

FLORIDA SPECIALTIES BIRDING TOUR

South Florida, the Keys, and the Dry Tortugas!

April 9-17, 2020

A birding tour organized by *Seven Ponds Nature Center & Nature is Awesome Tours*

Sunny, warm, exotic, and filled with vibrant birds, there is no other birding in North America quite like birding in Florida. With 525 birds on the official checklist, and another 30 or so exotics, Florida ranks among the best states for birding, and with migrants streaming through, springtime is when bird numbers peak.



Join us for a tour to sunny south Florida with Seven Ponds Nature Center and Angel Abreu of *Nature Is Awesome Birding and Wildlife Tours*. We'll spend seven full days exploring all that south Florida has to offer, from the world-famous Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary to Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, from the pine flatwoods of northwestern Palm Beach County to the sandy shores and coves of the Florida Keys, from the distant and isolated Dry Tortugas National Park to the exotic birds of downtown Miami. Along the way we'll search out the special birds that make Florida a top destination for birders far and wide – highly sought after birds including Snail Kite, Florida Scrub-Jay, Bachman's Sparrow, and Red-cockaded Woodpecker; south Florida specialties such as Black-whiskered Vireo, White-crowned Pigeon, Mangrove Cuckoo, and Gray Kingbird; Miami exotics like Spot-breasted Oriole, Gray-headed Swamphen, Red-whiskered Bulbul, and Monk Parakeet; and birds of the high seas such as Masked Booby, Bridled Tern, Magnificent Frigatebird, and Brown Noddy – just to name a few!

TOUR ITINERARY

Our daily activities will be flexible based on species we've seen to date and recent bird reports, but the following outline provides a preliminary plan of how we will spend our days. South Florida has a strong history of rare bird sightings, and our plans are subject to change if something hot shows up, or due to weather conditions and/or road and park closures. Note: the birds mentioned are not intended to be an exhaustive list – just a sampling of what may be found at each location.

DAY 1 (April 9) – Arrival day - group meeting in hotel lobby at 6:00 PM, then dinner at a nearby restaurant Night #1 in Miami Lakes.

DAY 2 (April 10) Loxahatchee NWR & Jonathan Dickinson State Park Our Florida specialties tour kicks

off with a visit to Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, which preserves the last remaining portion of the northern Everglades in Palm Beach County. Once a vast ecosystem, the northern Everglades are now compartmentalized. Squeezed between the Everglades Agricultural Area to the west and development to the east, this slice of remaining marsh habitat is a refuge to an array of birds and other wildlife. Our visit to Loxahatchee will be focused on adding **Snail Kite** to our trip list! The Florida population of Snail Kite is restricted to wetlands where their primary prey item is found. In the last century, landscape-scale changes in hydrology have altered the wetlands, which changed the timing and distribution of the Apple Snail. These changes have impacted the population of the Snail Kite, which sadly are now federally endangered. The refuge will also give us a chance to see the *extimus* subspecies of **Red-shouldered Hawk**, plus **Swallow-tailed Kite**, **Limpkin**, **White Ibis**, **Glossy Ibis**, **Wood Stork**, and other wetland birds.



We will break for lunch and begin the second half of our day by visiting Jonathan Dickinson State Park where we will seek out Florida's only endemic bird, the **Florida Scrub-Jay**. This park also offers pristine pine flatwoods that are home to **Bachman's Sparrow** and **Pine Warbler**, among other pineland denizens. We hope to find gopher tortoise and Florida scrub-lizard, two other habitat-specific species that can be found in this park. We will end our day at Green Cay Wetlands where we'll look for **Purple Gallinule**, **Black-bellied Whistling Duck**, **Mottled Duck**, **Black-necked Stilt**, **Least Bittern**, and **American Bittern**. Night #2 in Miami Lakes.

