

# SOUTH FLORIDA

APRIL 21 – MAY 1, 2008

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The great pointed paw of the state of Florida, familiar as the map of North America itself, of which it is the most noticeable appendage, thrusts south, farther south than any other part of the mainland of the United States. Between the shining aquamarine waters of the Gulf of Mexico and the roaring deep-blue waters of the north-surging Gulf Stream, the shaped land points toward Cuba and the Caribbean. It points toward and touches within one degree of the tropics.

— Marjory Stoneman Douglas

*Marjory Stoneman Douglas thus described Florida in her 1947 classic, **The Everglades: River of Grass**. In many ways, the passage is a perfect description of the geographic uniqueness of the state. It is the “youngest” region of the lower 48 states, geologically speaking, having achieved its current appearance a mere 4,000 years ago. During the Pleistocene epoch, the northern and central tiers of the continent were periodically covered with great sheets of ice. As the ice packs repeatedly grew and then shrunk, the sea levels rose and fell. Ancient shorelines characterize the south-central part of Florida; in contrast, the southeastern mainland, where the land meets the Atlantic, is mainly formed by limestone, which creates the Atlantic coastal ridge, only 24 feet above sea level.*

*Natural depressions in the substrate allowed for the formation of central Florida’s many freshwater lakes and the deep swamps and Everglades that originally covered most of the southern part of the state. The result was the creation of a bio-region unlike any other in the world.*

*It does not do South Florida justice simply to call it the most biologically rich region in the United States and Canada. It is a land so unique that in 1976 the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recognized the Everglades National Park as part of the International Network of Biosphere Reserves. Since then, numerous national and international conservation organizations have deemed the Everglades and nearby areas as one of the most important and threatened natural regions in the world.*

*Within the United States, South Florida stands alone with regard to biological diversity. It contains complex plant communities of oak forest, scrub, hammocks, swamps, mangroves, salt marshes, pine forests, dry prairies, and wet prairies. There are habitats found nowhere else in the country; these support over a dozen species of birds that reach their northern limit of distribution and are seldom seen elsewhere within our borders. Another dozen subspecies of more widespread species have evolved into unique, often separable, local forms not found outside Florida.*

*We’ll range from Lake Okeechobee and vicinity all the way down through the Keys to Key West itself. From east to west, the tour will move from the Fort Lauderdale-Miami area on the Atlantic*

*Ocean to Naples and Fort Meyers on the Gulf of Mexico. Areas harboring South Florida specialty birds are emphasized, but we'll also cover locations holding other sought-after species.*

*Beginning in the Fort Lauderdale area with our first search for Smooth-billed Anis, introduced exotics, and a myriad of water birds, we'll move on to the prairies and pinelands around Lake Okeechobee and Naples to find Short-tailed Hawk, Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Florida Scrub-Jay, and Bachman's Sparrow. In the vicinity of Naples and Fort Meyers we bird the lagoons and mudflats of the Gulf Coast, home to frigatebirds, oystercatchers, and many other shore and wading birds. We'll go on to the Big Cypress region and the Everglades where Wood Storks and Swallow-tailed Kites reign supreme, Snail Kites patrol for apple snails, and Limpkins stalk the banks. After a day in Miami and its suburbs for exotics such as parakeets, bulbuls, mynas, and Spot-breasted Orioles, the tour concludes in the hardwood hammocks and mangroves of the Florida Keys, with White-crowned Pigeons, Mangrove Cuckoos, Gray Kingbirds, and Black-whiskered Vireos.*

*There are, of course, other remarkable inhabitants of this subtropical world—tropical plants and butterflies, amphibians, turtles, and alligators lying motionless in wait. And no trip to South Florida would be complete without gaining insight into the threats to its natural wonders. We'll have plenty of opportunity to explore this topic, as well as the \$7.8 billion Everglades Restoration Plan, which will take 38 years to complete.*

*This tour may be combined with our Dry Tortugas tour (April 30-May 3, 2008).*

**April 21, Day 1: Arrival in Fort Lauderdale.** Participants may plan to arrive in Fort Lauderdale at any time today and transfer to the nearby Days Inn where a room will be reserved in your name. The group will meet in the hotel lobby at 6:00 p.m. for a get-acquainted dinner and orientation.

