

SOUTH FLORIDA

APRIL 21 - MAY 1, 2008

LEADER: BRENNAN MULROONEY

COMPILED BY: BRENNAN MULROONEY

**VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS, INC.
2525 WALLINGWOOD DRIVE, SUITE 1003
AUSTIN, TX 78746
WWW.VENTBIRD.COM**

SOUTH FLORIDA

April 21 - May 1, 2008

Leader: Brennan Mulrooney

South Florida is home to many birds that can't be found easily anywhere else in North America. The trick is that most of them aren't that easy to see in Florida either. This is the challenge of leading this tour: there is a long list of "target" birds and almost every one of them could be missed if things don't go just right. They range from birds that are becoming increasingly rare like the Smooth-billed Ani, and birds that are notoriously difficult to observe like the Mangrove Cuckoo and Short-tailed Hawk, to birds like White-crowned Pigeon and the various Miami exotics that are fairly common, but unpredictable, and to birds like Antillean Nighthawk and Roseate Tern that are late migrants and often aren't back on the breeding grounds in time for us to see them. Well, sometimes fortune smiles. This year we had a combination of good weather, a great group, and just enough pure luck that everything seemed to fall into place—not one target bird was missed!

Without a doubt, the bird on this trip that causes me the most lost sleep is the Mangrove Cuckoo. It always seems to be at the top of everybody's want list, usually because they've been to Florida before and missed it! While not especially uncommon, they are incredibly hard to find when they are not singing. Unfortunately for us, and most visiting birders, their singing activity doesn't really pick up until May or June; at this time, and through the summer, they are actually fairly easy to find, but that doesn't help us in April. We needed a little something extra, and some overnight showers were exactly that. The Mangrove Cuckoo has been called "rain crow" for its tendency to become active and vocal after rains, and we saw strong evidence of that. After enjoying superb scope views of a singing Black-whiskered Vireo (unusually scarce this year), I heard a distant singing cuckoo. I could barely believe my ears, but as we worked on it, it continued to get closer, and soon we were treated to prolonged views of first one, then a second singing Mangrove Cuckoo from an adjacent territory. We finally walked away as they continued their vocal sparring. We heard at least one other singing that morning as we birded in the lush, tropical hardwood hammocks of Key Largo; it was an embarrassment of cuckoos.

Short-tailed Hawk is another bird that we know is around, but getting a good look at one is an entirely different matter. They breed at very low densities in large areas of riparian woodland in the interior of central and southern Florida, and spend most of the day soaring high above these remote areas. They are almost never seen perched, so we usually have to settle for rather distant scope views. After having typically unsatisfying scope views early in our day around Lake Okeechobee, we continued our search in the afternoon. We had just gotten fantastic roadside views of a group of Florida Scrub-Jays while birding the back road woodlands (which were also yielding such goodies as Red-headed Woodpecker and Swallow-tailed Kite) when we spotted a small *Buteo* soaring overhead. It was a light-morph Short-tailed and, as we watched, it was joined by a second bird. For several minutes they drifted back and forth at fairly low altitude, giving

us great views without even having to use the scope! Light-morph Short-tailed Hawks are very handsome raptors and we had unusually good looks.

This is not to say that this whole trip is hard core target birding; in fact, our first day was very relaxed and a trip highlight as usual. We spent the morning at two very birder-friendly water treatment facilities that have become incredible havens for birds and birders alike. Here we delighted in stunningly close looks at several marsh birds that are often secretive and difficult to observe. First we found a Sora running around so close to us that we could barely focus our binoculars on it. A bit later on we had Purple Gallinules just as close, and then noticed that they were tending to a freshly hatched clutch of chicks! The little black balls of fluff were barely bigger than ping pong balls, and yet were already crawling through the vegetation after their parents. Then we had repeated scope views of Least Bitterns skulking in the reeds, doing a great job of concealing themselves, but not quite well enough! A flock of migrant warblers here was a great way to start the tour as we had Northern Parula, Cape May, Black-throated Blue, Prairie, Palm, Blackpoll, and Black-and-white warblers, American Redstart, and Common Yellowthroat all at or below eye level! So much for warbler neck!

