

SOUTH FLORIDA

APRIL 23 - MAY 3, 2007

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Leader: Brennan Mulrooney

The first day of our 2007 South Florida tour was one to remember. I knew from the outset that we had the chance to see a lot of great birds, including several that we might not see again during the rest of the tour. So there was a bit of trepidation mixed with our excitement as we set out that morning.

Our first stop was a quick check to see if we could locate the last chaseable Smooth-billed Ani left in Florida. They hadn't been seen for a few weeks, so I wasn't too surprised when we came up dry. I quickly refocused the group on the next task, locating a Western Spindalis (a rare visitor from the Bahamas) that had been frequenting a nearby cemetery. As we entered the neighborhood of the cemetery, we were stopped by a fly-by pair of Spot-breasted Orioles! I quickly parked the van and we all piled out, trying to keep our eyes on them. After several minutes of searching, we finally tracked them down in a gumbo limbo tree. We were getting great views when somebody asked, "Hey, isn't that the Spindalis?" And it was! We watched it for a brief moment and then the orioles chased it off. Though we had seen the bird land in a mango tree nearby, several minutes of waiting proved fruitless. And then it started to rain. I decided to run back for the van so we could wait out the rain shower and resume our search later, but by the time I returned with the van everybody was smiling and giving me thumbs up! As it turns out, the bird had emerged from the mango tree and sat out in the open at close range, allowing everybody fantastic views. I'd rather be lucky than good.

With our main morning target out of the way so quickly, I decided to try a nearby park where I had recently seen multiple Snail Kites. This bird can be difficult some years so I wanted to try early as insurance. Not only did we find 3 Snail Kites, but they were accompanied by a huge concentration of wading birds. We had 50 or more Wood Storks, large numbers of Great Egrets, Snowy Egrets, Tricolored and Little Blue herons, and several Purple Swamphens. The Swamphen is an introduced species (resembling a Purple Gallinule on steroids) that is rapidly expanding its range in South Florida and may soon be considered countable. To top it off, sitting out in the middle of the marsh with all the other birds was an immature Bald Eagle—what a sight!

Our next stop, Wakodahatchee Wetlands, was for many the highlight of the tour. This water reclamation facility (i.e. sewage pond) has become a must-see for birders visiting South Florida, and we saw plenty to justify this reputation. As we walked the boardwalk over the ponds, we were treated to an unforgettable show from several species of marsh birds that are usually much more difficult to observe. It all started with knockout looks at Purple Gallinule. This is one of the prettiest birds in North America, and to have one crawling around in the bulrushes and fire flag not 20 feet from us was quite a treat. We

would see several more before we completed our circuit. Next it was a Sora, again right out in the open and so close we almost couldn't focus our binoculars on it.

Soon our attention was drawn away by a group of photographers all in a cluster with their lenses pointed at a patch of bulrushes. We were astonished to find out that they were watching three fledgling Least Bitterns that had just emerged from their hidden nest and were periodically being fed by both parents! Again we were getting incredible views of a species that is usually very secretive and difficult to observe. From less than 20 feet away we watched as tiny, awkward, fluffy young tested their wobbly legs and scrambled to be fed when a parent would return; it was truly mind-blowing. After that, the nests full of Anhingas and other herons and egrets were just icing on the cake, but we really put the cherry on the top with a Limpkin that spoke up just as we were leaving. With a little effort and patience we were able to get excellent scope views as it sat quietly preening in the marsh.

Over the next eight days of birding we tallied a tremendous list of quality birds including Great White Heron (the white morph of Great Blue Heron), Reddish Egret, Roseate Spoonbill, Swallow-tailed Kite (20+ in one day), Short-tailed Hawk (light and dark morphs), Crested Caracara, Piping Plover, White-crowned Pigeon, Smooth-billed Ani (we found two on a second visit), Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Black-whiskered Vireo, Florida Scrub-Jay, Cave Swallow, Brown-headed Nuthatch, "Cuban Yellow Warbler" (a subspecies of Yellow Warbler, also known as Golden Warbler), Bachman's Sparrow, Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow (an endangered subspecies of Seaside Sparrow), and both Bronzed and Shiny cowbirds. It was quite a trip, but that first day was a doozy!

ITINERARY:

April 23 - Tour orientation and dinner at Sal's

April 24 - Fort Lauderdale Airport/Old Griffin Road, Evergreen Cemetery neighborhood, Markham County Park, Wakodahatchee Wetlands, lunch at Lenny's, Green Cay Wetlands, Hwy 880 to Clewiston, dinner at the Clewiston Inn.

