the road. We all piled out of the vans and were a little surprised as the bird flew directly up to us. Soon it was foraging on the ground right at our feet. Clearly this bird was accustomed to humans, and we thoroughly enjoyed our experience with it.

The rest of our tour of South Florida was filled with more fantastic birds and more unique Florida experiences. From Red-cockaded Woodpeckers and the incomparable Corkscrew Swamp near Naples to Snail Kites and the wonder of the Everglades near Homestead, to the dizzying array of introduced species inhabiting the Miami area, and to the Black-whiskered Vireos and White-crowned Pigeons of the tropical hardwood hammocks of the Keys, it was an amazing trip that will provide years of memories and many new checks on the life list.

ITINERARY:

April 20 - Tour orientation and dinner at Sal's

April 21 - Fort Lauderdale Airport/Old Griffin Road, Wakodahatchee Wetlands, Green Cay Wetlands, Everglades Agricultural Area, Clewiston where we checked out the view of Lake Okeechobee before checking in; dinner at the Clewiston Inn.

April 22 - Birding west and north of Lake Okeechobee on highways 27, 29, 74, and 731; we spent time at Venus Flatwood Preserve, Fisheating Creek Campground, Sheppard Rd before heading for lunch in Lake Placid. Afternoon birding near Archbold Biological Station before returning to Clewiston.

April 23 - Morning walk at Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary then an afternoon trip to Tigertail Beach on Marco Island; dinner at Swan River (received several votes for best Key Lime Pie).

April 24 - Dawn search for RCW's on the outskirts of Naples where development is shockingly destroying endangered species habitat. Next we visited Eagle Lakes

Community Park and the Fahka Union Canal before heading to Ochopee and Joanies Blue Crab Café for lunch. We took a jaunt down Loop Road to Sweetwater Strand then headed out the Tamiami Trail, stopping for stellar views of Snail Kite at Chief Osceola's.

April 25 - All day around Miami looking for exotics and rarities. We visited the neighborhoods around the Kendall Baptist Hospital, the University of Miami, a bank in East Coral Gables, Bill Baggs State Park, Pelican Harbor Seabird Station, Miami Springs, and finally the Cave Swallow colony in Cutler Ridge.

April 26 - Our day in Everglades National Park was interrupted by the passing of a powerful cold front that brought torrential rains and plenty of lightning - not good picnic weather. We made the best of it visiting the sawgrass prairies around Mahogany Hammock, Paurotis Pond, 9 Mile Pond, West Lake, Flamingo, the Coe Visitor Center, then we returned in the afternoon to visit Long Pine Key, Hidden Lake and Anhinga Trail. Dinner at Mutineer produced a strong contender for best Key Lime Pie. Optional owling return to the park after dinner.

April 27 - This morning we headed for the Keys with our birding being centered around North Key Largo and Dagny Johnson Key Largo Hammock Botanical State Park. Picnic lunch at Harry Harris Park before visiting Audubon's Tavernier Science Center, The Wreck (Key Lime Pie stop), the Marathon Airport, Marathon Gov. Center, and the 7 Mile Bridge before pulling into Key West. Post dinner nighthawking at Key West airport.

April 28 - Morning birding in the Lower Keys with stops at Lower Sugarloaf / Saddlebunch Keys, No Name Key and Key West's Indigenous Park.

April 29 - Departures for home (except for those continuing to the Tortugas).

BIRDLIST

Note: Species appearing in **bold print** are birds of special note that are either rare, local specialties, or are otherwise generally hard to find. The taxonomic order and nomenclature follows American Ornithologist Union Check-list of North American Birds, 7th edition (including 47th suppl.).

Abbreviations:

ENP: Everglades National Park
WW: Wakodahatchee Wetlands
GC: Green Caye
LO: Lake Okeechobee
CW: Cutler Wetlands

WATERFOWL

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck - great views at WW and GC (Lipstick Duck)
(Muscovy Duck) - This species is considered to be an established exotic in Florida, but does not count for your ABA list (by most accounts anyway).