Other “target birds” that we nabbed included Black-bellied and Fulvous whistling-ducks, Mottled Duck, Magnificent Frigatebird, Great White Heron (the white morph of Great Blue Heron), Reddish Egret, Roseate Spoonbill, Wood Stork, Snail Kite, Crested Caracara, Limpkin (with babies!), Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Gray Kingbird, “West Indian” Cave Swallow, Brown-headed Nuthatch, “Cuban” Yellow Warbler (a.k.a. Golden Warbler), Bachman’s Sparrow, “Cape Sable” Seaside Sparrow, and Shiny Cowbird. Not a bad haul! This year’s tour was certainly one to remember, and has set a standard for future tours.

ITINERARY:

April 21 - Tour orientation and dinner at Sal’s

April 22 - Fort Lauderdale Airport/Old Griffin Road, Wakodahatchee Wetlands, Green Cay Wetlands, Hwy 880 to 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 Lake Placid and lunch at the Tower. Afternoon visit to Archbold Biological Station and birding along Sheppard Rd before returning to Clewiston.

April 24 - Morning drive along highways 833, 832, 29 and 846 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.

- 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 along Greenway and Fritchey roads. Late afternoon birding at the Conservancy of Southwest Florida, dinner at Andre's with Hermann the German.
- April 26** - Morning at Fort Myers Beach (Little Estero Lagoon) then a return visit to Eagle Lakes and a stop for Manatee watching at Faka Union Canal; 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 Cutler Ridge for Cave Swallows, then into Florida City. Dinner in our private dining nook at Capri.
- April 27** - All day birding neighborhoods and parks of the greater Miami area. We started in residential Kendall (across from the Baptist Hospital) then headed north stopping near MIA for parakeets then on to Miami Springs for our oriole. The afternoon included a nice drive through Cutler Ridge stopping at Matheson Hammock County Park and Cutler Wetlands before trying for Mangrove Cuckoo at Biscayne National Park.
- April 28** - All day in Everglades National Park. Started with Cape Sable Seaside Sparrows near Mahogany Hammock, then stopped at Paurotis Pond before birding the Flamingo area (marina, Eco Pond, picnic area). Next was Bear Lake Trail followed by lunch at West Lake. We gave blood on Snake Bight Trail then headed back to Royal Palm where we walked the Gumbo Limbo Trail and then hit the Coe Visitor Center. Post dinner return to the park for night birding.
- April 29** - Morning drive to the keys with our first stop (a good one!) at the Port Bougainville entrance to Dagny Johnson Key Largo Hammock Botanical State Park (got that?). Celebratory libations at Starbucks then a brief stop at my house for baby watching and then Audubon's Tavernier Science Center; lunch at The Wreck. Post-lunch birding around Lake Edna (Grassy Key), the Marathon Government Center, the Seven Mile Bridge, then Big Pine Key for Key Deer and a stop at the Blue Hole. Dinner at The Café then nighthawk listening at Key West Airport.
- April 30** - Morning birding at Indigenous Park and Fort Zachary Taylor State Park. Lunch at Turtle Kraals then finishing up at the Key West Tropical Forest and Botanical Gardens (on Stock Is). Dinner at the Café again!
- May 1** - 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

GC: Green Caye

CW: Cutler Wetlands

FMB: Fort Myers Beach

WATERFOWL

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck - a small flock at WW

Fulvous Whistling-Duck - three at Eagle Lakes were a surprise and as it turns out it was a first Collier County record!