DAY 3 (April 11) Southeastern Pine Flatwoods An early start is required for today, because we will be in search of the endangered **Red-Cockaded Woodpecker**! Our travels will take us to a wildlife management area in northwestern Palm Beach where 22,000 acres of wet prairies, cypress domes, pine flatwoods, and remnant Everglades marsh make up the habitat. While here we will also seek out **Bachman's Sparrow**, the southeastern race of **Eastern Towhee** (possible future split), **Common Ground Dove**, **White-eyed Vireo**, and **Brown-headed Nuthatch** among the other inhabitants of the flatwoods. A walk on the Cypress Boardwalk gives us the chance to look for **Red-shouldered Hawk**, **Barred Owl**, and **Carolina Wren**. The boardwalk and the grassy areas are also great for butterflies – beautiful species such as zebra swallowtail, Julia heliconia, gulf fritillary, and tropical checkered-skipper just to name a few. Other targets for today will include **Sandhill Crane** and **Crested Caracara**. Night #3 in Miami Lakes.

DAY 4 (April 12) The Florida Keys – Upper and Lower Keys The Keys archipelago is made up of over one thousand islands that extend southwest into the Florida Straits and the Gulf of Mexico. The road ends at “Mile Marker 0” in Key West, only 90 miles from Cuba! Located between 24 and 25 degrees latitude north, here you are closer to the tropics than anywhere else in the United States. The Keys support distinct plant communities that are home to animal species found nowhere else in North America, like the unique Key deer. We’ll look for this specialty in Big Pine Key. The azure blue water will begin to work its soothing magic while you are here. Enjoy the views!

The Upper Keys will give us a chance to take it slow and explore lesser-known areas. Stops along the road to scope mudflats for waders and shorebirds will be on the itinerary today. We will visit locations that in the past have produced Caribbean vagrants such as Thick-billed Vireo, Bahama Mockingbird, La Sagra’s Flycatcher, and various tropical dove species. We hope to find some tropical migrants such as **Gray Kingbird** and **Black-whiskered Vireo**. Resident species like **White-crowned Pigeon**, **Mangrove Cuckoo**, and **Cuban Yellow Warbler** will be on our target list while in the Upper Keys today. We hope to find living jewels in the way of liguus tree snails. In North America, these



beautiful endangered tree snails are found only in extreme southern Florida. We’ll also keep our eyes out for the beautiful Florida purplewing, a true Florida Keys specialty butterfly. Working our way southwest to Mile 0, we will make a stop for **Roseate Tern** and **Least Tern** in Marathon, and a stop at Ohio Key to scan the flats and tidal pools for shorebirds and



migrant songbirds along the coastal habitat. Continuing towards Key West we’ll make a stop for **Shiny Cowbird** in Sugarloaf Key. At this point we will head for Key West to check in to our hotel, take a short break to refresh, and meet back in the hotel lobby. From here we will head to a few local hotspots in search of migrant songbirds.



Stops at Indigenous Park where many a vagrant has been discovered, and at Fort Zachary Taylor State Park, location of the one and only sighting of a Cuban endemic in North America (Cuban Vireo) are on the agenda. A stroll around the fort, which was built between 1844-1860, will take us back in time while we search for incoming spring migrants. We hope to make the Sunset Celebration at Mallory Square this evening – a daily celebration that includes music, local street performers, artists, dancers, and a beautiful postcard sunset. Our lodging tonight is a short five minute walk from the Southernmost Point marker. Night #4 in Key West.

DAY 5 (April 13) Dry Tortugas National Park Today we travel aboard the *Yankee Freedom III* to Dry Tortugas National Park on an island adventure of a lifetime! About 70 miles west of Key West lay the Dry Tortugas, a set of islands first discovered by Ponce de Leon in 1513. First named “La Tortugas” for the quantities of sea turtles found here by the Spanish sailors, the name was later altered to “Dry Tortugas” for the lack of springs or other fresh water sources on the islands. Our destination today is Garden Key, home to the historic and mysterious Fort Jefferson. The fort is rich in history, and was built to protect interests in the important shipping lanes between the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico. The fort was actually never completed, but was used as a prison during the Civil War. The fort’s most famous prisoner, Dr. Samuel Mudd, served four years here for setting the broken leg of John Wilkes Booth, the man accused of assassinating President Abraham Lincoln. In 1935 President Franklin D. Roosevelt designated the islands a national monument and in 1992 Dry Tortugas National Park was born.



