

SOUTH FLORIDA

APRIL 21 - MAY 1, 2009

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Leader: Brennan Mulrooney

It was the last morning of our tour and the pressure was on. We had two big target birds left to find and only half a day's birding to find them. The previous night we had only a glimpse of an Antillean Nighthawk as it rocketed past in high winds, never to return. It was because of this that we found ourselves driving in the pre-dawn darkness to a spot that I hoped would give us a better look at this highly sought South Florida specialty. I knew the birds were there, but I'd never tried for them at dawn; we just crossed our fingers and hoped. As we island-hopped our way up the keys from Key West to Marathon, we passed through several areas of rain showers. This was the first rain we had seen on the tour and it was a great sign. All of South Florida had been in a drought and the lack of rains had really been affecting the bird activity. So rain was good, as long as it wasn't raining in Marathon where our nighthawks were. As luck would have it, the weather was clear and we arrived as dawn was just breaking. We had to wait a few tense minutes as the sky began to brighten, but soon we had a very cooperative Antillean Nighthawk diving just over our heads, giving its distinctive "pity-pa-tit!" call. What a start! And what a relief! Now it was time to head back toward Key West and find out if the rains would pay off for us.

Thus far we had failed in our efforts to see the infamous Mangrove Cuckoo. This was frustrating, but not all that surprising given the difficulty that species usually presents. The dry and windy conditions we had been dealing with played no small part in our lack of success, and we were anxious to give it another try now that (finally) there had been some rain. It's no secret that cuckoos become active after rain; in fact, one of their nicknames is Rain Crow, and less than five minutes into our search we had one living up to its reputation. We could hear it calling, back in the mangrove forest, and soon enough we were enjoying knockout views of this highly elusive species. This is consistently one of the most difficult-to-find birds on any North American tour, and we were elated to be getting such good looks. After the dancing and high-fives had subsided, we decided that what this cake needed now was some icing.

Just a few days earlier a male Western Spindalis (formerly known as Stripe-headed Tanager) had been discovered in Key West, and now, with all of our target species accounted for, we could focus our efforts on finding this gorgeous Bahamian vagrant. When we arrived at the park where it was being seen, we were greeted by a host of migrant and resident birds. So while we tried to stay focused on the spindalis, we enjoyed the distraction being provided by birds like Broad-winged Hawk, White-crowned Pigeon, Black-whiskered Vireo, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Prairie Warbler, and Worm-eating Warbler. When we didn't find the spindalis in the *Ficus* tree we knew it to be frequenting, I decided it must be off in a bush somewhere, dozing until it was ready to feast again. But the clock was ticking, and we didn't have time to wait for napping birds, so I decided to go see if I could find it. Luckily for me, I had a pretty good idea of where

to look, and soon we were all enjoying superb close views of the Western Spindalis having his mid-morning siesta. What a way to cap a tour!

This was just the last morning of an already fantastic tour that encompassed the whole southern third of the Florida peninsula. We saw white powder-sand beaches, tropical hardwood hammocks, cypress swamps, mangrove forests, sawgrass prairies, oak and pine woodlands, and some magnificent man-made wetlands. We amassed an impressive list of birds along the way including Magnificent Frigatebird, Least Bittern, "Great White Heron," Reddish Egret, Roseate Spoonbill, Wood Stork, over 40 Swallow-tailed Kites, Short-tailed Hawk, Purple Gallinule, Limpkin, "Florida Burrowing Owl," Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Gray Kingbird, "Keys White-eyed Vireo," Florida Scrub-Jay, "West Indian Cave Swallow," "Cuban Yellow Warbler," "Florida Prairie Warbler," "Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow," and Shiny Cowbird.

ITINERARY:

April 21 - Tour orientation and dinner at Sal's

April 22 - Fort Lauderdale Airport/Old Griffin Road, Wakodahatchee Wetlands, Green Cay Wetlands, Everglades Agricultural Area, Clewiston via the Miami Canal, dinner at the Clewiston Inn.

April 23 - Birding west and north of Lake Okeechobee on highways 27, 29, 74, and 731 before stopping at Fisheating Creek Campground, more roadside hawk searching before heading for lunch in Lake Placid. Afternoon birding near Archbold Biological Station and birding along Sheppard Rd before returning to Clewiston.