April 25 - Birding west and north of Lake Okeechobee on highways 27, 29, 74, and 731 before stopping at Fisheating Creek Campground, then birded Sheppard Rd before heading for Lake Placid and lunch at the Tower. Afternoon birding along highways 621 and 98, stopping at Hickory Hammock, then returning south on 721 and 70, stopping again along 74 before returning to Clewiston.

April 26 - Morning drive along highways 833 and 846 to Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. Lunch in Naples at the Boston Beer Garden. Afternoon birding at the North County Water Reclamation Facility and Shell Island Rd in Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. Dinner at Pier 41.

April 27 - Dawn search for RCW's on the outskirts of Naples followed by birding along Goodland Rd and Tigertail Beach (Marco Island). Lunch at the Snook Inn, followed by birding along Greenway and Fritchey roads and at Eagle Lakes Mitigation Site. Dinner at Swan River.

April 28 - Morning at Fort Myers Beach (Little Estero Lagoon) then after lunch at Joanie's we drove Loop Road (94) through the Big Cypress National Preserve. We made a quick stop for Snail Kites at the 40 mile bend of the Tamiami Trail, then headed to Florida City. Dinner in our private dining nook (former location of the restrooms) at Capri. Post-dinner owling in Everglades National Park.

April 29 - Return trip to Fort Lauderdale for anis (success!) then birding at Evergreen Cemetery. Lunch at On the Border in Kendall, then birding in residential Kendall (across from the Baptist Hospital), Royal Palm Tennis Courts, Cutler Wetlands, and the Cave Swallows of Cutler Ridge. Dinner at the Mutineer.

April 30 - Dawn at Lucky Hammock (Frog Pond Wildlife Management Area) then all day in Everglades National Park. Started with Cape Sable Seaside Sparrows near Mahogany Hammock, then stopped at Paurotis Pond, West Lake (mangrove boardwalk), Flamingo (Eco Pond, picnic lunch), Pa-hay-okee Tower, Coe Visitor Center, then post picnic dinner birding along Anhinga Trail.

May 1 - Morning birding along Card Sound Rd, then along old hwy 905 on North Key Largo with stops at Carysfort Circle, and the Port Bougainville entrance to Dagny Johnson Key Largo Hammock Botanical State Park (got that?). Brief stops at my house and Audubon's Tavernier Science Center, lunch at The Wreck, birding around Lake Edna (Grassy Key), the Marathon Government Center, the Seven Mile Bridge, then evening birding on Key West at Fort Zachary Taylor State Park and the Key West Airport. Dinner at The Café.

May 2 - Morning birding on Geiger and Boca Chica Keys, then the remainder of the morning on Big Pine Key visiting Long Beach Rd, Key Deer Blvd, The Blue Hole, No Name Key (lunch at the No Name Pub), then finishing up at the Key West Tropical Forest and Botanical Gardens (on Stock Is). Dinner at Mangia Mangia.

May 3 - Departures for home (except everybody went 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

CW: Cutler Wetlands

FMB: Fort Myers Beach

WATERFOWL

(Muscovy Duck) - This species is considered to be an established exotic in Florida, but does not count for your ABA list. These birds bear little resemblance to their wild ancestors

Mottled Duck - we had great looks at WW (babies!) seen daily on the mainland

Blue-winged Teal - WW and elsewhere

Ring-necked Duck - Green Cay Wetlands

Red-breasted Merganser - Fort Myers Beach

GREBES

Pied-billed Grebe - Tamiami Trail and CW

GANNETS & BOOBIES

Northern Gannet - several off FMB and Tigertail

PELICANS

American White Pelican

Brown Pelican

CORMORANTS

Double-crested Cormorant

DARTERS

Anhinga - many fantastic looks with some birds in high breeding colors

FRIGATEBIRDS

Magnificent Frigatebird - first at Marco Island then many in the Keys

BITTERNS & HERONS

Least Bittern - Fantastic looks at WW where we saw both adults feeding three babies (!) that were just out of the nest.

Great Blue Heron - many close looks, including nesting birds and huge chicks at WW

(Great White Heron) - birds in ENP and also in 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

Snowy Egret

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

Tricolored Heron - great close looks at a nest with babies at WW

Reddish Egret - several in salt water habitats, including an immature white morph bird at Lake Edna that was a great quiz bird

Cattle Egret

Green Heron - many fantastic close views

Black-crowned Night-Heron

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron

IBISES & SPOONBILLS

White Ibis

Glossy Ibis

Roseate Spoonbill - Fantastic views of a flock in Little Estero Lagoon

STORKS

Wood Stork - perhaps best in a large flock at Markham Park

NEW WORLD VULTURES

Black Vulture

Turkey Vulture - seen daily in direct comparison with the former species

HAWKS, EAGLES, & KITES

Osprey - we saw a few...hundred! quite common in South Florida

Swallow-tailed Kite - we saw over 20 on our day around Lake Okechobee, such a stunningly graceful bird