The *Yankee Freedom III* will be the perfect platform for a study of pelagic species encountered in the Gulf Stream. **Northern Gannet, Audubon's Shearwater, Cory's Shearwater, Pomarine Jaeger, Masked Booby, Brown Booby, Roseate Tern, and Bridled Tern** are all possible while en route to the islands. Our pelagic species study will continue once we dock on Garden Key, where we will target birds that nest on nearby islands Hospital Key and Bush Key. **Magnificent Frigatebird, Sooty Tern, and Brown Noddy** all nest on

these islands. A thorough check of the Brown Noddy colony may turn up a rare **Black Noddy**. We'll also be on the lookout for **Red-footed Booby** and **White-tailed Tropicbird**, two rarities that are occasionally seen.

Off to explore the grounds on Garden Key, we'll be in search of a different set of birds here: Gulf-crossing neotropical migrants that land on the islands to rest and refuel. These migrants may include warblers, vireos, thrushes, cuckoos, raptors, and more. Garden Key is also a good place to see southern specialties such as **Antillean Nighthawk, Gray Kingbird, Black-whiskered Vireo, and Shiny Cowbird**. We'll sift through the trees and shrubs around the fort and check the water fountain for migrant passerines. Before leaving the island, participants may visit the park's visitor center and gift shop or explore the fort on a self-guided tour. Others may wish to bird some more. We'll meet at a set location and time to board our waterborne chariot for the ride back to Key West. On our way out, we'll be swinging by Hospital Key for a closer look at the Masked Booby colony. Night #5 in Miami Lakes.

DAY 6 (April 14) Key Biscayne – Virginia Key -

Crandon Today we will visit the shelly sandstone islands of Key Biscayne and Virginia Key, two barrier islands off the coast of Miami. These unique islands are composed of sand eroded from the Appalachian Mountains and carried to the coast by rivers and south by coastal currents. First inhabited by Tequesta Indians some 2,000 years ago, today it's hard to imagine what these islands looked like when this indigenous tribe inhabited them. We'll be visiting three great birding sites on the islands: Cape Florida, Crandon Beach and Gardens, and Virginia Key, in hopes of finding neotropical migrants and with some luck, a Caribbean vagrant! These islands are known hotspots for West Indian strays such as La Sagra's Flycatcher, Thick-billed Vireo, Western Spindalis, Bahama Mockingbird, Bananaquit, and more. Of course these would be rare and unexpected, but these birds have all been recorded on these islands multiple times.



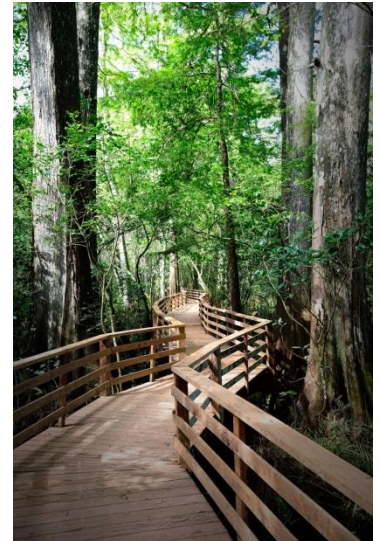
We'll visit the oldest standing structure in Miami, the Cape Florida Lighthouse, built in 1825 and the site of a Seminole Indian invasion – the second indigenous tribe to inhabit the islands. We will gaze at homes that float above the shallow Biscayne Bay waters. We'll also visit the site of the former Zoological Gardens, a zoo that was started



with animals that were stranded when a traveling animal show broke down in Miami. In 1973, two southern Bald Eagles were hatched at the zoo – the first successful captive hatching in over fifty years! Wrapping up this historic region of South Florida, we will explore an ancient fossilized mangrove reef where shorebirds forage for food stranded by the changing tides. Key Biscayne and Virginia Key are truly natural gems of Miami's coast, possessing rich coastal environments that will give us many opportunities for great birding. Night #6 in Miami Lakes.