NIGHT: Days Inn Fort Lauderdale Airport South, Hollywood

**April 22, Day 2: Fort Lauderdale and Vicinity; Drive to Clewiston.** On our first day of birding, there will be much to see in and around the Fort Lauderdale area. One of our stops today will be the newly created Wakodahatchee Wetlands, named from the Seminole word for "created waters." These 50 acres of wetlands filter highly treated wastewater and, at the same time, attract numerous water birds. Along the 3/4-mile boardwalk, Least Terns hover just a few feet overhead; Anhingas, night-herons, Least Bitterns, and Purple Gallinules feed and rest along side—and often on—the boardwalk; meanwhile, the shy Limpkin is often spotted as it stalks prey through the willows.

Time-permitting, we will proceed to nearby Pembroke Pines where the introduced Purple Swamphen is resident. Native to the Old World, this species now seems on its way to becoming established and "countable." As we bird today, we may spot some of the other sometimes-elusive Florida exotics: e.g., Common mynas, Spot-breasted Oriole, and various parakeets.

In the afternoon, we will drive northwest to Clewiston on the south shore of Lake Okeechobee, our base for the next two nights.

NIGHT: Clewiston Inn, Clewiston

**April 23, Day 3: Short-tailed Hawk, Florida Scrub-Jay, and Bachman's Sparrow.** Although much of south-central Florida has been converted to orange groves and sugar cane, there are still large pastures where Florida's resident populations of Crested Caracara, Sandhill Crane, and Burrowing Owl can be found. Okeechobee and other area lakes host Limpkins and Bald Eagles, while Wild Turkeys, Ospreys, Red-headed Woodpeckers, and

Eastern Bluebirds nest in this region's open woodlands, and King Rails, Purple Gallinules, and Marsh Wrens occur in marshes along Rainy Slough and other favored wetlands.

But of primary import today will be finding three specialty birds of this region west and north of Lake Okeechobee. One is the Florida Scrub-Jay, a declining species found in no other state. Though its habitat of open oak scrublands is being lost to development and fire-suppression, this jay fortunately tends to be conspicuous in its behavior and not too difficult to see locally.

A local specialty of shrubby and pinewoods grasslands, the Bachman's Sparrow tends to choose conspicuous singing perches, but when silent it is much more challenging to find. A few of the state-endangered "Florida" Grasshopper Sparrows might be another possibility in one of the Bachman's areas we check.

Much more difficult at this time of year, though, is the Short-tailed Hawk. Places like Fisheating Creek, Rainy Slough, and Hickory Hammock represent the southern edge of this raptor's breeding range, and it typically takes a lot of patient scanning to spot one hunting for prey in the deciduous canopy. Most individuals are dark-morph birds, devoid of bold and obvious field marks, and the species is seldom seen perched, always seeming to be flying high overhead or over distant treetops.

NIGHT: Clewiston Inn, Clewiston

**April 24, Day 4: Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary and Drive to Naples.** Assuming we were successful in locating all the specialties around Okeechobee the previous day, our first stop this morning will be at the famous Corkscrew Swamp. Managed by the National Audubon Society since 1955, this sanctuary preserves the largest remaining tract of bald cypress in North America. A beautiful boardwalk takes visitors back in time to an age when all of South Florida was wilderness, as it passes through cordgrass and sawgrass fields and into stands of pond cypress, red maple, pine, and pond apple.

When we reach the so-called Lettuce Lakes, we are within the magnificent stand of bald cypress. Some of these giant trees are 500 years old and 130 feet tall. The birds are impressive as well: Swallow-tailed Kites and Wood Storks soaring over the canopy; Pine Warblers and Eastern Towhees singing from the pine stands; and Limpkins, both night-herons, and Little Blue Herons stalking prey within just a few feet of the boardwalk.

From Corkscrew, it is only a short drive west to the Fort Meyers and Naples area. Depending on when we arrive, there may be time this afternoon to make our first attempt to locate some Red-cockaded Woodpeckers in Naples. Or, depending on the tide tables, we may decide to look for shorebirds at Fort Meyers Beach or Marco Island's Tigertail Beach.

NIGHT: Hampton Inn Naples Central, Naples

**April 25, Day 5: Naples, Fort Meyers, and Vicinity.** Despite the rapid population growth and development along the Gulf Coast of Florida, there are still a few natural areas which remain remarkably intact in and around Naples. One of these is a stand of longleaf and slash pines on the eastern edge of town which continues to survive and support a few pairs of Red-cockaded Woodpecker. If we did not have the time to stop here the day before, we plan to start birding here at dawn in hopes of watching a pair or two emerge from their nesting and roosting cavities. This same location may also provide our best – or only – chance to see Brown-headed Nuthatch, and we might find Pine Warblers and "white-eyed" Eastern Towhees here as well.