Snail Kite - great views at Markham Park and again on the Tamiami Trail

Bald Eagle - adults and immatures

Northern Harrier

Cooper's Hawk

Red-shouldered Hawk - the most common hawk in South Florida, the resident race is distinctively pale, we had a great show from a young bird eating a snake just off the boardwalk at Corkscrew

Short-tailed Hawk - These birds are always a challenge in the breeding season. We had our first right at the last minute on our day around Lake Okeechobee (a light morph bird only seen by a couple of us) and then we found another one in Key West (a young dark morph bird) that everybody got to see (though at a distance).

FALCONS & CARACARAS

Crested Caracara - only around Lake Okeechobee

American Kestrel - mostly gone north

Merlin - a cooperative perched bird in ENP

Peregrine Falcon - an adult hunting at Eagle Lakes

RAILS & COOTS

King Rail - we probably heard 4 different birds calling at Anhinga Trail, but none would come out into view

Sora - we couldn't have had better views, a bird at WW walked around in the open practically at our feet!
(Purple Swamphen) - not yet "countable", but certainly thriving in the Everglades, we saw many at Markham Park
Purple Gallinule - point blank looks at this stunner at WW
Common Moorhen
American Coot

LIMPKIN

Limpkin - much easier than last year, we had one at WW then 7 more elsewhere

CRANES

Sandhill Crane - one of the coolest moments of the tour was watching one of these birds defending its nest from a small Alligator near Venus

PLOVERS & LAPWINGS

Black-bellied Plover
Wilson's Plover - seen well at Tigertail in comparison to the other small plovers
Semipalmated Plover - dark back, orange legs
Piping Plover - pale back, orange legs, great views of this endangered species
Killdeer

STILTS & AVOCETS

Black-necked Stilt - several, including some on nests
American Avocet - two at Eco Pond

SANDPIPERS

Spotted Sandpiper - including a super spotty one at Eco Pond
Solitary Sandpiper
Greater Yellowlegs - Eco Pond in direct comparison with the Lessers
Willet - We saw many "Western Willets" along the beaches and probably one "Eastern Willet" in flight in salt marsh habitat in the Lower Keys where they breed.
Lesser Yellowlegs - several in Eco Pond
Ruddy Turnstone
Sanderling - several in their very distinctive breeding plumage
Semipalmated Sandpiper
Western Sandpiper - Tigertail
Least Sandpiper
White-rumped Sandpiper - only at CW
Dunlin - great close looks at Eco Pond
Short-billed Dowitcher
Long-billed Dowitcher - Leader only at CW
Wilson's Snipe - knockout looks at WW

GULLS, TERNS, & SKIMMERS

Laughing Gull - copulating pair at Flamingo

Ring-billed Gull

Least Tern

Caspian Tern - good looks with the following at Flamingo

Forster's Tern - at WW and again in Flamingo

Royal Tern - the more slender carrot colored bill helped distinguish it from the former

Sandwich Tern - FMB

Black Skimmer - a flock in Clewiston, one at Eagle Lakes, and a small group at Flamingo

PIGEONS & DOVES

Rock Pigeon

White-crowned Pigeon - great looks at 3 perched in a tree together in Key West

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

White-winged Dove

Mourning Dove

Common Ground-Dove

PARROTS

Monk Parakeet - their huge bulky stick nests were quite impressive, we had excellent looks in Kendall

(Cockatiel) - one at Fort Zach was probably a recent escape

CUCKOOS

Yellow-billed Cuckoo - we saw several, and once again this species came in to our tape for Mangrove Cuckoo

Smooth-billed Ani - it took three trips and a lot of work, but we finally tracked down two of these unusual birds in Fort Lauderdale. This is the last family group that is seen with any regularity in the ABA area.

OWLS

Eastern Screech-Owl - seen well on our owling excursion in ENP

Burrowing Owl - sitting out on its perch on Marco Island

Barred Owl - fantastic looks at a very cooperative bird on Loop Road

NIGHTJARS & ALLIES

Common Nighthawk

Chuck-will's-widow - seen and heard well in ENP

SWIFTS

Chimney Swift

WOODPECKERS

Red-headed Woodpecker - great looks at an adult and an immature near Naples

Red-bellied Woodpecker

Downy Woodpecker

Red-cockaded Woodpecker - at least two showed very well for us in a patch Long-leaf
Pine flatwoods near Naples

Northern Flicker

Pileated Woodpecker

TYRANT FLYCATCHERS

Great Crested Flycatcher - a few seen and heard, seen year round in South Florida

Western Kingbird - an uncommon winter bird, we saw them at Fritchey Rd. and ENP

Eastern Kingbird

Gray Kingbird - many great looks at this Florida specialty, including one “plunge
bathing” at Blue Hole on Big Pine Key.