DAY 7 (April 15) Corkscrew Swamp, Big Cypress National Preserve

Today we take a road trip to the gulf side of the state to visit the Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. This 17 square-mile sanctuary was established in 1955 to protect one of the largest remaining stands of bald cypress and pond cypress in North America. The 2.25 mile boardwalk traverses pine flatwoods, wet prairie, old growth cypress swamp, and marsh ecosystems. Along with many bird species, American alligators and cottonmouth snakes also inhabit the sanctuary. During our visit we may see **Anhinga, Snowy Egret, Little Blue Heron, Tricolored Heron, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Roseate Spoonbill**, and numerous songbirds, including **Painted Bunting**. On our return to Miami via the Tamiami Highway, we'll visit Big Cypress National Preserve, which protects 729,000 acres of freshwater swamp, including a mixture of both tropical and temperate plant communities and a wide range of bird life. A scenic loop drive through the preserve will provide some insight into this vast area, and should give us close-up looks at many wading and water birds. Night #6 in Miami Lakes.



DAY 8 (April 16) Miami Exotics and South Florida Specialties We'll wrap up our tour of South Florida with a day of cultural and birding experiences in the world famous Magic City of Miami – a dynamic city with rich history dating back to the 1500s when Juan Ponce de Leon sailed into Biscayne Bay. But the city's roots are much older than that: Tequesta Indians roamed South Florida some 10,000 years ago! Our travels today will navigate you through historical cities such as Coral Gables, home to the Biltmore Hotel. One of three National Landmarks in Miami, the Biltmore is a beautiful Mediterranean revival style masterpiece designed and built during the City Beautiful movement in the early 20th century. We'll also visit historic South Miami where we'll search for parakeets, parrots, and majestic macaws. During a visit to Little Havana, where the Cuban flair is evident, we'll stop for lunch and a *cafecito* at a world famous Cuban restaurant.

Miami is a place where the world comes together, a melting pot of people, music, art, and wildlife. Miami is also a hotspot for exotic bird species that are ABA-countable; these species are mostly found in suburban and urban Miami, highlighting lush tropical habitats found throughout the city.



Today we will focus on ABA-countable species, such as the attractive and glowing **Spot-breasted Oriole**. In total, there are eight countable species, including **Egyptian Goose, Gray-headed Swamphen, Monk Parakeet, Nanday Parakeet, White-winged Parakeet, Red-whiskered Bulbul, and Common Myna**. Miami is not only about the exotic wildlife. Situated at the southern tip of the peninsula, here the northern temperate zone meets the subtropical zone, and as a result tropical species such as **Gray Kingbird** range just north enough that they nest in Miami. **Snail Kite, Mangrove Cuckoo**, the Caribbean race of **Cave Swallow, White-crowned Pigeon**, and **Short-tailed Hawk** all add to the tropical infusion that is so very evident in Miami. Night #7 in Miami Lakes.

DAY 9 (April 17) Departure Plan your departure for any time today. Hotel check-out is 12:00PM. If you're flying out today, you'll need to arrange your own transportation to Miami International Airport, which is about 10 miles from the hotel.