(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 and GC seen daily on the mainland

Blue-winged Teal - WW and elsewhere

Lesser Scaup - a couple at CW

Red-breasted Merganser - one at Lake Edna

PHEASANTS, GROUSE AND ALLIES

Wild Turkey - near Lake Okeechobee

GREBES

Pied-billed Grebe - CW

GANNETS & BOOBIES

Northern Gannet - several off FMB and Tigertail

PELICANS

American White Pelican - CW and ENP

Brown Pelican

CORMORANTS

Double-crested Cormorant

DARTERS

Anhinga - ugly babies at WW

FRIGATEBIRDS

Magnificent Frigatebird - first around Naples then many in the Keys

BITTERNS & 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 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

Reddish Egret - just a couple around the Naples area beaches, these guys are uncommon and restricted to salt water habitats

Cattle Egret

Green Heron - many fantastic close views

Black-crowned Night-Heron - lots of these, but none of these typically common yellow-crowned cousins...

IBISES & SPOONBILLS

White Ibis - some in peak breeding condition were striking

Glossy Ibis

Roseate Spoonbill - more scarce than normal this year, it was a strange year for breeding in South Florida with several traditional colonies abandoned

STORKS

Wood Stork - probably best at GC

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! this was an every day bird

Swallow-tailed Kite - I think our total was about 47 on our day around Lake Okechobee (ask Stan, he was in charge of counting), such a stunningly graceful bird

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 - 3 at Tigertail were great views, seen elsewhere as well

Northern Harrier - several including a second-year male, or was it a sub-adult, no wait a juvenile...

Sharp-shinned Hawk - 1 in ENP

Cooper's Hawk - this bird is expanding its breeding range into South Florida probably in response to the abundance of Eurasian Collared-Doves

Red-shouldered Hawk - the most common hawk in South Florida, the resident race is distinctively pale, especially on the head

Short-tailed Hawk - These birds are always a challenge in the breeding season, but we did pretty well this year. Our first looks were terrible, but we kept at it and eventually had good repeated views of a pair of light morph birds along Fisheating Creek

FALCONS & CARACARAS

Crested Caracara - only around Lake Okeechobee

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, including a pair feeding brand new babies right at our feet!

Common Moorhen

American Coot

LIMP KIN

Limpkin - great looks at several, probably best at GC where they have become common, taking advantage of an outbreak of exotic snails

CRANES

Sandhill Crane - several around Okeechobee including a pair at a nest near Venus

PLOVERS & LAPWINGS

Black-bellied Plover - several in breeding plumage

Wilson's Plover - their big honkin' bill is distinctive

Semipalmated Plover - dark back, orange legs

Killdeer

STILTS & AVOCETS

Black-necked Stilt - who knew they liked tomatoes?

American Avocet - Eco Pond

SANDPIPERS

Spotted Sandpiper

Solitary Sandpiper

Greater Yellowlegs

Willet - We saw many "Western Willets" along the beaches and probably one "Eastern Willet" along the Florida Bay shore in Flamingo that looked smaller and darker with a shorter bill.

Lesser Yellowlegs

Ruddy Turnstone

Red Knot - we were fortunate to see a small group of these at Tigertail, several were in breeding plumage. The *rufa* subspecies that migrates up the east coast has been crashing in recent years

Sanderling

Semipalmated Sandpiper

Western Sandpiper

Least Sandpiper

Dunlin

Stilt Sandpiper - CW

Short-billed Dowitcher - at the beach

Long-billed Dowitcher - only at CW

GULLS, TERNS, & SKIMMERS

Laughing Gull

Ring-billed Gull

Herring Gull - one immature at FMB

Least Tern

Roseate Tern - We saw a pair foraging near the 7 mile bridge in the Keys

Forster's Tern - ENP

Royal Tern - the most common tern in South Florida

Sandwich Tern - FMB

Black Skimmer - a few in Clewiston near their Wal Mart colony

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

Mourning Dove

Common Ground-Dove

PARROTS

(Chestnut-fronted Macaw) - widespread in South America and present in the Miami area since the late 70's; we had one peeking at us from its nest cavity in a Royal Palm

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 small flock in Miami

(Yellow-chevroned Parakeet) - mixed with the former; though more common than White-winged they are not considered "countable" while White-winged is, silliness...