April 24 - Early morning return to Venus/Palmdale area for the dawn cow chorus and to search for an invisible sparrow before heading to Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. Lunch in Naples at the Boston Beer Garden. Afternoon birding at Eagle Lakes County Park, dinner at Swan River (voted best restaurant and best Key Lime Pie!).

April 25 - Dawn search for RCW's on the outskirts of Naples followed by birding at Tigertail Beach (Marco Island). Lunch at the Snook Inn, followed by birding on Shell Island Rd (Rookery Bay). Late afternoon birding at the Conservancy of Southwest Florida, return to Swan River for dinner.

April 26 - Morning at Fort Myers Beach (Little Estero Lagoon) then on down to the Tamiami Trail with a Manatee search at Faka Union Canal; we then drove Loop Road (94) through the Big Cypress National Preserve with a fantastic stop at Sweetwater Strand; we stopped for Snail Kites at the 40 mile bend of the Tamiami Trail, then headed to back into civilization; we stopped at Cutler Ridge for Cave Swallows Cutler Wetlands for waterbirds, then into Florida City. Dinner was in our private dining nook at Capri.

April 27 - All day birding neighborhoods of the greater Miami and Fort Lauderdale areas. We started in residential Kendall then headed north stopping near MIA then on to Miami Springs. After lunch we returned to the ani spot and got skunked again. We checked ponds in Pembroke Pines before returning to FL City.

April 28 – Pre-dawn owling before spending all day in Everglades National Park. We started with Cape Sable Seaside Sparrows near Mahogany Hammock, then stopped at Paurotis Pond and West Lake before birding the Flamingo area (marina, Eco Pond, picnic area). Next was Bear Lake Trail followed by blood donations on Snake Bight Trail then back up to Royal Palm where we walked the Anhinga Trail before stopping at the Coe Visitor Center. Dinner was at the charming White Lion Café.

April 29 - Morning drive to the keys with a picnic breakfast at the Port Bougainville entrance to Dagny Johnson Key Largo Hammock Botanical State Park (got that?). Next was John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park then lunch at Snappers. Post-lunch birding was around Lake Edna (Grassy Key), the Marathon airport and Government Center, the Seven Mile Bridge, then at Key West's Fort Zachary Taylor State Park. Dinner was at Turtle Kraals then nighthawking at the airport and Stock Island.

April 30 – Desperation pre-dawn nighthawk run was a great success and the overnight rain had the cuckoos crowing on Sugarloaf Key. The rest of the morning's birding was at the Key West Botanical Gardens, Indigenous Park and Fort Zachary Taylor State Park. Lunch at the Rusty Anchor then finishing up at the Key West Country Club (on Stock Is). Dinner at the Café!

May 1 - 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 - a sleeping pair at WW

(Muscovy Duck) - This species is considered to be an established exotic in Florida, but does not count for your ABA list.

Wood Duck – flybys on our day around LO

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

Blue-winged Teal – CW and Key West

Northern Shoveler – a few at CW

PHEASANTS, GROUSE AND ALLIES

Wild Turkey - near LO

NEW WORLD QUAIL

Northern Bobwhite – unfortunately heard only, but we heard several near LO

GREBES

Pied-billed Grebe – an adult feeding babies at WW

PELICANS

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 - first around Miami then many in the Keys

BITTERN & HERONS

Least Bittern - Fantastic looks at WW

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

Great Egret – slightly smaller and slimmer than the former

Snowy Egret – surprisingly scarce this year

Little Blue Heron - white ones and blue ones and blue-and-white ones...