TOUR LEADERS



Angel Abreu of *Nature is Awesome Birding and Wildlife Tours* is a bilingual educator and naturalist, professional birding guide, and mentor to young birders. He was raised in Miami, Florida, by Cuban parents who encouraged outdoor exploration. His love of nature came from the waters that surrounded Florida – the ocean provided a getaway from the busy metropolis of Miami, and it’s where he had his first experiences with birds and other wildlife. From oceans to the “River of Grass,” Angel developed a strong bond with the unique flora and fauna of the Florida Everglades while working on several Everglades restoration and

species monitoring projects. This fascination with wildlife led him to a career path he cherishes: leading tours and teaching others about culture, birds, and wildlife – immersed in nature, he wouldn’t have it any other way. Angel and his wife Mariel specialize in helping their clients find and learn the birds of Florida, Cuba, and beyond through their guiding service. Angel is a leader for Miami’s Tropical Audubon Society, and also guides, presents, and teaches workshops at birding and wildlife festivals across the U.S.

Daryl Bernard is a long-time birder and amateur naturalist who loves being outdoors and embraces every opportunity to share nature with others. He enjoys organizing trips and tours, and strives to ensure that every participant has a thoroughly enjoyable experience. Previous birding tours organized and led by Daryl include trips to Colorado, Texas, California, New Mexico, Oregon, and Arizona, in addition to many local birding trips in Michigan. Daryl is the Executive Director at Seven Ponds Nature Center in southeast Michigan, and regularly presents birding programs at Audubon clubs, libraries, and birding festivals.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Lodging for this tour will be in two different locations:

- First three nights and last four nights – La Quinta Inn & Suites, Miami Lakes
- Middle night – Blue Marlin Motel, just a five minute walk from the Southernmost Point marker in Key West

LOCAL TRANSPORTATION

We will travel in a single 15-passenger van. Keeping the group together in one van allows everybody to get on the same birds while on the road, and helps develop group camaraderie. Since we will be packing up a couple times during the tour, we ask that you travel as lightly as is practical. This will help maximize space in the van.

MEALS

All meals are included in this tour, from dinner on Day 0 (arrival day) to breakfast on Day 8. Most breakfasts will be provided by our Miami Lakes hotel, continental style. We will keep the van stocked with various snacks to tide you over between meals. Lunches will be mostly in the field, picnic-style, with the exception of Day 7, when lunch will be at a very special Cuban restaurant in Little Havana. For dinner each evening we will enjoy a different, unique restaurant near our hotel in Miami Lakes, where we will have a wide variety from which to choose. The dinners on this tour will be one of the many highlights!

FEE and REGISTRATION INFORMATION

- Tour Fee: \$2375 per person in double occupancy from Miami, Florida
- Single Supplement: \$540 (subject to availability, which may be difficult to secure)
- Deposit: \$300 (due within three weeks of registration)
- Final Payment Due: March 1, 2020
- Group size is limited to **8 individuals** and early registration is encouraged

WHAT THE TOUR FEE INCLUDES:

- guide service for seven full days of birding – Angel will be with us every birding step of the way
- lodging for eight nights (seven nights in Miami Lakes, one night in Key West)
- all meals from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 9, including amazing local Miami restaurants
- local ground transportation in a single, 15-passenger van
- boat trip to/from Dry Tortugas National Park aboard the *Yankee Freedom III* (\$180 value)
- all park entrance fees, parking fees, tolls, etc.
- pre-trip information and a post-trip mailing with an annotated list of all birds observed by the group
- eBird checklist sharing (for participants who use eBird)

WHAT THE TOUR FEE DOES NOT INCLUDE:

- your airfare to/from Miami, Florida
- your shuttle to our hotel on arrival day, and to the airport on day 8
- personal snacks, additional drinks, and alcoholic beverages
- laundry
- other items of a personal nature
- gratuity for local birding guide services (optional)

PHONE/ON-SITE REGISTRATION WILL OPEN ON TUESDAY, JANUARY 7, 2020 at 9:00 AM

Registered participants will be mailed a registration form to return with their tour deposit.