Mottled Duck - we had great looks at WW and GC seen almost daily on the mainland

Blue-winged Teal - nice close pair at WW

PHEASANTS, GROUSE AND ALLIES

Wild Turkey - near LO

NEW WORLD QUAIL

Northern Bobwhite - superb scope views at Venus Flatwoods Preserve

GREBES

Pied-billed Grebe

GANNETS & BOOBIES

Red-footed Booby - this bird was released from rehab several months ago and is said to be no longer under human care, but continues to roost at the rehab center. We had excellent views from close range, but is it countable? I've heard persuasive arguments both ways...

Northern Gannet - we saw a few distant birds off Tigertail Beach

PELICANS

American White Pelican - flight views on our drive to Clewiston

Brown Pelican - mostly coastal, but a few also at LO

CORMORANTS

Double-crested Cormorant - seen almost daily

DARTERS

Anhinga - seen most days including *ugly* babies at WW and ENP

FRIGATEBIRDS

Magnificent Frigatebird - best views at Tigertail

BITTERN & HERONS

Least Bittern - Fantastic looks at WW where we found a pair tending a nest; these birds came in third in our favorite bird vote

Great Blue Heron - many close looks, including nesting birds and huge chicks at WW
(Great White Heron) - a few in ENP the keys, this used to be considered a separate species, but is now considered to be a subspecies that only has a white morph

(Wurdemann's Heron) - a couple in the Lower Keys, this is the intergrade between Great Blue and Great White

Great Egret
Snowy Egret
Little Blue Heron - white ones and blue ones and blue-and-white ones...
Tricolored Heron - great looks, especially at WW where a couple were in electric colors
Reddish Egret - dark morph birds on Marco Island and ENP, these guys are
uncommon and restricted to salt water habitats
Cattle Egret
Green Heron
Black-crowned Night-Heron
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron - first bird of the trip, a pair building a nest at the ani spot

IBISES & SPOONBILLS

White Ibis - an odd sight feeding in front yards and perched on power lines, but this
species has become quite accustomed to suburbia in South Florida
Glossy Ibis - best at WW and GC
Roseate Spoonbill - a young bird at WW was a surprise, and we saw several gorgeous
adults in ENP including one on its nest

STORKS

Wood Stork - best views were in ENP, especially at Paurotis Pond

NEW WORLD VULTURES

Black Vulture - abundant on the mainland, absent from the keys
Turkey Vulture - seen daily in direct comparison with the former species

HAWKS, EAGLES, & KITES

Osprey - we saw a few...hundred! this was an every day bird
Swallow-tailed Kite - such a graceful flyer and such a striking bird.
Snail Kite - voted favorite bird of the trip, we had a wonderful experience with a
foraging female along Tamiami Trail
Bald Eagle - young birds at Venus Flatwoods
Cooper's Hawk - this bird is expanding its breeding range into South Florida probably in
response to the abundance of Eurasian Collared-Doves
Broad-winged Hawk - a young bird in Marathon was late for this species
Red-shouldered Hawk - the most common hawk in South Florida, the resident race
(*extimus*) is distinctively pale, especially on the head
Short-tailed Hawk - best views ever on this tour, we had two sightings, one light morph
and one dark morph near Fisheating Creek
Red-tailed Hawk - three on our first day was unusual

FALCONS & CARACARAS

Crested Caracara - several around LO
Merlin - we saw a couple of brown streaks
Peregrine Falcon - a single bird in a sod field on day one

RAILS & COOTS

Sora - we couldn't have had better views, a bird at WW walked around in the open practically at our feet!