Tricolored Heron – great looks, especially at WW and GC

Reddish Egret – both white and dark morph birds on Marco Island, these guys are uncommon and restricted to salt water habitats

Cattle Egret – common and widespread

Green Heron - many fantastic close views

Black-crowned Night-Heron – ENP only

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron – a gorgeous adult south of LO

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 – nice views of adults and branchlings at Paurotis Pond in ENP

STORKS

Wood Stork – it was days before we saw them on the ground, but we finally got good views along loop road and saw many nesting in ENP

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. We saw over 40, mostly on our day around LO

Snail Kite - we enjoyed scope views of perched and flying birds on the Tamiami Trail as we relaxed under the new palapa at the 40 mile bend

Bald Eagle – several at scattered locations; a nest on Marco Is was nice

Northern Harrier – mostly in the Everglades Agricultural Area

Sharp-shinned Hawk - 1 in Key West

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 Key West 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 - These birds are always a challenge in the breeding season, after much scanning we finally got on a soaring dark morph bird near Fisheating Creek

Red-tailed Hawk – our three sightings were the most I've ever had on this tour, an adult in Key West was very unexpected

FALCONS & CARACARAS

Crested Caracara - around LO, and in a field of rotten tomatoes near Immokalee

American Kestrel – a lingering winter bird, usually gone by this time

Merlin – a single bird in Key West

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, babies at WW

American Coot – only at CW

LIMPKIN

Limpkin - great looks at GC, even better at 40 mile bend while we watched Snail Kites

CRANES

Sandhill Crane - several around LO, even joining the cow chorus

PLOVERS & LAPWINGS

Black-bellied Plover - several in breeding plumage

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

Semipalmated Plover - dark back, orange legs

Killdeer – seen or heard almost every day

STILTS & AVOCETS

Black-necked Stilt – seen most days

American Avocet – a few at CW

SANDPIPERS

Spotted Sandpiper – a few scattered individuals

Solitary Sandpiper – same story as the spotted

Greater Yellowlegs - CW

Willet - We saw many “Western Willets” along the beaches and probably one “Eastern Willet” that looked smaller and darker with a shorter bill.

Lesser Yellowlegs – just a few around Miami and the keys

Whimbrel – a single sneaky bird at Tigertail

Ruddy Turnstone – a few on the beaches

Sanderling – several on the beaches

Semipalmated Sandpiper – on the beaches

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

Least Sandpiper – the most common peep

Dunlin – a couple of late birds in breeding plumage

Stilt Sandpiper - CW

Short-billed Dowitcher - at the beach

GULLS, TERNS, & SKIMMERS

Laughing Gull – the common gull of SFL

Ring-billed Gull – a few in parking lots

Lesser Black-backed Gull – we had one at Flamingo

Least Tern – common and widespread

Caspian Tern – just a few

Royal Tern - the most common tern in South Florida

Sandwich Tern – flybys at FMB

Black Skimmer - a large flock took flight at their Wal Mart colony in Clewiston

PIGEONS & DOVES

Rock Pigeon

White-crowned Pigeon - first in Kendall, then seen well again 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 (Mitre Parakeet) - another one from South America, present in FL since the 80's, these are not yet "countable"; we had a small flock in Kendall
White-winged Parakeet - present since the mid-40's, from South American and formerly considered conspecific with the following species and known as Canary-winged Parakeet; after the split, this one was considered "countable"; we had a couple of distant flybys, but never found one perched

CUCKOOS

Yellow-billed Cuckoo - a couple of flybys at WW
Mangrove Cuckoo – this bird lived up to its reputation as one of the hardest birds to see in the ABA area. It had been a very dry winter and spring and these guys like rain. We didn't even get a whiff on our first attempts, but then a brief overnight shower in the lower keys did the trick and we found a very cooperative bird on our last morning.

OWLS

Barn Owl – there was at least one in a cypress stand south of LO, but we only got flight views
Eastern Screech-Owl – superb looks in ENP
Burrowing Owl – the Florida race, right outside the van window on Marco Island
Barred Owl – awesome walk-away views on Loop Road, we shared it with several strange non-birder types

NIGHTJARS & ALLIES

Common Nighthawk – several in the daytime at scattered locations
Antillean Nighthawk – we got blown out in Key West, but the next morning we scored back up at Marathon airport
Chuck-will's-widow – great views in flight and sitting on the road in ENP

SWIFTS

Chimney Swift – best in Clewiston around the Inn

WOODPECKERS

Red-headed Woodpecker - great looks in Venus and Naples
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
Pileated Woodpecker - great views near LO and in Big Cypress

TYRANT FLYCATCHERS

Great Crested Flycatcher – fairly common, one at a most unexpected nest cavity
Eastern Kingbird - a few scattered sightings
Gray Kingbird – great views in Fort Lauderdale then again in the keys

