

# FLORIDA SPECIALTIES BIRDING TOUR

## South Florida, the Keys, and the Dry Tortugas!

April 12-20, 2024

A birding tour organized by *Seven Ponds Nature Center* and *Woodstars Birding & Nature Tours*

Sunny, warm, exotic, and filled with vibrant birds, there is no other birding in North America quite like Florida birding. With 534 birds on the official checklist, and many more exotics, Florida ranks among the best states for birding, and with spring migrants streaming through, bird numbers peak in April. Come along for this tropically infused birding tour!



Join us for a tour to sunny south Florida with Seven Ponds Nature Center and local expert guide Luis Gles. We'll spend seven full days exploring all that south Florida has to offer, from the edge of the Everglades at Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge to the beautiful boardwalk at Green Cay Wetlands, 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 Nanday 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 basic 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 noted are not intended to be an exhaustive list – just a sampling of what may be found at each location.

**DAY 1 (April 12) – Arrival Day** Group meeting in hotel lobby at 5:00 PM, then dinner at a nearby restaurant. *Night in Fort Lauderdale.*

**DAY 2 (April 13) Loxahatchee NWR & Jonathan Dickinson State Park** Our south Florida 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 wetland 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 refuge to a wide 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 – apple snails – are found. The refuge will also give us a chance to see **Swallow-tailed Kite, Limpkin, White Ibis, Glossy Ibis, Wood Stork**, and other wetland birds.



After a break for lunch, we'll 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 in Fort Lauderdale.*



**DAY 3 (April 14) 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 DuPuis Wildlife and Environmental Area in northwestern Palm Beach County where 22,000 acres of wet prairies, cypress domes, pine flatwoods, and remnant Everglades marsh make up the habitat. We'll also search for **Bachman's Sparrow, 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 in Fort Lauderdale.*



**DAY 4 (April 15) 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. 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 have a rich history of hosting West Indian strays such as La Sagra's Flycatcher, Thick-billed Vireo, Bananaquit, Bahama Mockingbird, Western Spindalis, and more. Of course, these would be rare and unexpected, but these birds have all been recorded on these islands multiple times.



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 of the species 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 in Fort Lauderdale.*

### **DAY 5 (April 16) Miami Exotics and South Florida Specialties**

Today we will focus our birding efforts in the world-famous Magic City of Miami – 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 the lush tropical habitats found throughout the city.

Exotic target birds today will include **Spot-breasted Oriole, Egyptian Goose, Gray-headed Swamphen, Monk Parakeet, Nanday Parakeet, White-winged Parakeet, Red-whiskered Bulbul, and Common Myna.** But Miami is not only about exotic wildlife. Situated at the southern tip of the Florida peninsula, 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 evident in Miami. *Night in Fort Lauderdale.*



**DAY 6 (April 17) The Florida Keys – Upper and Lower Keys** The Florida Keys archipelago is made up of over one thousand islands that extend southwest into the Florida Straits and the Gulf of Mexico. The Keys support distinct plant communities that are home to animal species found nowhere else in North America, like the unique Key deer, a species we'll look for in Big Pine Key. As we drive Overseas Highway toward Key West, the azure blue water will begin to work its soothing magic. Enjoy the views! The road ends at "Mile Marker 0" in Key West, only 90 miles from Cuba. Located between 24- and 25-degrees latitude north, here we'll be closer to the tropics than anywhere else in the United States. We'll spend the next two nights living on Key West time!



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 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 gathering 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 in Key West.*



**DAY 7 (April 18) Dry Tortugas National Park** Today we will 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" due to the lack of springs or other fresh water sources on the islands. The Dry Tortugas are a "bucket list" destination for birders throughout North America. Our destination today is Garden Key, home to the historic Fort Jefferson.



The *Yankee Freedom* 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 in Key West.*



**DAY 8 (April 19) Florida Keys & Miami clean-up** We'll depart Key West this morning and begin working our way back up the Keys, stopping along the way to try for any birds we missed on the way down. Once back in the Miami region, we'll use today as a "clean-up" day, tracking down wayward species we still haven't connected with. Our plan for today is flexible – but rest assured we will put the day to good use! *Night in Fort Lauderdale.*

**DAY 9 (April 20) Departure Day** Plan your departure for any time today. Hotel check-out is 12:00PM. If you're flying out of Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport, take the complimentary shuttle. If you're flying out of the Miami International Airport, you'll need to arrange your own transportation.