Purple Gallinule - point blank looks at this stunner at WW

Common Moorhen - seen most days

American Coot

LIMPKIN

Limpkin - fun view at WW where one flew right at us calling, then called for the rest of the morning

CRANES

Sandhill Crane - several around LO

PLOVERS & LAPWINGS

Black-bellied Plover

Wilson's Plover - their big honkin' bill is distinctive, a couple at Tigertail Beach allowed very close views

Semipalmated Plover - dark back, orange legs

Piping Plover - light back, orange legs, seen with the other small plovers at Tigertail

Killdeer - seen or heard almost every day

STILTS & AVOCETS

Black-necked Stilt - seen most days, a male incubating a nest at WW was a special treat

SANDPIPERS

Spotted Sandpiper - a few scattered individuals

Solitary Sandpiper - two at WW

Greater Yellowlegs

Willet - We saw "Western Willet" which is the common wintering form in FL

Lesser Yellowlegs - WW

Upland Sandpiper - heard only, we heard one calling in flight at dusk in Key West

Marbled Godwit - a few birds on the shore at Flamingo

Ruddy Turnstone - Tigertail and Flamingo

Sanderling - a few on the beaches

Semipalmated Sandpiper - on the beach and in a field near ENP

Western Sandpiper - a few to compare with the shorter billed semis

Least Sandpiper - Tigertail

White-rumped Sandpiper - a few in a flock of Semi's near ENP

Dunlin - several looking sharp in breeding plumage

Short-billed Dowitcher - at the beach

GULLS, TERNS, & SKIMMERS

Laughing Gull - the common gull of SFL

Ring-billed Gull - a few in parking lots

Least Tern - common and widespread
Caspian Tern - LO and ENP
Royal Tern - the most common tern in South Florida
Black Skimmer - brief flight views at the Clewiston Walmart

PIGEONS & DOVES

Rock Pigeon

White-crowned Pigeon - lots of flight views before we finally got one in the scope in Key West

Eurasian Collared-Dove - ubiquitous in South Florida, the origin of their U.S. invasion

White-winged Dove - many in urban areas

Mourning Dove - seen daily

Common Ground-Dove - we had several sightings of these cute little guys

PARROTS

Monk Parakeet - from southern South America and present in FL since the 60's, their huge bulky stick nests were quite impressive, we had excellent looks in Kendall

(Black-hooded Parakeet) - not officially countable yet, but maybe soon, we had a few flybys on our first morning and in Miami

(Mitre Parakeet) - another one from South America, present in FL since the 80's, these are not yet "countable", we had a couple flocks in Kendall

White-winged Parakeet - present since the mid-40's, from South America and formerly considered conspecific with the following species and known as Canary-winged Parakeet; after the split, this one was considered "countable"; we had one uncooperative bird that was only seen well by a few in the group

(Yellow-chevroned Parakeet) - a couple of distant flying birds in Kendall; on the ABA list, but not on any state list, go figure...

CUCKOOS

Yellow-billed Cuckoo - great views perched bird in the Keys

Smooth-billed Ani - there was only one left in Fort Lauderdale and we eventually found it in prime habitat...sitting on a dumpster.

OWLS

Eastern Screech-Owl - heard in ENP, then great views in the Keys

Burrowing Owl - the Florida race, a pair in prairie habitat near LO

Barred Owl - nice views of two begging fledglings in ENP

NIGHTJARS & ALLIES

Common Nighthawk - great views both flying and perched

Antillean Nighthawk - heard well and seen well, just not all at the same time...

Chuck-will's-widow - great views sitting on the road in ENP

SWIFTS

Chimney Swift - best in Clewiston around the Inn

HUMMINGBIRDS

Ruby-throated Hummingbird - a couple of females still lingering

WOODPECKERS

Red-headed Woodpecker - great looks in Venus

Red-bellied Woodpecker - everywhere

Downy Woodpecker - several heard a few seen

Red-cockaded Woodpecker - at least one showed very well for us in a patch Long-leaf Pine flatwoods near Naples that was in the process of being bisected by a huge road and probably ruined; very sad

Pileated Woodpecker - great views near LO and in Big Cypress

TYRANT FLYCATCHERS

La Sagra's Flycatcher - we heard its distinctive call a couple of times, but despite a significant effort we could never see it at Bill Baggs State Park