To register for this tour, please call SEVEN PONDS NATURE CENTER at (810) 796-3200 or visit the nature center in person. These field tours often fill quickly. For more information, contact Daryl Bernard at (810) 796-3200 or (989) 513-5195 (cell) or via e-mail at dbernard@sevenponds.org.

PHOTOS USED BY PERMISSION, COURTESY OF:

Andrew Simon – White-crowned Pigeon

Oscar Wilhelmy – Shiny Cowbird

Kim Leedom – Snail Kite, Florida Scrub-Jay

RJ Wiley – Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary boardwalk

Susan Young – Mangrove Cuckoo, Short-tailed Hawk

Good Birds! Here is a sampling of the birds we are hoping to see that aren't generally found Michigan

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck
 Egyptian Goose ϵ
 Mottled Duck
 Northern Bobwhite
 American Flamingo Φ
 White-crowned Pigeon
 Eurasian Collared-Dove ϵ
 Common Ground-Dove
 White-winged Dove
 Zenaida Dove Φ
 Mangrove Cuckoo
 Antillean Nighthawk
 Chuck-will's-widow
 King Rail
 Clapper Rail
 Purple Gallinule
 Gray-headed Swamphen ϵ
 Limpkin
 Black-necked Stilt
 American Avocet
 American Oystercatcher
 Snowy Plover
 Wilson's Plover
 Marbled Godwit
 Western Sandpiper
 Laughing Gull
 Brown Noddy
 Black Noddy Φ
 Sooty Tern
 Bridled Tern
 Least Tern
 Roseate Tern
 Royal Tern
 Sandwich Tern
 Black Skimmer

White-tailed Tropicbird Φ
 Audubon's Shearwater
 Magnificent Frigatebird
 Masked Booby
 Brown Booby
 Northern Gannet
 Anhinga
 American White Pelican
 Brown Pelican
 Snowy Egret
 Little Blue Heron
 Tricolored Heron
 Reddish Egret
 Cattle Egret
 Yellow-crowned Night-Heron
 White Ibis
 Glossy Ibis
 Roseate Spoonbill
 Black Vulture
 White-tailed Kite
 Swallow-tailed Kite
 Snail Kite
 Short-tailed Hawk
 Burrowing Owl
 Red-cockaded Woodpecker
 Crested Caracara
 Monk Parakeet ϵ
 White-winged Parakeet ϵ
 Yellow-chevroned Parakeet Ω
 Red-crowned Parrot Ω
 Orange-winged Parrot Ω
 Nanday Parakeet ϵ
 Blue-and-Yellow Macaw Ω
 Chestnut-fronted Macaw Ω
 Blue-crowned Parakeet Ω

Mitred Parakeet Ω
 Red-masked Parakeet Ω
 La Sagra's Flycatcher Φ
 Western Kingbird
 Gray Kingbird
 Scissor-tailed Flycatcher
 Loggerhead Shrike
 White-eyed Vireo
 Thick-billed Vireo Φ
 Black-whiskered Vireo
 Florida Scrub-Jay
 Fish Crow
 Cave Swallow
 Brown-headed Nuthatch
 Carolina Wren
 Red-whiskered Bulbul ϵ
 Northern Mockingbird
 Bahama Mockingbird Φ
 Common Myna ϵ
 Western Spindalis
 Yellow-breasted Chat
 Orchard Oriole
 Spot-breasted Oriole ϵ
 Shiny Cowbird
 Bronzed Cowbird
 Boat-tailed Grackle
 Worm-eating Warbler
 Swainson's Warbler
 Kentucky Warbler
 "Cuban" Yellow Warbler
 Yellow-throated Warbler
 Prairie Warbler
 Summer Tanager
 Blue Grosbeak
 Painted Bunting

ϵ exotic/introduced – ABA countable

Ω exotic/introduced – not ABA countable

Φ rarity – hoped for, but not to be expected