

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*

Trip Report and Sightings Notes



DAY 1 (April 12) – Arrival Day

We gathered in the hotel parking lot, catching up with one another and sharing amazing views of nesting Yellow-crowned Night-Herons just a few feet away. We met our guide, Luis Gles, with introductions all around. Right from the start it felt like Luis would be fun to bird with, and he did not disappoint. Our first dinner together was at a wonderful Mexican restaurant just a few minutes from the hotel – the first of many delicious forays into Latin American food culture. *Night in Dania Beach.*

DAY 2 (April 13) Heading North to Start the Tour

Our south Florida tour kicked off with an early morning drive to the **Hungryland Wildlife and Environmental Area**, where we arrived before sunrise in hopes of catching the elusive Red-cockaded Woodpecker around their nesting trees in the Florida Pine Flatwoods habitat. On the way to the woodpecker spot, a pair of Northern Bobwhites surprised us by flushing from the edge of the trail. After a bit of searching, Luis had us on not just one, but two of the rare woodpeckers, as we had extensive scope and binocular views while they foraged. On the way back to the van we had looks at another denizen of the pines, the Bachman's Sparrow. Great start to our first day! At **Jonathan Dickinson State Park**, shortly after entering the park we were treated to great views of Florida's only endemic bird: the Florida Scrub-Jay. At the park we also tracked down another of our pinewoods targets: Brown-headed Nuthatch – but not before we found two more Red-cockaded Woodpeckers! On the way out of the park we were treated to distant views of a Swallow-tailed Kite. Our next stop was **Green Cay Wetlands and Nature Center**, where we enjoyed a lengthy walk on the park's amazing boardwalk. Along the way we found 45 species of birds, including Least Bittern, Purple Gallinule, Limpkin, Painted Bunting, and many others. We also spotted our first Marsh Rabbit. We finished our long opening day of birding at **Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge** with boardwalk birding through the cypress swamp. We tallied a total of 73 species of birds for the day – what a way to start! *Night in Dania Beach.*



DAY 3 (April 14) A Change in Plans

Because we found all of our pine flatwoods targets yesterday, today presented an opportunity to stretch the tour a bit, heading northwest towards Lake Okeechobee. At **Belle Glade Marina & Torry Island** we didn't track down either of our target species (Tricolored Munia and Snail Kite), but did manage to find many other birds, including a continuing Tropical Kingbird, American Bittern, more Painted Buntings, and a total of 51 species. Additional stops included **John Stretch Park**, where we viewed Lake Okeechobee, **A-1 Flow Equalization Basin**, which held several shorebirds plus resting Common Nighthawks, and **Pine Island Ridge Natural Area**, where we enjoyed a Burrowing Owl on its day roost. *Night in Dania Beach.*

DAY 4 (April 15) Key Biscayne

Today we battled Miami morning rush hour traffic in order to be at **Key Biscayne** at sunrise. Our first stop was at the southern end of **Crandon Park**, where we first walked the beach for shorebirds, then explored the old zoo area. There we found many birds, including the exotic-looking Egyptian Goose, displaying Indian Peafowl, our first Gray Kingbird, plus our only encounter with American Crocodiles. At the north end of the park, we notched our first Black-whiskered Vireos of the tour. Our next stop on Key Biscayne was **Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park**; it was midday and there



was not a lot of bird activity. Onward to **Haulover Park**, where we carefully scanned each palm tree in hopes of finding the lingering Yellow-headed Caracara. Failing to find it, we moved across the inlet to **Oleta River State Park**, where the caracara had also been spending time. We diligently waited over two hours, only to miss the bird by mere minutes as we were in the wrong part of the park. The miss hurt all of us, but was probably most felt by our guide, Luis. We determined to give it another shot before the end of the tour. *Night in Dania Beach.*



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

Once again into the heart of Miami traffic, this time on a city-wide hunt for exotic birds. Our first stop was **Brewer Park**, a small neighborhood park nestled among historic homes. Here we found Yellow-chevrons Parakeets, Lilac-crowned Parrot, Orange-winged Parrots, Red-masked Parakeets, and stately Blue-and-yellow Macaws. At **Pine Woods Park** we added Red-whiskered Bulbul and numerous Scaly-breasted Munias. At **West Matheson Hammock Park** we didn't add any exotics, but we did manage eight raptor species, including a glimpse at our first Short-tailed Hawk of the trip. A stop at **Country Golf Biltmore Hotel** added Mitred Parakeets, along with more Yellow-chevrons and Red-masked