CUCKOOS

Yellow-billed Cuckoo - a quick view early in the trip, then unbeatable views in Key West
Mangrove Cuckoo - we had incredible luck with this bird. We were very fortunate to hit the best habitat right after a rain so the birds were quite active and vocal. We had walk away scope views of this seldom seen species.

Smooth-billed Ani - another species that is easily missed, Judy spotted it perched in the morning light in Ft Lauderdale and we had great looks in the scope at close range

OWLS

Eastern Screech-Owl - in broad daylight at the entrance to its nest cavity, great spotting David!

Burrowing Owl - sitting out with babies on Marco Island

Barred Owl - fantastic looks at a very cooperative bird in Naples then a family group at night in ENP where we heard the juvenile's squealed call

NIGHTJARS & ALLIES

Common Nighthawk

Antillean Nighthawk - we heard it well then saw a silent bird that could have been it fly by at close range at the airport in Key West

Chuck-will's-widow - unfortunately heard only in ENP

SWIFTS

Chimney Swift

HUMMINGBIRDS

Ruby-throated Hummingbird - lots in Key West

WOODPECKERS

Red-headed Woodpecker - great looks at a pair in Venus and another near Naples

Red-bellied Woodpecker - everywhere

Downy Woodpecker - several heard a few seen

Red-cockaded Woodpecker - at least two showed very well for us in a patch Long-leaf Pine flatwoods near Naples; we couldn't see their cockades, but we could see their bands!

Northern Flicker

Pileated Woodpecker - great views in Big Cypress and elsewhere

TYRANT FLYCATCHERS

Eastern Wood-Pewee - for those who did the afternoon option in Key West

Acadian Flycatcher - a single silent bird in Key West fit all of the plumage characters for this species, which is the most common *Empidonax* flycatcher in spring migration in South Florida

Great Crested Flycatcher - we saw and heard several, including one at a most unexpected nest cavity

Western Kingbird - one on the afternoon in Key West

Eastern Kingbird - a few scattered sightings

Gray Kingbird - the first few were leader only, but eventually we all saw them many times and very well

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher - another one only on the Key West afternoon walk

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

Yellow-throated Vireo - one in Key West

Red-eyed Vireo - Big Cypress, ENP and Key West

Black-whiskered Vireo - scarce this year, but we had great views of a singing bird at Dagny Johnson Key Largo Hammock Botanical State Park

CROWS & JAYS

Blue Jay

Florida Scrub-Jay - superb views of a small group near Archbold

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

Northern Rough-winged Swallow

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

Barn Swallow

CHICKADEES & TITS

Tufted Titmouse

NUTHATCHES

Brown-headed Nuthatch - great views in Naples

WRENS

Carolina Wren - easier heard than seen...

House Wren

Marsh Wren - Eagle Lakes

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 good looks at two

GNATCATCHERS

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher

THRUSHES

Eastern Bluebird - NW of Lake Okeechobee

Swainson's Thrush - seen well in Key West

MOCKINGBIRDS & THRASHERS

Gray Catbird - seen almost daily

Northern Mockingbird - the state bird, seen daily

Brown Thrasher - one from the van near Immokalee

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 probably the next countable exotic for Florida, they are getting more common each year; we saw many

(Hill Myna) - also from Southeast Asia; not countable and not as common as in former days (seen since the late 60's), but a neat bird none-the-less, we saw a pair in Kendall

WOOD WARBLERS

Tennessee Warbler

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 called "Golden Warbler" if split in the future

Cape May Warbler - probably best at GC

Black-throated Blue Warbler - fairly common migrants

Yellow-rumped Warbler - one in Key West

Pine Warbler - on the breeding grounds near Okeechobee

Prairie Warbler - we saw migrants and the resident "Florida Prairie Warbler"