This part of Florida should also provide us with our best shorebirding of the tour. Tigertail Beach on Marco Island just south of Naples and Fort Meyers Beach farther north are two of the most important sites for wintering and migrant shorebirds on the Gulf Coast, and we will hopefully be able to time our visits to these places at low tide. We will concentrate especially on looking for the less common species, like Piping, Wilson's and Snowy plovers; American Oystercatcher; Long-billed Curlew; Whimbrel; and Red Knot. Other possibilities here include Magnificent Frigatebird, Reddish Egret, and Least and Sandwich terns.

Naples can boast of another excellent location to see a variety of herons/egrets, shorebirds, terns, and other water birds. Though not an especially natural area, the newly created lagoons of Eagle Lakes Park are easily birded from the park's trails, and almost every year we add something new or unexpected here to our trip list.

NIGHT: Hampton Inn Naples Central, Naples

**April 26, Day 6: The Tamiami Trail and Big Cypress National Preserve; Drive to Florida City.** After a final check of the Naples and Fort Meyers area, we will leave these busy cities behind and enter the habitats that made South Florida famous.

As we head east on the Tamiami Trail, our route takes us through the Big Cypress National Preserve. Created in 1974, this preserve reached its current size of 729,000 acres in 1988: in fact, the name "Big Cypress" refers not to the trees but to the size of the preserve, a mix of wet and dry prairies, piney woods, mangroves, cypress swamps, and tree islands known as hammocks. The preserve was created to protect the western portion of the Everglades watershed, and, despite assaults by human development, Big Cypress is still a wild and beautiful home to a wide diversity of wildlife, including black bear, mink, river otter, and the critically endangered Florida panther.

We will not spend a lot of time at the preserve, but we will be able to take a boardwalk through one of the best cypress stands. Here we will be in the company of giants, their arms draped with Spanish moss. This area will also give us chances to see Barred Owl, Pileated Woodpecker, Great Crested Flycatcher, Red-eyed Vireo, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Northern Parula, and Prothonotary Warbler.

Farther east along the Tamiami Trail, we'll be on the northern border of Everglades National Park, an area extremely rich in wildlife. The sawgrass prairies and swamplands abound with wading birds, and we are almost sure to see Wood Storks, Tricolored Herons, and White Ibis. But our main quarry today is the Snail Kite, an elegant raptor which has become the signature bird species of the Everglades. Fortunately, they're fairly consistent along a certain stretch of this highway, and with patience we should encounter this special bird.

Numerous pulloffs along the highway will not only allow us to scan for kites but also to take in the beautiful scenery. Extensive sawgrass prairies are dotted with clumps of cypress that grow in the form of domes, betraying the substrate, where the higher areas of rock and soil are found. The nearby canals and marshy ponds host numerous alligators along with a few Limpkins and Purple Gallinules stalking the water's edge. Other species we may encounter are Glossy Ibis, the pale "Florida" Red-shouldered Hawk, and Roseate Spoonbill.

In the late afternoon, we will arrive in Florida City south of Miami, our base for the next three nights.

NIGHT: Ramada Inn, Florida City

**April 27, Day 7: Greater Miami Exotics.** Where cities have increasingly replaced natural habitats in South Florida, there are numerous free-flying, exotic bird species. All these exotics have been introduced, either intentionally or as escaped cagebirds, and their populations range along a spectrum from widely established to only locally marginal.

Today we'll search the Greater Miami area for some of the many exotics that occur in these suburban parks and yards. We will naturally pursue those species considered "countable," but almost anything is possible. We'll especially focus on Red-whiskered Bulbul (established since the 1960s) and Spot-breasted Oriole (present since the 1940s). Our searches should also turn up Monk, Yellow-chevrons, and White-winged parakeets (these latter two formerly comprising the "Canary-winged" Parakeet). Other interesting finds might include Common and Hill mynas, Muscovy Duck, and such parakeets as Red-masked, Mitred, Blue-crowned, and Dusky-headed.

As we explore suburban Miami, we will find a number of native species as well, including Red-bellied Woodpecker, Northern Parula, “Florida” Prairie Warbler, and Boat-tailed Grackle. We may even see a Swallow-tailed Kite or Smooth-billed Ani, and, depending on the weather, some migrant passerines may still be passing through. We’ll also stop on the way back to Florida City to view a colony of Cave Swallows of the “West Indian” variety under a favored bridge in Cutler Ridge.