Parakeets. We finished our day of exotic birding in the **Miami Springs neighborhood**, where we enjoyed close-up views of more than a dozen Mitred Parakeets as they descended on some backyard feeders. We had an early dinner in anticipation of our long drive down the Florida Keys the following morning. *Night in Dania Beach.*

DAY 6 (April 17) The Florida Keys

An early morning departure had us at **Key Largo Hammocks State Botanical Site** before 7AM in hopes of tracking down the shy Mangrove Cuckoo. White-eyed Vireo and Yellow-billed Cuckoo were the best we could do, as the Mangrove Cuckoo would not reveal itself. We took a one mile walk through multiple habitats at **Long Key State Park**, where many Merlins were patrolling the treetops. The nearby Long Key State Park campground area produced several shorebirds. At **Grassy Key** we added Neotropic Cormorant, Reddish Egret, and Red-breasted Merganser to our trip list before hurrying down to the **Key West Tropical Forest and Botanical Gardens**, where two rare birds had recently been found (Pearly-eyed Thrush, Piratic Flycatcher). We searched the grounds until the 4:00 PM closing time without luck, then proceeded to our lodging in



Key West. The group enjoyed wandering the streets of this southernmost U.S. outpost (ticking White-crowned Pigeon in the process), then settled in for a good night's sleep in anticipation of our early morning boat trip. *Night in Key West.*



DAY 7 (April 18) Dry Tortugas National Park

The blue waters of the Gulf of Mexico provided smooth sailing our we headed 60 miles west aboard the *Yankee Freedom III* to Dry Tortugas National Park. Despite our vigilance en route, we were not able to spot an Audubon's Shearwater, one of our hoped-for oceanic species. Nearing Fort Jefferson, the captain steered the boat around **Hospital Key**, where we observed many Masked Boobies and a handful of Brown Boobies before docking at **Garden Key**. We were immediately engulfed in bird life: Magnificent Frigatebirds silently glided over the fort; Sooty Terns squabbled and circled overhead and in the beachside vegetation; Brown Noddies perched stoically on the old dock pilings. That is



where we focused our attention first – sorting through the many Brown Noddies in search a possible Black Noddy – and we found not just one, but two of the wayward seabirds. After enjoying our lunch inside the fort, along with numerous songbirds who were feeding in the trees and visiting the fountain – the lone freshwater source for the next 60 miles – we ventured up to the fort’s upper wall to search for Bridled Terns, of which we found three. Our time at Fort Jefferson was amazing, but brief, and by mid-afternoon we made our way back to the *Yankee Freedom III* for our return trip to Key West. *Night in Key West.*

DAY 8 (April 19) Florida Keys & One More Caracara Attempt

We departed Key West after breakfast, stopping along the way at **Big Pine Key** (Key Deer) and **La Niña Restaurant** (Common Myna). In Homestead, we made a stop at the home of south Florida birding legend Larry Manfredi, who opened his backyard to our group so we could see the Bronzed Cowbirds and (much less common) Shiny Cowbirds that frequent his feeders. After a lunch stop at a nearby park, we ventured into the Everglades with stops at **Frog Pond Wildlife Management Area — Lucky Hammock** and the **Southern Glades Trail**. At these stops we added Western Kingbird and a distant White-tailed Kite to our trip list. From there we headed back into the gnarly Miami rush hour traffic, hoping to get to Oleta River State Park for one more shot at the caracara. Making it through the



traffic, we arrived at the park just before 6:00 PM, when we received a message from Luis that our new friend Larry Manfredi was looking at the South American raptor at nearby **Haulover Park**. Making a quick U-turn in the park, we hurried to Haulover Park, eight minutes distant. Pulling into the park, we spotted Larry, then saw the caracara perched stately in a palm tree, aglow from the early evening Florida sun. We piled out of the van, then enjoyed more than fifteen minutes with this special bird of prey before it decided to head off in the direction of the state park. We all agreed – it was the perfect way to end an amazing tour of south Florida. *Night in Dania Beach.*



DAY 9 (April 20) Departure Day

Every good tour comes to an end, and this one was certainly among the best. Our guide, Luis, provided all we could possibly ask from a local guide: energy, enthusiasm, expertise, and a smile that lit up the group. Add in his amazing partner Mariah, and we were certainly in good hands. Everyone headed home, back to our normal lives, but holding on to the many wonderful memories created during this tour.