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher - uncommon in winter in S. FL, we found one at Flamingo

SHRIKES

Loggerhead Shrike - quite common in South Florida, especially compared to the
Northeast where they have almost disappeared

VIREOS

White-eyed Vireo

Black-whiskered Vireo - great views at Flamingo, several in the Keys also

CROWS & JAYS

Blue Jay

Florida Scrub-Jay - superb views of a small group along Hwy 74.

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

Tree Swallow

Northern Rough-winged Swallow - Tigertail

Cave Swallow - point blank views of birds in their nests in Cutler Ridge

Barn Swallow

CHICKADEES & TITS

Tufted Titmouse

NUTHATCHES

Brown-headed Nuthatch - Corkscrew and Naples

WRENS

Carolina Wren

GNATCATCHERS

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher

THRUSHES

Eastern Bluebird - NW of Lake Okeechobee

MOCKINGBIRDS & THRASHERS

Gray Catbird

Northern Mockingbird - seen daily

MYNAS & STARLINGS

European Starling

(Common Myna) - probably the next countable exotic for Florida, they are getting more common each year; we saw many

(Hill Myna) - not countable and not as common as in former days, but a neat bird none-the-less, we saw a pair in Kendall

WAXWINGS

Cedar Waxwing

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 singing male at Flamingo, this would be Golden Warbler if split in the future

Magnolia Warbler

Cape May Warbler

Black-throated Blue Warbler

Black-throated Green Warbler

Pine Warbler

Prairie Warbler

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

Blackpoll Warbler

Black-and-white Warbler

American Redstart

Prothonotary Warbler - breathtaking views of singing males both at Corkscrew and Big Cypress

Worm-eating Warbler

Ovenbird

Northern Waterthrush

Common Yellowthroat

TANAGERS & ALLIES

Western Spindalis - we saw a gorgeous male of the green-backed race *townsendi* of the Bahamas

SPARROWS & ALLIES

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

Bachman’s Sparrow - finally managed great looks NW of Lake Okeechobee

Seaside Sparrow - we saw the endangered “Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow” in ENP,
this is the only race that breeds in freshwater wetlands

CARDINALS & ALLIES

Northern Cardinal

Blue Grosbeak

Painted Bunting - a female in Key West

BLACKBIRDS & ALLIES

Bobolink

Red-winged Blackbird

Eastern Meadowlark

Common Grackle

Boat-tailed Grackle

Shiny Cowbird - good looks at males and females at Eagle Lakes and Flamingo

Bronzed Cowbird - same as above, plus we were treated to the wonderful flight display
of the male as he hovered above a female at Eagle Lakes

Brown-headed Cowbird

Spot-breasted Oriole - we had great luck with this bird in Ft Lauderdale and we
appreciated it’s assistance in locating the Spindalis!

Baltimore Oriole

FINCHES

House Finch

OLD WORLD SPARROWS

House Sparrow

BUTTERFLIES

Giant Swallowtail (*Papilio cressphontes*)

Palamedes Swallowtail (*Papilio palamedes*)

Florida White (*Appias drusilla*)

Great Southern White (*Ascia monuste*)

Cloudless Sulphur (*Phoebis sennae*)

Orange-barred Sulphur (*Phoebis philea*)

Mallow Scrub-Hairstreak (*Strymon istapa*)

Cassius Blue (*Leptotes cassius*)

Gulf Fritillary (*Agraulis vanillae*)

Julia Heliconian (*Dryas julia*)

Zebra Heliconian (*Heliconius charitonia*)

Variiegated Fritillary (*Euptoieta claudia*)

Mangrove Buckeye (*Junonia evarete*)
White Peacock (*Anartia jatrophae*)
Monarch (*Danaus plexippus*)
Queen (*Danaus gilippus*)
Mangrove Skipper (*Phocides pigmalion*)
Tropical Checkered-Skipper (*Pyrgus oileus*)

OTHER CRITTERS

REPTILES

Florida Water Snake (*Nerodia fasciata pictiventris*)
Everglades racer (*Coluber constrictor paludicola*)
American Crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*) an endangered species, we were lucky to see three 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*)
Red-eared Slider (*Trachemys scripta elegans*)
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

MAMMALS

Key Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus clavium*)
Eastern Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*)
Marsh Rabbit (*Sylvilagus palustris*)

FISH

Tarpon (*Megalops atlanticus*)
Great Barracuda (*Sphyraena barracuda*)
Alligator Gar (*Lepisosteus platyrhincus*)