SHRIKES

Loggerhead Shrike - quite common in South Florida, especially compared to the Northeast where they have almost disappeared; we saw one feeding nestlings at Eagle Lakes

VIREOS

White-eyed Vireo - we saw and heard several, including the “Keys White-eyed Vireo”
Yellow-throated Vireo - one in Naples
Red-eyed Vireo - Big Cypress on Loop Rd
Black-whiskered Vireo – great looks in Kendall distracted us from the pain of looking for exotics, we also saw them in ENP and 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
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 – we saw the southernmost breeding population in Big Cypress

NUTHATCHES

Brown-headed Nuthatch – nice views of a pair a Corkscrew

WRENS

Carolina Wren - easier heard than seen...

BULBULS

Red-whiskered Bulbul - escaped from an aviary in the early sixties; this Southeast Asian species has not spread from the Kendall area where we had distant looks at two

GNATCATCHERS

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher – several in the interior where they breed

THRUSHES

Eastern Bluebird - NW of Lake Okeechobee

Veery – one in Naples

Gray-cheeked Thrush – a single bird on Loop Rd was a surprise

Wood Thrush – a single bird at Fort Zach was nice

MOCKINGBIRDS & THRASHERS

Gray Catbird - seen almost daily

Northern Mockingbird - the state bird, seen daily

Brown Thrasher – at the Clewiston Inn and near LO

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

WAXWINGS

Cedar Waxwing – a big flock in Kendall

WOOD WARBLERS

Northern Parula - many seen, including breeding birds at Corkscrew

Yellow Warbler - the “Cuban Yellow Warbler” *Dendroica petechia gundlachi* is a common breeder in Florida Bay and we found a very responsive pair at Flamingo, this would be called “Golden Warbler” if split in the future

Magnolia Warbler – a few scattered migrants

Cape May Warbler – anywhere we found fruiting *Ficus*

Black-throated Blue Warbler - fairly common migrants

Black-throated Green Warbler – one in ENP

Pine Warbler - on the breeding grounds near Okeechobee and in Naples

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 – seen almost every day

American Redstart - lots of good looks at these flashy warblers

Worm-eating Warbler – one in Key West on the last morning

Ovenbird - first in Naples, then more in the Keys

Northern Waterthrush – great looks at Corkscrew where one was already in full song
Kentucky Warbler – a real surprise at Corkscrew, this is a fairly scarce migrant
Common Yellowthroat – seen almost daily

TANAGERS & ALLIES

Western Spindalis – a male of the black-backed Bahamian race *zena* showed well for us
in Key West, definitely a stunning bird and voted favorite of the trip. .

SPARROWS & ALLIES

Eastern Towhee - we had good looks at singing birds of the “white-eyed” race

Bachman’s Sparrow – unfortunately heard only this year

Seaside Sparrow - we saw the endangered “Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow” in ENP,
this is the only race that breeds in freshwater wetlands; we had spectacular looks
at an individual right next to the road

Swamp Sparrow – an uncommon wintering species in SFL, we had brief views of one in
Naples

CARDINALS & ALLIES

Northern Cardinal - everywhere but Key West where they are scarce

Indigo Bunting – ENP and the Keys

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 a nice male in Flamingo

Bronzed Cowbird - we were treated to the wonderful flight display of the males as they
hovered above a female and each other at Eagle Lakes

Brown-headed Cowbird

Orchard Oriole – a young male along Loop Rd was a surprise

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 two 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
Green Iguana (*Iguana iguana*) fairly common in South Florida, an exotic
Brown Basilisk (*Basiliscus vittatus*) – introduced, I was mistakenly calling these Striped Basilisk; these are the ones known as Jesus Christ Lizards
Six-lined Racerunner (*Cnemidophorus sexlineatus*)
Pig Frog (*Rana grylio*)

MAMMALS

Nine-banded Armadillo (*Dasypus novemcinctus*)
Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*) - including the small pale race of the keys
White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*)
Eastern Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*)
Marsh Rabbit (*Sylvilagus palustris*)
Atlantic Bottle-nosed Dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*)

FISH

Common Snook (*Centropomus undecimalis*)

Tarpon (*Megalops atlanticus*)