LEADER & GUIDES

Daryl Bernard – Executive Director – *Seven Ponds Nature Center*

Luis Gles – Professional Birding Guide – *Woodstars Birding & Nature Tours*

Mariah Hryniewich – Professional Birding Guide – *Woodstars Birding & Nature Tours*



PARTICIPANTS

Doris Ganzhorn – *Jacksonville, Florida*

Jan Giesken – *Lapeer, Michigan*

Sue Keener – *Oxford, Michigan*

Marlene O'Connor – *Suttons Bay, Michigan*

Patrick O'Connor – *Suttons Bay, Michigan*

Candy Petrick – *Beulah, Michigan*

Anita Spencer – *Lapeer, Michigan*

Nancy Tazzia – *Dryden, Michigan*

LODGING

Sleep Inn & Suites–Fort Lauderdale International Airport

Dania Beach – April 12-13-14-15-16-19

Blue Marlin Motel

Key West – April 17-18



RESTAURANTS

Orale Mexican Restaurant – *Hollywood*

The Ripe – *Delray Beach*

Tardes Caleñas (Colombian) – *Hollywood*

El Tropic Cuban Cuisine – *Sunny Isles Beach*

Runas Peruvian Cuisine – *Hollywood*

Irie Island Eats (Jamaican) – *Marathon*

Pinchers – *Key West*

Ocean Grill & Bar – *Hollywood*

BIRDING LOCATIONS

Saturday, April 13

- Hungryland Wildlife and Environmental Area
- Jonathan Dickinson State Park
- Green Cay Wetlands & Nature Center
- Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge



Sunday, April 14

- Belle Glade Marina & Torry Island
- John Stretch Park
- A-1 Flow Equalization Basin
- Pine Island Ridge Natural Area



Monday, April 15

- Crandon Park
- Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park
- Haulover Park
- Oleta River State Park

Tuesday, April 16

- Brewer Park
- Pine Woods Park
- West Matheson Hammock Park
- Country Golf Biltmore Hotel
- Miami Springs neighborhood



Wednesday, April 17

- Key Largo Hammocks State Botanical Park
- Long Key State Park
- Grassy Key
- Key West Tropical Forest & Botanical Gardens



Thursday, April 18

- Key West Bight
- Gulf of Mexico (Key West to Dry Tortugas)
- Dry Tortugas National Park—Hospital Key
- Dry Tortugas National Park—Garden Key & Fort Jefferson

Friday, April 19

- Big Pine Key—Blue Hole
- La Niña Restaurant
- Manfredi Home
- Benito Juarez Park
- Frog Pond Wildlife Management Area—Lucky Hammock
- Southern Glades Trail
- Haulover Park



TRIP BIRDS – 160

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck

Egyptian Goose

Muscovy Duck

Blue-winged Teal

Mottled Duck

Red-breasted Merganser

Northern Bobwhite

Indian Peafowl

Red Junglefowl

Pied-billed Grebe

Rock Pigeon

White-crowned Pigeon

Eurasian Collared-Dove

Common Ground Dove

White-winged Dove

Mourning Dove

Yellow-billed Cuckoo

Common Nighthawk

Chimney Swift

Clapper Rail

Sora

Common Gallinule

American Coot

Purple Gallinule

Gray-headed Swamphen

Limpkin

Sandhill Crane

Black-necked Stilt

Black-bellied Plover

Killdeer

Semipalmated Plover

Long-billed Dowitcher

Greater Yellowlegs

Lesser Yellowlegs

Willet

Ruddy Turnstone

Stilt Sandpiper

Sanderling

Least Sandpiper

Laughing Gull



Herring Gull
Lesser Black-backed Gull

Brown Noddy

Black Noddy
Sooty Tern
Bridled Tern
Least Tern
Caspian Tern
Sandwich Tern
Royal Tern



Wood Stork

Magnificent Frigatebird

Northern Gannet
Brown Booby
Masked Booby

Anhinga

Double-crested Cormorant
Neotropic Cormorant
American White Pelican
Brown Pelican
American Bittern
Least Bittern
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron



Little Blue Heron
Tricolored Heron

Reddish Egret

Snowy Egret
Green Heron
Western Cattle Egret



White Ibis

Glossy Ibis
Roseate Spoonbill

Black Vulture

Turkey Vulture
Osprey
White-tailed Kite
Swallow-tailed Kite
Northern Harrier
Sharp-shinned Hawk
Cooper's Hawk
Bald Eagle



Red-shouldered Hawk

Broad-winged Hawk

Short-tailed Hawk

Red-tailed Hawk

Burrowing Owl

Red-bellied Woodpecker

Downy Woodpecker

Red-cockaded Woodpecker

Pileated Woodpecker

Yellow-headed Caracara

American Kestrel

Merlin

Peregrine Falcon

Monk Parakeet

Mitred Parakeet

Yellow Parakeet

Red-masked Parakeet

Yellow-chevroned Parakeet

Lilac-crowned Parrot

Orange-winged Parrot

Blue-and-yellow Macaw

Great Crested Flycatcher

Tropical Kingbird

Western Kingbird

Eastern Kingbird

Gray Kingbird

White-eyed Vireo

Blue-headed Vireo

Black-whiskered Vireo

Loggerhead Shrike

Blue Jay

Florida Scrub-Jay

Fish Crow

Tree Swallow

Purple Martin

Northern Rough-winged Swallow

Barn Swallow

Cliff Swallow

Red-whiskered Bulbul

Brown-headed Nuthatch

Marsh Wren

Carolina Wren



European Starling

Common Myna

Gray Catbird

Brown Thrasher

Northern Mockingbird

Scaly-breasted Munia

House Sparrow

Bachman's Sparrow

Swamp Sparrow

Eastern Towhee

Eastern Meadowlark

Red-winged Blackbird

Shiny Cowbird

Bronzed Cowbird

Brown-headed Cowbird

Common Grackle

Boat-tailed Grackle

Ovenbird

Worm-eating Warbler

Blue-winged Warbler

Black-and-white Warbler

Common Yellowthroat

American Redstart

Cape May Warbler

Northern Parula

Yellow Warbler

Blackpoll Warbler

Black-throated Blue Warbler

Palm Warbler

Pine Warbler

Yellow-rumped Warbler

Prairie Warbler

Black-throated Green Warbler

Northern Cardinal

Indigo Bunting

Painted Bunting



REPTILES

American Alligator
American Crocodile
Florida Softshell Turtle
Florida Redbelly Turtle
Black Racer (snake)

Red Corn Snake

Curly-tailed Lizard

Green Iguana

Giant Ameiva (lizard)

Black Spiny-tailed Iguana

Red-headed Agama (lizard)

Crested Anole

Bark Anole

Brown Anole

Tokay Gecko (heard only)

Southern Five-lined Skink

Common Basilisk (lizard)



MAMMALS

Key Deer

Marsh Rabbit

BUTTERFLIES

Queen Butterfly

Monarch

Viceroy

Gulf Fritillary

Giant Swallowtail

Zebra Heliconian

Julia Heliconian

Common Buckeye

Mangrove Skipper

Hammock Skipper

White Peacock

Atala





PHOTO CREDITS

Daryl Bernard – *pine flatwoods, Red-cockaded Woodpecker, American Crocodile, Blue-and-yellow Macaw, White-crowned Pigeon, Yankee Freedom III, Yellow-headed Caracara (1), Luis Gles, Blue Marlin Motel, Southernmost Point, Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park, Haulover Park, Brewer Park, Key Largo Hammock State Botanical Park, Fort Jefferson National Park, Egyptian Goose, Red Junglefowl, Magnificent Frigatebird, Yellow-headed Caracara (2), Zebra Heliconian, Atala, Garden Key*

Anita Spencer – *Painted Bunting, Sooty Tern, Indian Peafowl, Purple Gallinule, Limpkin, Brown Noddy, Wood Stork, Anhinga, Reddish Egret, White Ibis, Black Vulture, Short-tailed Hawk, Monk Parakeet, Red-masked Parakeets, Yellow-chevroned Parakeets, Black-whiskered Vireo, Red-whiskered Bulbul, Common Myna, Shiny Cowbird, Bronzed Cowbird, Prairie Warbler, Curly-tailed Lizard, Green Iguana, Giant Ameiva, Black Spiny-tailed Iguana, Marsh Rabbit, Key Deer*

Luis Gles – *group photos at Pine Woods Park and Dry Tortugas National Park*