NIGHT: Ramada Inn, Florida City

**April 28, Day 8: Everglades National Park.**

*There are no other Everglades in the world.*

*They are, they have always been, one of the unique regions of the Earth, remote, never wholly known. Nothing anywhere else is like them: their vast glittering openness, wider than the enormous visible round of the horizon, the racing free saltiness and sweetness of their massive winds, under the dazzling blue heights of space...The miracle of the light pours over the green and brown expanse of saw grass and of water, shining and slow-moving below, the grass and water that is the meaning and the central fact of the Everglades of Florida. It is a river of grass.*

Marjory Stoneman Douglas, **The Everglades: River of Grass**

When Marjory Douglas’s book appeared in 1947, it brought to center stage the one-of-a-kind nature that is the Everglades. The name “Everglades” evokes images of wildness and untamable land. For many, the Everglades is Florida.

The east coast of Florida is slightly elevated. The Everglades, lying to the west on almost flat land, act like a trough for tremendous amounts of water flowing south. Because the limestone substrate declines in elevation so gradually, the flow of water is almost imperceptible. Water must travel 12 miles to lose a foot of elevation. In its natural state, water supplies to the Everglades were sustained by torrential thunderstorms over central Florida and Lake Okeechobee. As the water slowly made its way south, it spread out in a great swath, forming a broad, shallow, grass-clogged river to the sea. Marjory Douglas coined the term, “river of grass,” miles and miles of sawgrass prairie broken only by cypress swamps and hardwood hammocks.

The pristine Everglades is largely gone now. Massive projects to drain South Florida, which began in the late 1800s, have proven so effective that the natural flow of water has been severely disrupted: the construction of the Hoover dike around Lake Okeechobee, the channeling of the Kissimmee River, and the crisscrossing of canals north of the park. Some say the park is on life support. There is room for optimism, however, with the \$7.8 billion Everglades Restoration Plan, which is intended to restore some of the natural water flow.

Despite the flat, uniform appearance of the Everglades, it holds a variety of natural communities, each showing distinctive plant and animal life. We will work along the length of the park, exploring West Indian hardwood hammocks, sawgrass prairie, and mangrove swamp. Among the many possibilities today are the “Great White” form of Great Blue Heron (formerly a separate species which may be re-split), Roseate Spoonbill, Wood Stork, White-crowned Pigeon, Mangrove Cuckoo, the endangered “Cape Sable” race of Seaside Sparrow, and Shiny Cowbird.

On this day we usually return to the park after dark to look for Eastern Screech-Owl and Chuck-will's-widow in the spotlight at a favored stand of pines not far from the visitor's center.

NIGHT: Ramada Inn, Florida City

**April 29, Day 9: The Florida Keys.** The Keys stretch along a 150-mile arc southwest to Key West. The word “Key” is a corruption of the Spanish “cayo,” meaning island, and there are hundreds of islands in the Keys. These islands originated in the Pleistocene epoch with its rising and falling sea levels. Back when sea levels

were higher, a shallow, warm sea spread over the area where Florida Bay and the Keys currently lie. With the main barrier reef situated along the edge of the continental shelf to the west, the protected waters in the back reef zone were a perfect medium for the development of a patch reef system. The present Florida Keys later solidified as sea levels dropped and the reefs became exposed.

As a group, the Keys are composed of many plant community types that represent chance colonizations by hundreds of different species, many of West Indian origin. The Upper and Middle Keys are, or were, mostly tropical hardwood hammocks bordered by mangroves. The hammocks often contain many types of trees, including mahogany, tamarind, figs, palms, and gumbo limbo, that striking tree with the thin bark, burnt red in color. In comparison to the Upper and Middle Keys, the Lower Keys reveal a pronounced change in the soil and vegetation, with the ground less compact and far sandier.

Some of the birds we encounter here are species more typical of the Caribbean basin, whose ranges barely extend to the Keys. Others exist here in forms slightly different from their mainland relatives. We'll especially be on the lookout for White-crowned Pigeon, Mangrove Cuckoo, Gray Kingbird, Black-whiskered Vireo, the "Keys" White-eyed Vireo, the "Florida" Prairie Warbler, and the distinctive race of Yellow Warbler from Cuba which has expanded its range to the Keys.