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

Bay-breasted Warbler - uncommon in fall, but rather rare in spring in South Florida, a male in Key West was the first male in breeding plumage I've seen in Florida

Blackpoll Warbler - probably our most common warbler of the trip

Black-and-white Warbler - a few here and there

American Redstart - lots of good looks at these flashy warblers

Prothonotary Warbler - breathtaking views of the southern most singing a male at Big Cypress

Worm-eating Warbler - one furtive individual in Naples

Ovenbird - first in Naples, then more in the Keys

Northern Waterthrush - didn't finally see one until Key West

Common Yellowthroat
Hooded Warbler - a female in Key West

TANAGERS & ALLIES

Summer Tanager - Key West
Scarlet Tanager - a gorgeous male at my office next to a male Indigo Bunting was nice

SPARROWS & ALLIES

Eastern Towhee - we had good looks at singing birds of the "white-eyed" race
Bachman's Sparrow - 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; they were distant, but we
were able to make out the distinctive bands around their legs...

CARDINALS & ALLIES

Northern Cardinal - everywhere but Key West where they are scarce
Blue Grosbeak
Indigo Bunting - lots of females and a few nice blue males
Painted Bunting - a female in ENP

BLACKBIRDS & ALLIES

Bobolink - singing males near Okeechobee were nice
Red-winged Blackbird - everywhere
Eastern Meadowlark - several nice view of singing birds
Yellow-headed Blackbird - a second year male in Naples was quite a surprise
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 had good looks at males and females at Flamingo and a quick,
unsatisfying view in Naples
Bronzed Cowbird - 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 - present in Miami since the late-40's, native to Central America,
we had great looks as a pair fed young in a nest in Miami Springs
Baltimore Oriole - a brief view of a male in Big Cypress

OLD WORLD SPARROWS

House Sparrow

BUTTERFLIES

Polydamas Swallowtail (*Battus polydamas*)
Giant Swallowtail (*Papilio cresphontes*)

Palamedes Swallowtail (*Papilio palamedes*)
Florida White (*Appias drusilla*)
Great Southern White (*Ascia monuste*)
Cloudless Sulphur (*Phoebis sennae*)
Large Orange Sulphur (*Phoebis agarithe*)
Orange-barred Sulphur (*Phoebis philea*)
Barred Yellow (*Eurema दौरa*)
Dainty Sulphur (*Nathalis iole*)
Mallow Scrub-Hairstreak (*Strymon istapa*)
Gulf Fritillary (*Agraulis vanillae*)
Julia Heliconian (*Dryas julia*)
Zebra Heliconian (*Heliconius charitonia*)
Mangrove Buckeye (*Junonia evarete*)
White Peacock (*Anartia jatrophae*)
Ruddy Daggerwing (*Marpesia petreus*)
Monarch (*Danaus plexippus*)
Queen (*Danaus gilippus*)
Soldier (*Danaus eresimus*)
Mangrove Skipper (*Phocides pigmalion*)
Dorantes Longtail (*Urbanus dorantes*)
Florida Duskywing (*Ephyriades brunneus*)
Baracoa Skipper (*Polites baracoa*)
Whirlabout (*Polites vibex*)

OTHER CRITTERS

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

Florida (Banded) Watersnake (*Nerodia fasciata pictiventris*)
Everglades (Black) Racer (*Coluber constrictor paludicola*)
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
Pig Frog (*Rana grylio*)

MAMMALS

Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*) - including the small pale race of the keys
White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*)
Key Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus clavium*)
Eastern Gray Squirrel (*Scuirus carolinensis*)

Marsh Rabbit (*Sylvilagus palustris*)
Eastern Cottontail (*Sylvilagus floridanus*)
West Indian Manatee (*Trichechus manatus*)

FISH

Common Snook (*Centropomus undecimalis*)
Bluegill (*Lepomis macrochirus*)

OTHER

Junkin's Shoestring Snake (*Tripopus untiedis versicolor*)