Great Crested Flycatcher - fairly common

Eastern Kingbird - a few scattered sightings

Gray Kingbird - fairly common, especially in coastal areas

SHRIKES

Loggerhead Shrike - quite common in South Florida, especially compared to the Northeast where they have almost disappeared; we watched one fiercely guarding at territory at Eagle Lakes

VIREOS

White-eyed Vireo - we saw and heard several, including the drab "Keys White-eyed Vireo" *Vireo griseus maynardi*

Blue-headed Vireo - for some at Fisheating Creek

Red-eyed Vireo - common migrant in the Keys

Black-whiskered Vireo - great looks once we got to the Keys

CROWS & JAYS

Blue Jay - common and widespread

Florida Scrub-Jay - superb views around LO

American Crow - mostly in the interior and Everglades

Fish Crow - these usually stay along the coasts, or near large bodies of water

SWALLOWS

Purple Martin - many around martin houses

Tree Swallow - a few late migrants

Northern Rough-winged Swallow - a couple around LO

Bank Swallow - in the Keys

Cave Swallow - point blank views of birds in their nests in Cutler Ridge, the nominate race *fulva* breeds throughout the Caribbean and is only found in the ABA area in South Florida

Barn Swallow - common and widespread

CHICKADEES & TITS

Tufted Titmouse

NUTHATCHES

Brown-headed Nuthatch - briefly near Venus, then nice views at Corkscrew

WRENS

Carolina Wren - best at Fisheating Creek

House Wren

BULBULS

Red-whiskered Bulbul - escaped from an aviary in the early sixties; this Southeast Asian species has not spread from the Kendall area; careful planning and astute navigating led to our success...

GNATCATCHERS

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher - several in the interior where they breed and at least one migrant

THRUSHES

Eastern Bluebird - NW of Lake Okeechobee, and a family group in ENP

Veery - a couple in the Keys

Gray-cheeked Thrush - same as the former

Swainson's Thrush - one with the other thrushes on Sugarloaf

Wood Thrush - part of the keys thrush show

MOCKINGBIRDS & THRASHERS

Gray Catbird - seen almost daily

Northern Mockingbird - the state bird, seen daily

Brown Thrasher - best at the Clewiston Inn

MYNAS & STARLINGS

European Starling

Common Myna - native to the Middle East, India and Southeast Asia this species has been introduced widely throughout the world; it has been seen in Florida since the mid-80's and is the most recently added countable exotic for Florida, they are getting more common each year; we saw many

(Hill Myna) - seemed to be increasing in the 70's and 80's but numbers have declined, and they are not considered countable

WAXWINGS

Cedar Waxwing - scattered flocks

WOOD WARBLERS

Northern Parula - many seen, including breeding birds at Fisheating Creek

Cape May Warbler - at least a couple of striking adult males

Black-throated Blue Warbler - fairly common migrants

Black-throated Green Warbler - one at Fisheating Creek

Pine Warbler - nice views in ENP

Prairie Warbler - we saw migrants as well as the resident "Florida Prairie Warbler"

Palm Warbler - "Western Palm Warbler" is the form that winters in South Florida

Blackpoll Warbler - a fairly common migrant

Black-and-white Warbler - scattered migrants

American Redstart - lots of good looks at these flashy warblers

Prothonotary Warbler - a migrant at Fisheating Creek

Worm-eating Warbler - one at Bill Baggs and one in Key West on the last morning

Northern Waterthrush - great views at Bill Baggs

Common Yellowthroat - seen almost daily

TANAGERS & ALLIES

Summer Tanager - a young male in the Keys

Scarlet Tanager - a gorgeous adult male in Key Largo at lunch

SPARROWS & ALLIES

Eastern Towhee - our best look was at a female in ENP; this is the "white-eyed" race

Bachman's Sparrow - great views right the side of the road

Seaside Sparrow - we had distant views of the endangered "Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow" in ENP, this is the only race that breeds in freshwater wetlands