## **TOUR LEADERS**

**Luis Eduardo Gles** is an economics graduate, but also an environmental scientist in the making. He graduated from Universidad Autónoma de Occidente in Colombia with a Bachelors in Economics and also attended Miami Dade College for his second degree. Shortly after Luis finished his first degree, while exploring the Andes mountains in South America, he was exposed to the incredible variety of birds in Colombia; it was at that point where he decided that the study of birds was his true passion. For several years, Luis has been involved with conservation foundations and bird tracking agencies there. He is one of the founding members of *Woodstars Birding & Nature Tours*, a tour company which focuses on developing ecotourism products, especially for medium-sized tours for bird enthusiasts. To date, Luis has run tours in Colombia as well as in South Florida and the Caribbean. Since 2014 he has participated in several South Florida Christmas Bird Counts and has also volunteered for the Florida Keys Hawkwatch and Cape Florida Banding Station.



**Daryl Bernard** is a long-time birder and amateur naturalist who loves being outdoors and embraces every opportunity to share nature with others. Daryl enjoys organizing trips and tours and strives to ensure that every participant has a thoroughly enjoyable experience. He has organized and led more than a dozen birding field tours throughout North America, many local birding trips in Michigan, and seasonal bird walks for Seven Ponds. 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:

- Fort Lauderdale – Cambria Hotel Fort Lauderdale (subject to availability)
- Key West – Blue Marlin Motel, just a five-minute walk from the Southernmost Point marker

## **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 1 (arrival day) to breakfast on Day 9. Most breakfasts will be provided by our 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 5, 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.

## **FEE and REGISTRATION INFORMATION**

- Tour Fee: \$2,900 per person in double occupancy from Fort Lauderdale, Florida
- Single Supplement: \$700 (subject to availability, which may be difficult to secure in Key West)
- Deposit: \$300 (due within three weeks of registration)
- Final Payment Due: March 1, 2024
- 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 – Luis will be with us every birding step of the way
- lodging for eight nights (six nights in Fort Lauderdale, two nights in Key West)
- all meals from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 9, including amazing local restaurants
- local ground transportation in a single, 15-passenger van
- your shuttle to our hotel on arrival day, and to the airport on departure day
- 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 Fort Lauderdale, Florida
- transportation to/from Miami International Airport, if that is the airport you choose to use
- personal snacks, additional drinks, and alcoholic beverages, and laundry
- gratuity for local birding guide services (optional)

**ONLINE REGISTRATION WILL OPEN ON FOR SEVEN PONDS MEMBERS  
TUESDAY, JANUARY 2, 2024, at 9:00 AM**

**ONLINE REGISTRATION WILL OPEN ON FOR NON-MEMBERS  
TUESDAY, JANUARY 9, 2024, at 9:00 AM (space permitting)**

Registration for this tour will take place online at [www.sevenponds.org](http://www.sevenponds.org) with a \$300 deposit due at the time of registration. At the Seven Ponds home page, go to Programs then Seven Ponds Field Tours and select the South Florida Birding Field Tour registration button. You should receive an email confirmation upon successfully completing your online registration. Registered participants will be mailed a registration form to return.

For more information, contact Daryl Bernard at (810) 796-3200 or (989) 513-5195 (cell)  
or via e-mail at [dbernard@sevenponds.org](mailto:dbernard@sevenponds.org).

**BIRD PHOTOS USED BY PERMISSION, COURTESY OF:**

Andrew Simon – White-crowned Pigeon

Kim Leedon – Snail Kite, Florida Scrub-Jay

Susan Young – Mangrove Cuckoo, Short-tailed Hawk

WikiCommons – Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Shiny Cowbird, Gray Kingbird, Brown Noddy, Magnificent Frigatebird, Dry Tortugas NP, Key Biscayne, Southernmost Buoy, Green Cay Wetlands, Jonathan Dickinson SP





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

\*V = vagrant species, annual or nearly-annual, but not to be expected

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

White-tailed Tropicbird  
 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  
 White-winged Parakeet  
 Yellow-chevroned Parakeet  
 Red-crowned Parrot  
 Orange-winged Parrot  
 Nanday Parakeet  
 Blue-and-Yellow Macaw  
 Chestnut-fronted Macaw  
 Blue-crowned Parakeet

Mitred Parakeet  
 Red-masked Parakeet  
 La Sagra's Flycatcher \*V  
 Western Kingbird  
 Gray Kingbird  
 Scissor-tailed Flycatcher  
 Loggerhead Shrike  
 White-eyed Vireo  
 Thick-billed Vireo \*V  
 Black-whiskered Vireo  
 Florida Scrub-Jay  
 Fish Crow  
 Cave Swallow  
 Brown-headed Nuthatch  
 Carolina Wren  
 Red-whiskered Bulbul  
 Northern Mockingbird  
 Bahama Mockingbird \*V  
 Common Myna  
 Western Spindalis \*V  
 Yellow-breasted Chat  
 Orchard Oriole  
 Spot-breasted Oriole  
 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