We first enter Key Largo, the largest of the keys, where large hardwood hammocks and mangroves are still intact at Key Largo Hammocks State Botanical Site and John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park. Migrant warblers and the occasional Caribbean stray can be found here, but we will especially concentrate on finding one of the shyest and most furtive species in North America: the Mangrove Cuckoo. This bird always presents a challenge, and, if we haven't already found one, we will certainly be looking on Key Largo.

As we island-hop southward, our journey will take us along the route of the former Overseas Railroad, which Henry Flagler began building in 1904 to connect the mainland to Key West. Construction was completed in 1912 and required 43 bridges. The line was later destroyed by a hurricane in 1935, and by 1938 the railroad had been converted to the Overseas Highway.

Upon reaching Big Pine Key, we'll be in both the Great White Heron National Wildlife Refuge and the National Key Deer Refuge. By driving the side roads, we may be able to spot one of the endangered Key Deer, a diminutive version of the White-tailed Deer. By the time we reach the Lower Keys and approach Key West, we should have come across a few "Great White" Herons and the intermediate "Wurdemann's" Heron in the numerous mangrove-lined lagoons and shallow bays.

We should arrive in Key West early enough so there is time after dinner to look for Antillean Nighthawks at dusk. These birds are typically a challenge to find, and often none are present at all by early May, but they are a local summer resident here and elsewhere on the Lower Keys.

NIGHT: Best Western Key Ambassador, Key West

**April 30, Day 10: Key West and the Lower Florida Keys.** In Key West, we are in the heart of the "Conch Republic," named for a separatist movement by island residents during the Civil War over a border dispute. The colorful history of Key West dates to the early 1800s, when the island originally attracted ship captains, treasure hunters, salvage operators, and pirates. In those early years, Key West became a boomtown and the wealthiest city per capita in the country. The Great Depression sent Key West's economy reeling, and it wasn't until World War II that the economy would recover, with the U.S. Naval Base here an important station for ships in the Atlantic. After the war, the island steadily became a haven for artists, writers, and eccentrics. As more people visited the Keys, Key West became a hot spot for sport fishermen, divers, politicians, jetsetters, and other tourists.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Key West, however, is that there are still places to find birds! White-crowned Pigeons and perhaps a Shiny Cowbird or two can be found in residential areas. The botanic gardens on nearby Stock Island are home to a wonderful hardwood hammock that often teems with northbound migrants.

Some years there are a few surprises still hanging around from winter, such as Broad-winged or Short-tailed hawk, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, or Western Kingbird. Nearby Indigenous Park and Fort Zachary Taylor State Park give us a chance for more migrants and possibly a Caribbean stray, while the latter park is often good for spotting Roseate Terns. Past tours have recorded Bahama Mockingbird, Western Spindalis, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, and other strays in Key West.

This day may also include some birding on Sugarloaf, Saddlebunch, and other Lower Keys if we didn't have time for them the previous afternoon. Some of the best Mangrove Cuckoo locations are on these keys, along with White-crowned Pigeon, Gray Kingbird, Black-whiskered Vireo, and other South Florida specialties. In the evening, another Antillean Nighthawk search may well be necessary.

At a time to be announced this evening, participants continuing on Dry Tortugas (April 30-May 3, 2008) will be provided an orientation and have the option to spend the night aboard the Playmate (see Dry Tortugas itinerary for details).

NIGHT: Best Western Key Ambassador, Key West

**May 1, Day 11: Departure For Home or Continue on Dry Tortugas.** Participants not continuing on Dry Tortugas may depart Key West at any time today.

**TOUR SIZE:** This tour will be limited to 14 participants.

**TOUR LEADER:** Brennan Mulrooney (a second leader will be added if group size warrants)

**Brennan Mulrooney** was born and raised in San Diego, California. Growing up, his heart and mind were captured by the ocean. He split his summer days between helping out behind the scenes at southern California's leading aquarium and working on sport fishing vessels off the coast. As a wildlife and fisheries biology major at UC Davis, he developed his fascination with birds and love of birding while taking a required ornithology course. Since graduating from UC Davis, Brennan has traveled throughout the United States working on widespread ornithological field studies. His work has taken him from the mountains of northern California to the Salton Sea in southern California, and from Cape May, New Jersey to Key Largo, Florida. Currently Brennan and his wife Brynne live in Key Largo where they are conducting research on nesting Roseate Spoonbills in Florida Bay for Audubon's Tavernier Science Center. Participants often comment that Brennan's sharp eyes, sharper wit, and easygoing attitude make it a pleasure to bird with him.