CARDINALS & ALLIES

Northern Cardinal - everywhere but Key West where they are scarce

Rose-breasted Grosbeak - males and females in the Keys

Indigo Bunting - ENP and the Keys

Painted Bunting - a couple of females; alas the males had all headed north already

BLACKBIRDS & ALLIES

Red-winged Blackbird - everywhere

Eastern Meadowlark - several nice view of singing birds

Common Grackle - smaller with a yellow eye

Boat-tailed Grackle - long tails and dark eyes

Shiny Cowbird - this species has spread from South America through the Caribbean and was feared to be invading Florida when it first arrived in the mid-80's; so far it hasn't had a major impact in Florida as it just shows up in small numbers each spring; we found three males in Flamingo

Bronzed Cowbird - nice views of males and females at Eagle Lakes

Brown-headed Cowbird

Orchard Oriole - Key West

Spot-breasted Oriole - This introduced species is one of the prettiest countable exotics of South Florida and often the most challenging to find. We were about to throw in the towel when Donna spotted one in a tree top and we eventually all got great looks at an adult and an immature bird

OLD WORLD SPARROWS

House Sparrow

BUTTERFLIES

Polydamas Swallowtail (*Battus polydamas*)

Zebra Swallowtail (*Eurytides marcellus*)

Giant Swallowtail (*Papilio cresphontes*)

Palamedes Swallowtail (*Papilio palamedes*)

Eastern Tiger Swallowtail (*Papilio glaucus*)

Great Southern White (*Ascia monuste*)

Large Orange Sulphur (*Phoebis agarithe*)

Mallow Scrub-Hairstreak (*Strymon istapa*)

Gulf Fritillary (*Agraulis vanillae*)

Julia Heliconian (*Dryas julia*)

Zebra Heliconian (*Heliconius charitonia*)

Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*)

Common Buckeye (*Junonia coenia*)

White Peacock (*Anartia jatrophae*)

Ruddy Daggerwing (*Marpesia petreus*)

Monarch (*Danaus plexippus*)

Queen (*Danaus gilippus*)

Mangrove Skipper (*Phocides pigmalion*)

OTHER CRITTERS

DRAGONFLIES

Regal Darner (*Coryphaeschna ingens*)

Four-spotted Pennant (*Brachymesia gravida*)

Halloween Pennant (*Celithemis eponina*)

Banded Pennant (*Celithemis fasciata*)

Great Pondhawk (*Erythemis vesiculosa*)

Needham's Skimmer (*Libellula needhami*)

Blue Dasher (*Pachydiplax longipennis*)

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

American Crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*) an endangered species, we were lucky to see one in the Flamingo Marina

American Alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*) we saw some big'uns

Florida Cooter (*Pseudemys floridana*)

Florida Redbelly Turtle (*Pseudemys nelsoni*)

Florida Softshell (*Apalone ferox*)

Green Anole (*Anolis carolinensis*) the pet store chameleon, a native that is being out competed by the following

Brown Anole (*Anolis sagrei*) an exotic that is becoming abundant

Bark Anole (*Norops distichus*)

Green Iguana (*Iguana iguana*) fairly common in South Florida, an exotic

Black Racer (*Coluber constrictor*)

Banded Watersnake (*Nerodia fasciata*)

Pig Frog (*Rana grylio*)

Marine/Cane Toad (*Bufo marinus*)

MAMMALS

Marsh Rabbit (*Sylvilagus palustris*) - still hanging on at Wakodahatchee where the pythons haven't found them yet

Eastern Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*)

Hispid Cottonrat (*Sigmodon hispidus*)

River Otter (*Lontra canadensis*) - Wow! We had an amazing look at one loping down Loop Road

Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*) - including the small pale race of the keys

Atlantic Bottle-nosed Dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*)

White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) - both the regular mainland type and the diminutive "Key Deer" of Big Pine Key

FISH

Florida Gar