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for this tour is **\$2795** per person in double occupancy from Fort Lauderdale (tour ends in Key West). This includes all food from dinner on Day 1 to dinner on Day 10, all lodging for 10 nights during the tour, ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Fort Lauderdale and return from Key West, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$635**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

**TOUR REGISTRATION:** To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$300**. If you prefer to pay your deposit by check, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office. Full payment of the tour fee is due 90 days prior to the tour departure date.

**CANCELLATION POLICY:** Refunds are made according to the following schedule: If cancellation is made 90 days or more before the tour departure date, the deposit less **\$125** per person is refundable. If cancellation is

made between 90 and 70 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 70 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions, as well as any transfers from one tour to another. ***We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance to protect yourself.***

If you cancel:

90 days or more before departure date  
Between 90 and 70 days before departure  
Fewer than 70 days before departure date

Your refund will be:

Your deposit minus \$125.  
No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance will be refunded.  
No refund available.

**TRIP CANCELLATION INSURANCE:** Application forms for optional coverage for baggage, illness, and trip cancellation can be obtained through the VENT office. We **strongly recommend** that you purchase trip cancellation insurance to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available; however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering. Contact the VENT office prior to registration for details. Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.**

**AIR INFORMATION:** Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

**GENERAL INFORMATION:** If you are continuing from South Florida to the Dry Tortugas tour, we suggest that you use a small or medium-sized duffel, etc., in which you can carry items needed only on the boat. Extra luggage may be stored at our hotel in Key West.

Springtime in Florida offers generally warm, sunny, and pleasant weather, although afternoons can be muggy. Rain—particularly in the form of an afternoon shower—is a distinct possibility. Your main considerations when choosing clothes should be avoiding overexposure to the sun and staying cool. The Florida sun can be intense and participants who are especially sensitive to sun should take all necessary precautions. A light-weight, long-sleeve shirt and some cool field trousers are recommended; shorts and T-shirts are fine, although they offer less sun protection. A light windbreaker and a sweatshirt or sweater may come in handy for early morning or night-time excursions. You should also bring sunglasses and a sun hat, preferably one that will not easily blow off.

Sneakers or other comfortable walking shoes are good footwear. Bring a rain jacket or poncho, and, if you wish, bring a bathing suit. A small travel alarm clock will be useful.

Please limit your luggage to one suitcase or duffel and a small carry-on bag. If you are also on the Dry Tortugas tour, you will find soft-sided baggage to be vastly more convenient.

Biting insects and similar pests can be a problem, especially mosquitoes in mangroves and coastal marshes. Chiggers are also found in the area, as are deer ticks, but neither usually presents problems. Your best defense against all of these is a good repellent.

Poisonous snakes do occur in the area; however, we will probably not encounter any.

**HEALTH:** If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember

to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against Hepatitis types A and B.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line (877) FYI-TRIP. You can check the CDC website at [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel). Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new\\_e.html](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html) (click on travel health).

**SUGGESTED READING:** Our website at [www.ventbird.com](http://www.ventbird.com) offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers, including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from the store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You might also want to visit such other online stores as [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), and for those out-of-print and hard-to-find titles, [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com), or [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com), which specializes in ornithology books.

*Audubon* (July-August, 2001). Entire issue dedicated to South Florida and restoration of the Everglades. To order a back copy of the magazine, see [www.magazine.audubon.org/content/content.html](http://www.magazine.audubon.org/content/content.html). Also see "Marjorie Stoneman Douglas and the Glades Crusade," *Audubon* (March 1983).

Douglas, Marjorie Stoneman. *The Everglades—River of Grass*. Pineapple Press, 1997. Reprint of 1947 edition.

Dunn, Jon et al. *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*, Fifth edition. Washington, D. C.: National Geographic Society, 2006. New edition includes most of the possible West Indian strays.

George, Jean C. *Everglades Wildguide (Vol 143)*. Everglades National Park, Florida: National Park Service Division of Publications, 1988.

Pranty, Bill. *A Birder's Guide to Florida*. Asheville, N.C.: American Birding Association, 2005

Rodgers, James A. et al. *Rare and Endangered Biota of Florida—Birds (Vol. 5)*. Florida: University Press of Florida, 1996. Natural history of Florida specialties.

Sibley, David A. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. New York: Knopf, 2000. Some may prefer to bring the smaller and more portable *Eastern* guide (2003).

**TIPPING:** Tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, local guides, and boat crew) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.

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refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. When this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on July 31, 2007 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation.