

A Birding Trip to
Florida, USA



April 26th to May 3rd, 2022

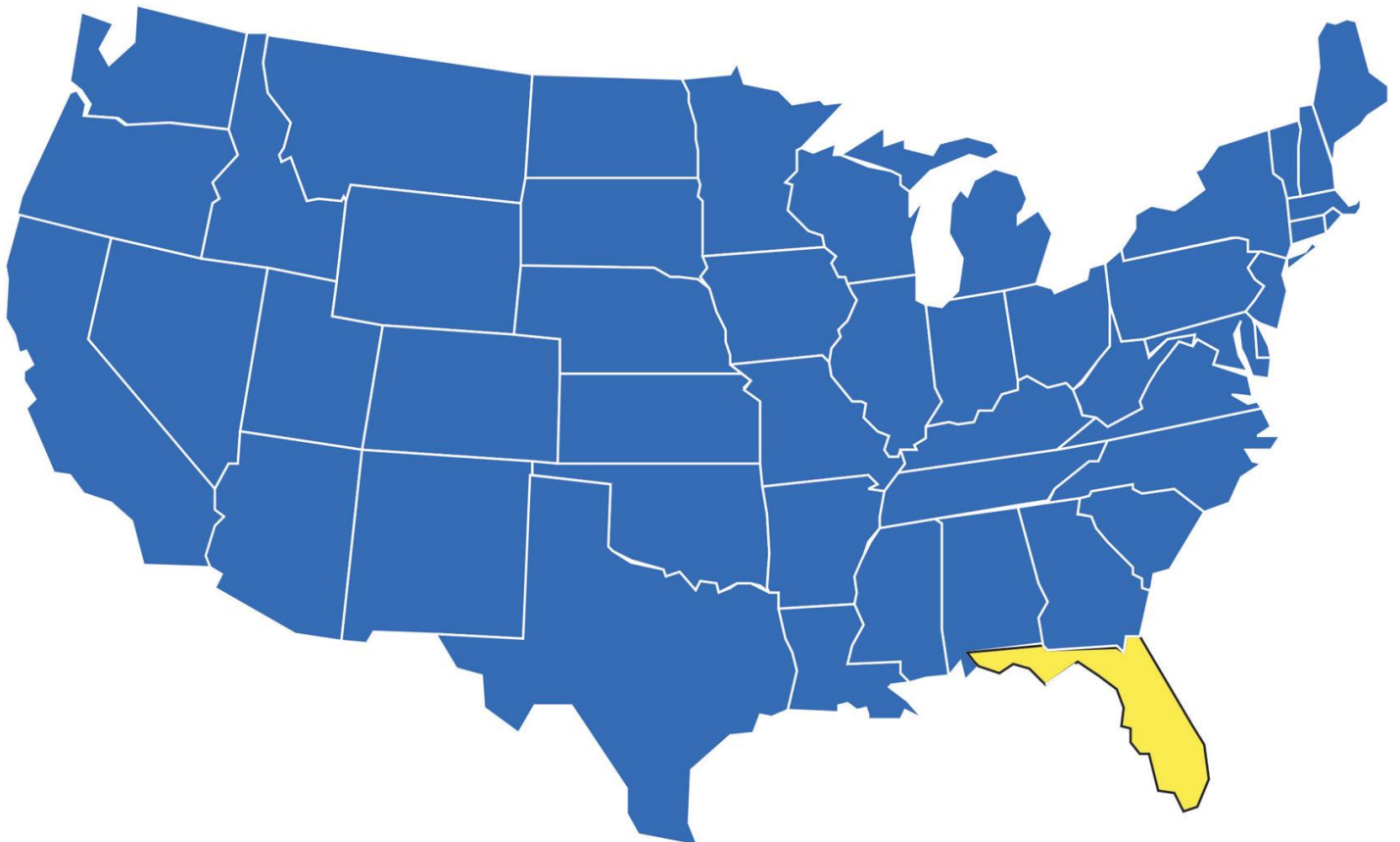
Tuesday 26 th April	Everglades NP	Key Largo Mahogany Hammocks Nine Mile Pond Snake Bight Trail Eco Pond/Flamingo Anhinga Trail Ingraham Highway, Homestead
Wednesday 27 th April	Florida Keys	Key Largo Hammocks Long Key SP Bahia Honda SP Key West Ferry area
Thursday 28 th April	Dry Tortugas NP	
Friday 29 th April	Homestead to Naples	Tamiami Trail Kirby Storter Roadside Park Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk Marco Island
Saturday 30 th April	Ding Darling NWR	Indigo Trail & Wildlife Drive Bailey Tract Winkler Point
Sunday 1 st May	Oscar Scherer SP Babcock-Webb WMA Ponce de Leon City Park	
Monday 2 nd May	Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary	
Tuesday 3 rd May	Biscayne NP Miami South suburbs	Dante Fascell Visitor Center Castello Hammock Park A D Barnes Park



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After a Covid enforced moratorium on birding trips for a couple of years, it was a relief and also hugely exciting to be searching beyond the now very, very familiar British birds and British sites. I had been to Florida a few times before, initially on a business trip, and subsequently on family holidays, usually managing to get out to see much of what avian platters were on offer. But never a true birding holiday. This actually meant a different type of planning as compared with previous trips, forming some sort of itinerary. It became clear that the locations we were looking at, and the clockwise-ish format of the journey were very similar to many of the organised trips and birding reports, which makes a lot of sense since this takes in the typical Floridian avifauna.



As befits a still occurring pandemic journey, hoops still had to be jumped through, despite being 2 years on from the start of the hullabaloo. Thankfully, travel on the UK side had become a lot more straightforward, even losing the pre flight locator information for the return flights only days after we booked them. The USA still insisted on some ways to make your journey all the more difficult, however, not least of which was the pre flight negative Covid test which had to be carried out. Good – lateral flow tests were accepted as well as

the more expected PCR test. Bad/odd – this had to be done and the certificate produced within one day of the flight (Monday flight, so toddling off to a local centre on the Sunday for the £35 test). Ah, and then, this had to go through the Verify app for online check in. Tests done, Verify passed, but guess what, online check-in didn't work! We were politely informed at the check in desk that in fact the Verify app wasn't working for US flights. Or in other words, the very flights it was designed for.

Driving in the area

Yon side in Miami airport from landing to picking up the hire car was a breeze – less than an hour from touchdown to driving away. Leaving Miami a week later was a pain – check in at Miami is painfully, painfully slow, with far too few desks open and a lot of time spent on some passengers. Back to the car, and we had brought our own preloaded-with-sites sat nav, which eventually woke up and was invaluable throughout. The car came with a toll-by-car pass, which had to be paid for at the collection desk, but did contain all toll payments for the week in a state which now has no tollbooths on its roads but plenty of (auto) toll payments to be made. Be prepared for the Miami way of driving – undertaking and switching lanes is allowed in Florida, but they see the speed limit as a minimum and look as if they're scoring points for every lane crossed!

The Reserves and Parks

The 21st Century has also now found the reserves and parks. Payment at almost all is now by credit card (be aware that Corkscrew Swamp recommends booking and paying for an entry slot online), but we still came across the odd one that only accepts good old fashioned dollar bills and the receptacle of an envelope. Also most of the parks have PDF's or the like of the trails which seem a much more environmentally format than paper maps. Don't worry though the latter are usually also handed out, even when you mention you already have one on the magic mobile phone.

Insects and weather

A huge surprise was the lack of mosquitoes throughout. Only the odd one was encountered, but have no fear, there are some rather vicious horsefly types that pack a bit of a bite, and don't seem perturbed by the spray. Occasionally we also came across tiny flies that didn't seem to bite, but annoyingly landed on the face and had a penchant for the eye area. Of course sun screen is a must here. First half of the week saw temperatures up to 92°F and almost constant sun. Later in the week, there was regular mid afternoon rain, when temperatures plummeted to a chilling 70°F. And when it rained it really rained, making driving conditions outright dangerous. We amazingly managed to avoid any of this while out birding – even the Gortex might have had a run for its money!

The boardwalks and tracks through almost all of the reserves and parks are kept in very good condition such as this one at Corkscrew Swamp

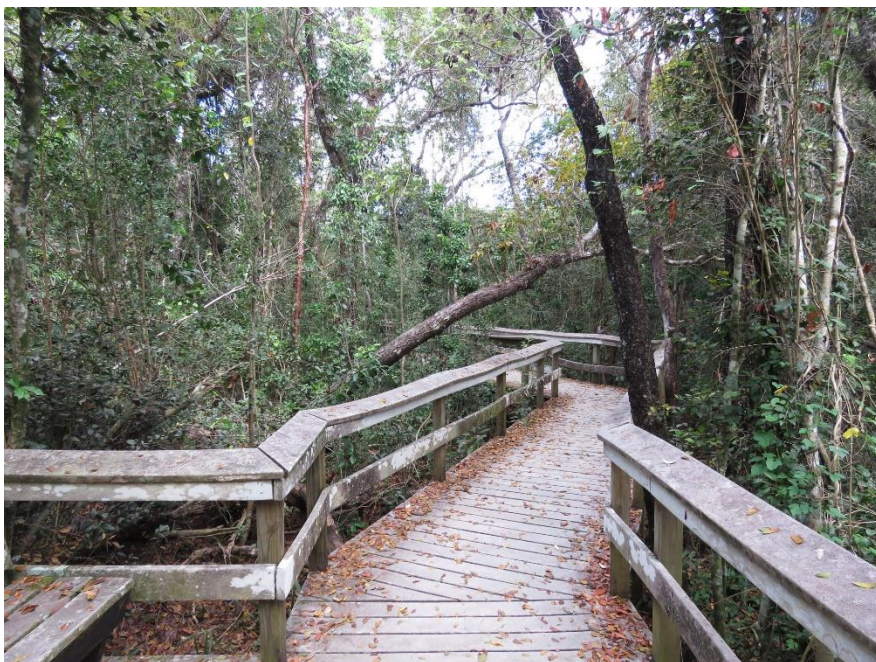


Mahogany Hammock

*Red-winged Blackbird*

First day of the first birding trip since the beginning of the Covid pandemic found us in the Everglades National Park. I had been here just before the pandemic on a family trip, and realised the potential then. However, the excitement of this first bit of birding was palpable. This was magnified when an Antillean Short-eared Owl flew across the road early on in the park. We decided to forgo the obvious start of the Anhinga Trail - nice easy Florida wetland birding - to try for one of the more difficult subspecies - Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow. These have been declining even by their own modest standards over the last couple of years, so chances were slim. Also, it is only really possible to locate them when singing, which is usually early in the morning. So we looked in the best reported place, just South of the Mahogany Hammock entrance. However, the closest we got to our quarry was the singing Red-winged Blackbird as soon as we pulled up. A heart stopping moment due to its similarity in song, but the fairly common presence of the blackbird won out. Equally regular were Common Yellowthroats. Not quite as approachable as the blackbirds, but still impressive. We drove a little further south to Sweet Bay Pond, but again no sign of the sparrows, although a pair of Eastern Kingbirds were showy.

So it was a reverse in direction to get to Mahogany Hammock, but progress was stopped at the main junction by, at first, a couple of Northern Mockingbirds, but then the impressive finding of a roosting Common Nighthawk. We spent some time on this impressive bird making sure it wasn't another nightjar/nighthawk, but it even called eventually.



We set off again for our third attempt to get to the Hammock, this time successfully. Only one other vehicle was parked up as we entered the car park (day trippers came in later!) and we were greeted straight away on the boardwalk by a juvenile White Ibis and a pair of Red-bellied Woodpeckers. Once in the hammock, the birding gets more difficult. The circular boardwalk is surrounded by thick foliage, and it is overall relatively quiet. However, one small part of the walk produced a pair of well marked Black-whiskered Vireos, Black-throated Green Warbler, and White-eyed Vireo. A separate Black-and-white Warbler was further around.

Nine Mile Pond



After stumbling around in the dense hammock, it was on to more open water habitat. We did stop briefly at Paurotis Pond, but this was disappointing due to poor visibility from any of the lookouts and basically very few birds. Highlight was a Great Blue Heron ambling around the car park as we left.

Nine Mile Pond is somewhat better. It is a reasonably sized open pond, and there was a limited amount of birdlife of interest here. A pair of Ospreys appeared as we watched and entertained with some open water fishing. In the bushes lining the car park, a pair of Great Crested Flycatchers held audience, with some good poses when they sat still. While watching them, I tried to pin down a woodpecker tapping almost in front of me. It just couldn't be found, until it dived out of a hole it had been making in a hidden upside-down entrance.

Snake Bite Trail



We had been looking forward (!?) to this walk with some trepidation. The 1.8 mile straight walk and same back in the heat of the day wasn't to be taken lightly, but the continuous mention of attack mosquitoes hammered home. As it turned out, it must have been their day off, save for a few biting flies, since not one of the little droning beasties was encountered. The walk remained though, and it seemed even longer through the avenue of trees on the way back.

However, it is well worth the effort!

The walk along the track through the woodland had quite a lot of quiet patches, but a bit of care brought up constant goodies. White-eyed Vireos and Great Crested Flycatchers were most commonly seen, but there were also other goodies in the form of American Redstart, Parula, Black-and-white Warbler, and a trio of Pine Warblers. Overhead was a single but distant Swallow-tailed Kite, and a couple of Common Ground Doves kept ahead of us. Two conundrums were encountered. First was a pair of what initially looked like vireos (greyish crown, darkish topped white supercilium resembling Red-eyed, but they had a small white patch at the base of the primaries). Hindsight resulted in likely female Black-throated Blue Warblers. Second was a shy snake at the side of the track, slate grey above with white belly. Almost certainly the first of a few Eastern Racers seen through the trip? We tried to wait it out for some time but it must have found a rear exit!

The icing on the cake was when the end of the walk was reached. A short boardwalk ended with a seat and small viewing area overlooking a small white sanded frontage to the gulf. Waders were thinly scattered but of interest. Willets and Grey Plover were the most obvious. Brown Pelicans were occasionally past. Nearby couple of Prairie Warblers were right next to the boardwalk, and singles of Common Flicker and Red-bellied Woodpecker to our front.



Great Crested Flycatcher

Flamingo

This is the end of the road for the Everglades National Park, and in true American style there is a cafe (thankfully) and boat tours to see manatees etc. There is also a quite decent lagoon in the form of Eco Pond, but it must have had one of its off days on our visit – Snowy Egret, Tricoloured Heron and a group of Willets were all that was on show.

So back into Flamingo and straight into a tree shaded free car park. The first port of call was the freshwater outlet where I had seen manatees previously, but none today. Wondering whether it was a bit late in the maritime season for them, we were over the moon to see a mother and calf very close to in the marina itself later. Throughout was noise from the 3 immature and adult Ospreys, nesting under everyone's noses in the middle of the few buildings. Down below were wandering Brown-headed Cowbirds and Common Grackles. Not to be outdone, a Swallow-tailed Kite flew low over the marina, and the nesting American Crocodile was spotted close to the shore.



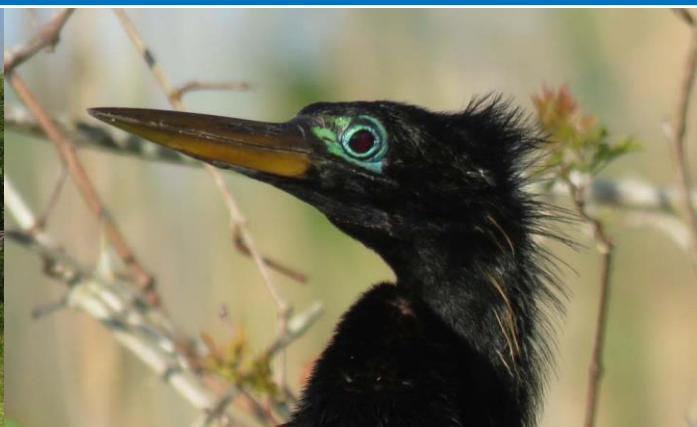


Adult Osprey



Immature Osprey on nest

Anhinga Trail



We sort of did things backward by looking for Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow first. This meant leaving this trail till late in the day, rather than be part of the mass invasion as one of the first tour stops in the park. It also seemed to result in far fewer people being around – never a bad thing!

There are two items which the trail is known for – Anhinga (natch) and Alligator. The former are not only easy to see, they positively almost seem to be seeking attention (I'm talking about you Anhinga drying on the walkway rail!). The latter were a little more difficult today, but we did get 3 of different ages, including 1 foot long youngster next to the path. Perhaps stealing the show were the 3 Swallow-tailed Kites, which are a step above in the handsome stakes. A flyby Pileated Woodpecker tried to muscle in on the beauty competition, but really needed a pose to be included.

Overall, a pleasant bit of Everglades at the end of the day. Pristine and manicured, with flip floppers wandering around and about, but still some good signs of the habitat.

With the satnav set for the hotel and the light beginning to fade, we thought that was it for the day. Until a Common Nighthawk was spotted perched on a single vertical tree stem. After having a good look at it for some time, it started to call, as did a few others in the area, and then flew off to display above us. When we started off again, we came across a few others in display flights. We were stopped again when a Loggerhead Shrike was spotted on a wire fence, and while watching that an Eastern Meadowlark (below) was found.



Dagny Johnson Key Largo Hammock

Today was the day to leave the Everglades area and traverse the length of the Keys to Key West, birding on the way. The downside to the first few sites, mainly on Key Largo, was that they don't open until 8am – a couple of hours birding time down! So, we decided to try for John Pennecamp State Park first, since it looked as if it might allow access beforehand. No chance – big white gates across the entrance. So, we tottered back up 4 miles to Dagny Johnson, of course to find no access to it by car due to bollards across the entrance. We decided to wait the half hour and see if we could find anything. As chance would have it, this was the only time we saw two of the specialities – White-crowned Pigeon over and perched on the treetops and Black-whiskered Vireo singing above the entrance. Surreally, a Cape May Warbler was hopping around the wing mirror of the only other car present.

8am came and went, with no sign of opening or even pay envelopes in the docket, we decided to leave the car outside and walk the area anyway. Good decision, since the smallish park seemed unkempt and unmanaged. Most of it is a poorly tended tarmac track running through the woodland, with a more open area and potential at the tip. Overall, birdlife was reasonably slow, and mainly focused on migrating warblers, which included Black-and-white, more Cape May, Blackpoll & Palm Warblers. Singing Prairie Warblers were more likely resident in the area and answered a conundrum from the day before when their constant songs at Snake Bight Trail were unidentified. We kept a close eye and ear for signs of Mangrove Cuckoo, but sadly none were found. Back at the entrance and the Black-whiskered Vireo was seen and heard yet again.



Cape May Warbler feeding on car bonnet

Long Key State Park



Solitary Sandpiper

We eschewed the idea of more of the same habitat at Key Largo in favour of an hour's drive down to Long Key. This would hopefully mix up the habitat and offer more in the way of mangroves and open water. It is not a very large park, having a circular loop of around a mile. A boardwalk starts the loop through some open mangrove, and it is here we arguably had our best bird – a Solitary Sandpiper. The boardwalk then turned to a sand track, with odd glimpses of the water to one side. This held a couple of juvenile Tricoloured Herons, a Willet and Snowy Egret. A brace of Brown Pelicans flew by with an Osprey overhead. Warblers were best represented by singing Prairie, and glimpses of one or two others were had. All in all not a bad little park but quite a bit of work in the hot sun for partial reward.

Bahia Honda State Park

When we first pulled up at the car park, initial reaction was mainly one of dismay. All we could see were tourist sunbathers and a paltry seaweed laden narrow beach with sea bathers. However, once we walked a little way away from these, in the direction of the entrance kiosk, the wader watching became superb. It is best to walk down to the "beach" over the large, jagged rocks when the entrance is reached again to the north, since the gate stating "no access" is for pedestrians as well as cars, not just the latter as we had assumed. That being said, when the two nice ladies in the buggy who worked for the park pointed out the error of our understanding, we had already seen a good bag of birds. We did then walk back along the narrow beach, and this helped add Royal Tern and Least Sandpipers to the haul.

The main birds seen and heard along the front were Laughing Gulls, with the odd Ring-billed Gull every now and again. Taking a closer look at the water's edge found numerous Turnstones and mainly nonbreeding plumage Sanderling, with occasional Grey Plover and a single Semipalmated Plover. As time progressed, we also sifted out a few Least Sandpipers from the larger waders. Pick of the crop of herons were a trio of Reddish Egrets, which were strangely very difficult to approach. Passerines were dominated by noisy Red-



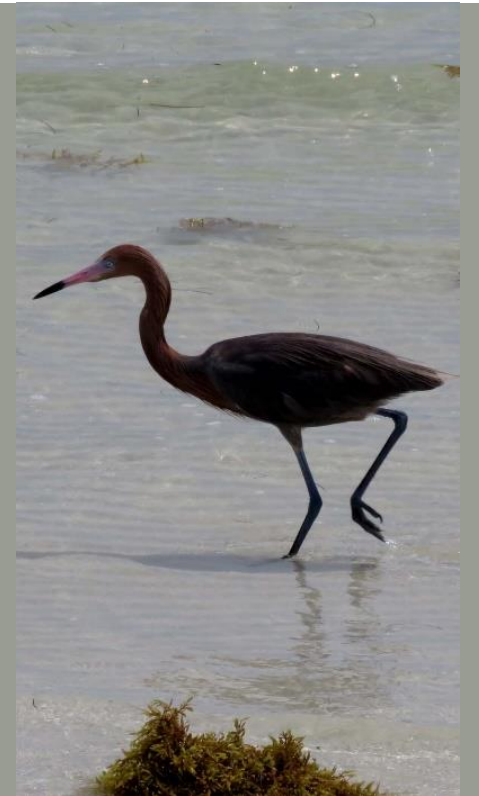
winged Blackbirds, but as we sat at a bench savouring an ice cream, a superb male American Redstart put on a bit of a show around us.



Laughing Gull



Least Sandpiper



Reddish Egret

Key West

After devouring shrimp and chicken at a roadside bar near to the Tortugas ferry, which we had checked out ahead of time, we thought no more birding was possible. We were a bit wrong there. Following a couple of White-crowned Pigeons next to the ferry terminal, it was obvious there were a lot more about, and they were seen regularly. Grey Kingbirds were also very obvious, perching on wires along the main streets. More of a surprise was when we flippantly checked a few trees in one of the main outdoor car parks. One of the trees contained Northern Parula, Cape May & Prairie Warblers. An adjacent one had Grey Kingbird, White-crowned Pigeon, and even a Northern Mockingbird sitting on a nest. An Osprey flew over for good measure.

White-crowned Pigeon



Day 3 The Dry Tortugas (www.drytortugas.com)

You have some days in birding that are just damned good birding days. You knew it would be good – weather was right for migration, etc. You were going to a known area for special birds. Etc. Then there are the superb days when you thought it would be good, were looking forward to that fact, and it turned out to be so much better than expected. Our day, or surely not only 4 hours of the day, on the Tortugas was the latter. We had been looking at forecasts of likely rain a day or two before. Sun/dry/calm seas (around 1-2 foot swell). Apparently the week before the swell on the journeys over had 6 foot+ swells. No fun. And then there was the actual birding on the island . . .



The day starts with a 7am check in at the ferry terminal on Key West. We had a hotel that was not only a 600m walk to the ferry, but also kindly allowed us to leave the car in their car park for free for the day (the covered car parks near to the terminal cost around \$40 for the day). We arrived at the check in just before 7am and they had been open for a little while. We were given boarding ticket numbers 46-47, and the boarding was in lots of 25. This is worth knowing since the preferred location for birders is on the outdoor viewing deck, and it does fill up quite quickly. The journey started well, with

good numbers of Least Terns along one of the rocky piers in the harbour. The journey overall, which takes around 2 hours 10 minutes, was more or less devoid of birdlife, save for the odd Magnificent Frigatebird. More than filling this slot were the regular antics of flying fish trying to avoid our oncoming behemoth and doing their flying thing.

Before Fort Jefferson, the main island in the Tortugas group, is reached, the ferry passes what look like uninhabited sandbanks. The third of these is Hospital Key, and it is THE place to see Masked Booby. However, it seems a good idea to mention to one of the ferry staff that a float by is appreciated, or this minor spectacle will be missed. To be fair, the shallow waters around the island mean there is still a bit of a distance to look over, but a bit of patience will result in reasonable views of the boobies, some in flight to examine wing patterns.



Masked Boobies

As Fort Jefferson is approached the main chunk of birding begins. After a few passing Brown Noddies and Magnificent Frigatebirds, a single wooden platform held the only Brown Booby we saw during the visit, accompanied by a few Double-crested Cormorants. The island is almost circumnavigated before docking, and the sheer numbers of Brown Noddies, Sooty Terns, Magnificent Frigatebirds and Brown Pelicans can be appreciated even before

setting foot on terra firma. The bush covered sand bar arcing from the main hub of the island seemed infested with manic Sooty Terns, and the first close Brown Noddies and Brown Pelicans welcomed us on vertical posts in the dock.



Fort Jefferson within the walls

The birding on the island divides itself into two distinct types – breeding seabirds and visible migration. We decided that the latter should be investigated first, since the seabirds would be there for the duration, but migrants may come and go. We crossed the welcoming path straight to the entrance to the old fort itself. I had visions of a parched open area with the odd scattered bush with a migrant or two clinging on for dear life but was instead hit with an arena formed by the fort walls with a quite well grass covered area and good numbers of large inviting trees and bushes to enrapture the tired travellers. Even better, we stumbled almost straight away on a purpose-built drinking pool under the shade of trees, with a few seats for comfort. During the initial encounter with this and also the second visit at the end of the stay, this proved to be a magnet for birds, most of which were wood warblers. Likewise, some of the trees in the corner adjacent to this had a lesser trickle of water to entice migrants, and a walled area was favoured by Indigo Buntings and Northern Waterthrush. The most obvious of the wood warblers in the fort enclosure were Palm Warblers, closely followed by Cape May Warblers. Others seen here were Northern Waterthrush, Common Yellowthroat, American Redstart, and Black-and white, Yellow, Black-throated Blue & Prairie Warblers. Grey Catbird and a few Grey Kingbirds added interest, and overhead were Red-shouldered Hawk and Merlin.



Indigo Bunting



Black-and-white Warbler



Grey Kingbird



The drinking pool (centre)



Palm Warbler



Common Yellowthroat

Selection of birds within the Fort walls



Cape May Warbler



Northern Waterthrush



And so to the seabirds. The excellent fall of stunning migrants had been unexpected, but the hordes of residents was a different but equally as compelling spectacle. I had had the impression that the Sooty Tern colony was further along the sandbank so allowing mainly distant views. And that the vertical old jetty posts favoured by the Brown Noddies were also a little far away. Wrong on both counts. While the tern colony does have obvious "No access" signs to minimise disturbance, it starts next to the circular path, and some of the birds were only 20 or so metres away. Same with the jetty posts, although a little imagination has to be applied to get a good view of all of them. Brown Noddies sit on just about every post, with a few Roseate and a couple of Royal Terns mixed in. Full view of these posts was a definite benefit, since without that the single Black Noddy which was with its Brown congeners would have been missed. In the other direction, large groups of Sooty Terns were in collectives on the beach, with droves in the air above, accompanied by the larger and much fiercer looking Magnificent Frigatebirds.





Black Noddy (centre bottom) with Brown Noddies

Brown Noddy



Magnificent Frigatebird



Sooty Tern



Kirby Storter Park

Birding today was along a stretch from Homestead along the Tamiami Trail to our overnight stay near Fort Myers. Traffic leaving Homestead was typical Miami at 6.45 in the morning – manic and busy. It took some time before we reached the turnoff for the Tamiami route, but the change was incredible. Initially flanked on one side by a waterway devoid of birds, at some point along its length the water birds started to appear in good numbers. Pick of them were Green Heron, Wood Stork and some Black-crowned Night Herons. We aimed for the Oasis Visitor Centre for some info on the Big Cypress Preserve, but the advertised 8am opening turned out to be 9am. So it was off to see what legacy old Kirby had left in the meantime.



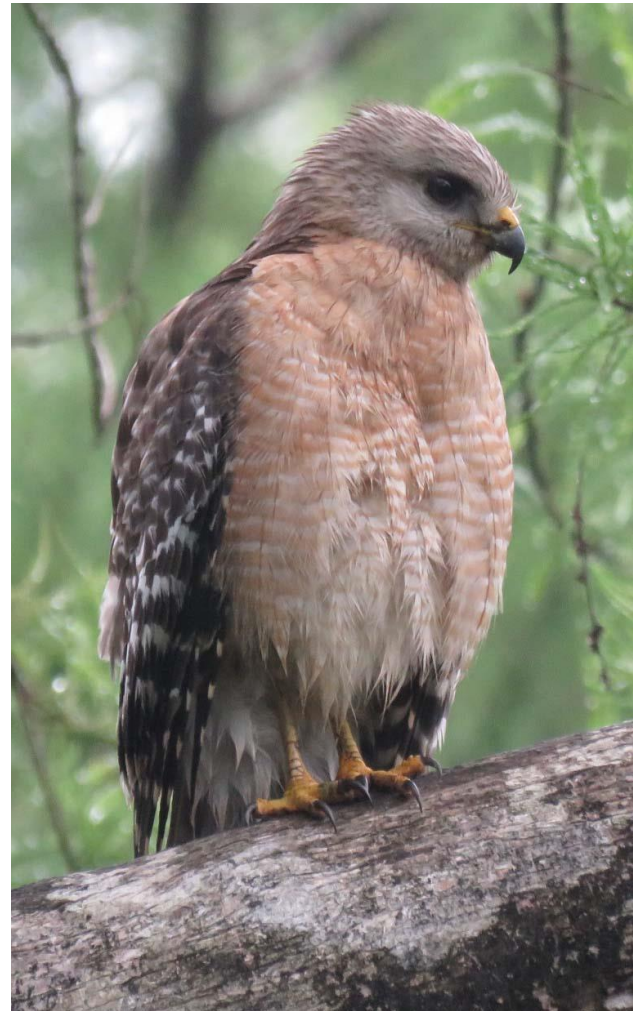
As often is the case even with small reserves, there was a well-built car park with a toilet (of sorts). This led off to a solid walkway which went around 400m into the Cypress Stands. Along the way there was a lookout over an open area, and the terminus was at a wet pond surrounded by trees. Birding for some of the commoner birds was very good, with plenty of song to follow up on. The end lookout was perhaps best, with Carolina Wren singing and showing, Grey Catbirds flying from side to side, and a perched Red-tailed Hawk being harassed by a couple of Blue-grey Gnatcatchers.

Along the rest of the boardwalk, Red-bellied Woodpeckers were the most obvious and obliging, but there were also a few close Northern Parulas and White-eyed Vireos. Downy Woodpecker was only brief, but a Great Crested Flycatcher stayed a little longer.

Carolina Wren



Red-shouldered Hawk



Big Cypress Bend



Following a short stop off at Everglades City, which had promised some lake birds but didn't deliver (Purple Martins were a saviour), we pushed on to this boardwalk also through Cypress stands. It was surrounded by thicker forest than the earlier one at Kirby Storter, but was a little longer, again terminating in a seated platform overlooking a pool containing two Alligators. We had been treated to at least 2 Pileated Woodpeckers on the way, which also were the limited sightings so far, but it was at the viewing platform that the enjoyable birding was to be had. Parulas were evident here, and one eventually sang just above us. A Tufted Titmouse did likewise, being in the company of a female. Non singing participants were in the form of American Redstart and a couple of Black-and-white Warblers.



Northern Parula



We were about to leave the viewing platform when a fellow appeared who seemed to be part of the boardwalk management. He had seen many snakes in the area and asked if we would like to see a Timber Rattlesnake? We were never going to pass the chance of seeing any snake, let alone a rattler, and he duly tried to point out the aforementioned reptile. We took some time but teased out obscured views of the tail at first and then the head. Superb. After a little while it moved and stuck a lot more of its body in view and we gorged on the views. Good as it was, it didn't seem at all right for a rattlesnake and after a bit of Google surfing looked better for Eastern Racer. Still a great sight though.

Marco Island



The wealth of this area hits you in the face. The houses are hugely expensive, most looking to have boat docks to the rear. Perhaps this is why the local Burrowing Owls have chosen this as an unlikely place to set up camp. And it's not as if the birds are hard to find when you are here. It wouldn't be a surprise if having your own Burrowing Owl residence is a mark of wealth, since where the owls dig their home, the residents have put a wooden cross like perch and roped off area around each. Not all you see have owls in evidence, but there are certainly plenty to go on. And they don't seem in the least bit bothered by a strange car on the opposite side of the road taking photos. When we had finally decided to tear ourselves away, we took a slightly different way out of the residential area, and came across yet more owls, one with a family of 4 immatures. Another was digging its new burrow, with only flying sand to be seen at times. Definitely worth paying these chaps a visit in another take on armchair birding.



Ding Darling Indigo Trail and Wildlife Drive

*Yellow-crowned Night Heron**Tricoloured Heron**Green Heron*

The only other time I had been here was almost 30 years ago, and it seems while the essence of the place is the same, there have been quite a few changes. Even coming over the bridges from the mainland, where it used to be a case of paying cash for the toll, is now auto pass on the car for the \$6 payment. The small islands linking the bridges to Sanibel also had good habitat for breeding colonies of Skimmers and Terns, which has now been swept over in favour of tarmac, fishing and recreation. Even entering the Ding Darling reserve proper, where the \$3 in times gone by was placed in an envelope and then you could bird from any time. Now there are steel gates covering the entrance, and the 7am earliest entrance is greeted by a card machine and not unreasonable \$10 per car for the Wildlife Drive. We came at low tide, so I was expecting the small pools filled with herons to show well, but these have now gone being replaced by large lagoons. What has not changed is the advice to wear mosquito repellent. Though we did this, there were very few of the little blighters anyway, although in some locations there were equally annoying tiny flies which insisted on irritating the head and face.

However, it is still an excellent place to visit. We had looked for the Indigo Trail early on, since we arrived somewhat before the 7am opening, and couldn't find it. It then appeared just at the pay booth, where we could park the car (always on the right here) and then explore the paths for a way. This was a great decision, since we did have calling Mangrove Cuckoo early in our walk, accompanied by a couple of singing Black-whiskered Vireos. Just before this, we visited the Wildlife Education Boardwalk with Tower which was placed within the mangroves. After our first Common Gallinule, we eventually found Green Heron, Tricoloured Heron, and Yellow-crowned Night Heron all on nests, with a static Black-crowned Night Heron nearby. Just over here were a small group of Fish Crows giving the game away by calling.



Then it was back into the car for a lazy birding sortie along the wildlife drive. First spot of interest found a trio of herons feeding in the centre of one of the lagoons. These turned out to be Reddish Egret, Little Blue Heron, and the only Roseate Spoonbill seen on the reserve. Shortly after was a small, exposed mud bank in one of the large lagoons. 2 Reddish Egrets, a Little Blue Heron, and 2 Grey Plovers were seen initially, and close inspection revealed a group of Least Sandpipers and single Spotted Sandpiper.

Next main stop was the Wulfert Keys Trail, a short 400m walk to a bench which had very pleasant views of the Flats (a no-go zone for speedboats) and Pine Island Sound. The light winds helped with the comfort here, as did the Ospreys and Brown Pelicans passing overhead. One of the former was seen catching quite a large fish, and finding the handling of it a bit of an issue. Best was to come, when a Manatee was spotted feeding on the rocks right in front of us, more or less eyeballing us when it came up to breathe. It seemed to be scouring the vegetation on the rocks at the shore.

Last quick stop was at the Shell Mound Trail. This is more aimed at the tourists with the plaques outlining previous native American inhabitants, but the short loop did offer our first view of Black-whiskered Vireo of the day, along with a pair of Grey Catbirds and a White-eyed Vireo.

West Indian Manatee



Bailey Tract



Wood Stork

Another site from yesteryear which had different memories to the reality of the present. This is a good in the winter for ducks, but it was now spring, and from the evidence of the mainly dried out marsh, a dry one. This left what can be numerous channels as 2 largish open lagoons, baking in the early afternoon heat. This didn't deter the Great White Egrets, here in good numbers and making for a very elegant vista. They weren't alone in the fishing stakes, with lower numbers of Wood Stork, Great Blue Heron and Snowy Egrets also getting their legs wet (or even parboiled!), with Green & Tricoloured Heron patrolling the water edges with Grey Plover. The smaller/less populated of the two pools also had a few Killdeer and Common Gallinule with chicks. A small group of waders comprising Lesser Yellowlegs and Least Sandpiper were in the distance. One central large tree held a noisy Osprey, later joined by an equally vocal Fish Crow. In the distance was the rumble of thunder and dark clouds (despite our baking sunshine) which made it time to scarper.

Estero Bay Preserve



After initially sniffing out Bunche Beach Preserve as a possible next site, the fact it was now high tide and swarming with beach bums put us off somewhat. It was more or less central to Sanibel and Estero, so had been worth a try, but no thanks! So off we toddled to Estero, which was only another 8 miles on, to find only one other car and a departing park enforcement vehicle. This was another site where the advice was to prepare for the "ferocious" mosquitoes, of which we encountered none. The open ground with wilted trees and the potential of a couple of ponds seemed enticing, but it was very quiet, save for a soaring Red-shouldered Hawk and Bald Eagle perched. Oh, and there was also the approaching storm with attendant thunder which seemed to be

heading our way. We did reach the first of the pools, but it was mainly dry and birdless, so we took the hint and returned to the dryness of the car.



The location of the accommodation for the previous evening couldn't have been better. We left the hotel and were at the park gates 1 minute later. The downside was that it didn't open until 8am, and there was a full steel gate barring entry. However, it slid open at 8 on the dot (we were first in the queue of 3) and once the \$5 for the car was paid, we drove the mile or so to the parking area next to Osprey Lake. There are various colour marked trails in the park, but it seemed that the blue then the green trails were better for birding, and the resident Scrub Jays in particular. This is

the densest breeding population in the state, so we had high hopes of finding them. We had only been walking for a few hundred metres along the blue trail, where the red trail starts, when we followed up a call. Shortly after, a Jay flew down into a lower bush, and suffice to say, we got a little bit excited and the shout of Scrub Jay had to be chalked off when closer inspection revealed one of a party of Blue Jays. These subsequently proved to be quite common in the park.

Undeterred, we doubled back to meet another part of the red trail, since a local birder had given us details of a Whip-poor-will he had seen earlier. We searched for a short while when a call which sounded like a Common Nighthawk turned out to be – Common Nighthawk! Perhaps ID of Poorwill was a little off! We were still ruminating over the Jay mis-ID when all of a sudden a Florida Scrub Jay appeared on a small bush right in front of us. It was almost seeking us out. And not only that, it wasn't in the least bit shy, staying where it was for some time despite our movements. After finally moving on, a short walk again was stopped by a Yellow-billed Cuckoo, which again alighted nicely on a branch but a little further away this time. We decided to double back and complete the Blue Trail, which added a pair of Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren and a Swallow-tailed Kite overhead.

Florida Scrub Jay



After filling up on water at one of the toilet blocks, we found the start of the Green Trail to cover perhaps half of this particular walk. The trail was much more open than the blue trail, with lower scrub. This help wasn't needed when we stopped at a covered seat, when a tapping on the roof turned out to be from the feet of another Scrub Jay. This was a little surreal – another one seemed to be trying to attract our attention. And again, this was not a shy bird, calling and performing in front of us. It did give out what seemed to be an alarm call, but this looked like a response to a colourful and likely poisonous caterpillar. While at this stop, a calling bird to rear and perched out above the scrub was Eastern Towhee.



Babcock Webb State Park

The entrance to this park still has the old fashioned envelope to put cash or cheque into for the \$3 per person entrance payment. Unfortunately, we had been expecting more modern card payment, so didn't have the change. We went off to a petrol station and returned with a few dirty greenbacks. Yet we were in. This is a large reserve, noted in particular for colonies of Red-cockaded Woodpeckers. Fortunately, the tracks can be driven by car, and interesting birds stopped for, as long as the car is tucked in to allow others to pass. Best route is to drive along Tuckers Grade for just short of 2 miles (this is the road that passed through the entrance) then turn left on to Oilwell Grade, which then merges on to Tram Grade, the taking another right after less than a mile on to Seaboard Grade, which re-joins Tuckers Grade. The whole obviously forms a rectangle.

The Red-cockaded Woodpecker sites are very well marked, with nesting trees having a white circle painted on them. There is a group along Oilwell, Tram, & Seaboard Grade. We found these sites easily, but there didn't seem to be any woodpecker activity at any of them, apart from a pair of Red-bellied Woodpeckers which had moved into one of the nest holes. These and a couple of Downy Woodpeckers, as well as 3 Northern Flickers, were the woodpecker contingent we found. However, we did find a small group of another of the site's specialities – Brown-headed Nuthatch (*below*). They were at the junction of Oilwell and Tram Grades. Other notable birds were Common Nighthawks, which were calling and doing display flights, with one being found perched on a horizontal branch.



A small collection of herons was found in a small stretch of water at the junction of Seaboard and Tucker Grades. Pick was a fishing Green Heron, alongside 2 Great Blue Herons and a Great White Egret.

Ponce de Leon City Park

The rain had streamed steadily down at Babcock so we decided to move on to Charlotte Harbor Preserve. It was still raining when we arrived so we read a little into its benefits and other local hotspots. This city park caught our eye, being a small boardwalk through some mangroves with potential for Mangrove Cuckoo. We didn't think there would be much hope this late in the day, but had as yet only had a calling bird at Ding Darling which hadn't shown. However, in for a penny . . . ! Yet the penny paid off. We had 3 birds, 2 of which were flying with each other, one of which was happy to hang around in our vicinity. The 3rd was another calling bird on the other side of the mangroves.



Mangrove Cuckoo



Day 7

Corkscrew Swamp

This seems to be one of the most well known of the Florida National Parks, and is most certainly worth a visit. They have a slightly unusual system of entry, in that online bookings are required (walk ins are possible but only if there are spaces), and you are required to book a time slot from between 8am and 1pm. Last entry is at 1pm, and even if you pop out to the car having already been in the reserve, you still need to be back by 1pm. On our visit, I wasn't sure why this strict system was in place, since it seemed to be fairly sparse in visitor numbers, and the boardwalk is 2.5 miles long, so lots of air for all. Perhaps it was the hang up from Covid frenzy.

On our 8am entry, we decided to concentrate first on the Lettuce Lakes area, hopefully finding it a bit more quiet from tourists, and also reputed to be one of the most lively places for wildlife. This very much turned out to be the case. We were welcomed more or less stepping out of the door by singing Carolina Wren and the spectacle of a couple of perched and preening Swallow-tailed Kites in a nearby tree. We walked along the boardwalk until a shortcut to the rear sites and Lettuce Lakes was taken (believe it or not there is a one way system on the boardwalk) to find a very productive area. We first stumbled on a pool area which was full of wading birds – Wood Storks, Great & Snowy Egrets, Tricoloured, Little Blue & Black-crowned Night Herons, and good numbers of White Ibis. A Red-shouldered Hawk was on the ground to the rear.

Roseate Spoonbill



This area was combed for some time, but one time we returned to the initial pool viewpoint to find a couple of folk looking at a Barred Owl. Okay, the drawback was that it had its back to us watching over the pool. However, it did fly down to return with a crayfish at one time, and while sitting occasionally turned for a preen, etc. Once we dragged ourselves away, the chap we had been watching with beckoned us over for a family of 8 River Otters. They were hunting very successfully for food in another "lettuce" pool, feeding and squabbling as if there was no tomorrow. While watching, a young Alligator briefly came out on to their log, and a Raccoon slowly padded around the area. Overhead, one of the Red-shouldered Hawks seen landed on a branch with what looked like a feathered snack, pulling it apart as we watched. By now it was lunchtime, so we went out to the car to have our own snack, careful of course to re-enter before 1pm!



The afternoon started with a bang when an Eastern Rat Snake was found in the eaves of the roof of the toilet block. It hardly moved initially before deigning to show us its head. Overall, it was an afternoon of snakes and woodpeckers. At times the mangroves could be quiet, and then Red-bellied or Pileated Woodpeckers would break that silence. A single Downy Woodpecker on the other hand never uttered a sound. Other birds calling regularly, and quite often showing themselves, were Carolina Wren, Tufted Titmouse, Parula, and Great Crested Flycatcher. Then at one of the small lookouts we found what looked like single Eastern Racer at first, but turned out to be an assumed pair. The size difference of the two was huge, but a bit of reading revealed little gender size difference, so the smaller one may have been a young snake. Another Racer was seen basking on top of a log. Before reaching the intersection with the short cut, a pool was passed, which had a trio of both Roseate Spoonbills and Wood Storks, and a single Black-crowned Night Heron. A single Alligator shared the same space – wonder why they don't try to eat the birds on offer? Last call was back at the earlier Lettuce Lakes, where the group of 8 River Otters was again in the same place, but not feeding this time (most probably stuffed!).



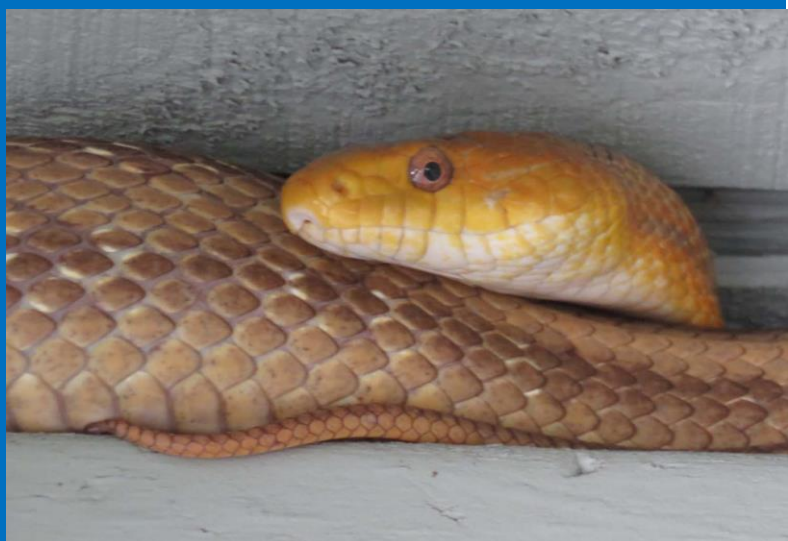
North American River Otter



Barred Owl



Eastern Racer



Eastern Rat Snake

Day 8 South Miami area

Convoy Point, Biscayne NP



For the last morning, we had looked for some sites not far from our regular hotel at Homestead and the airport. This location seemed to fit the bill, with the possibility of Mangrove Cuckoo again on the approach to the parking area. The whole was a bit of a disappointment, with the mangroves only represented by a narrow stand, and the water frontage a bit of a building site. It's likely the reported cuckoos in the area are present on



islands and mangroves in the whole area of the greater Biscayne park. A few common birds were around, but all was improved by a singing Black-whiskered Vireo, and a very approachable one at that. We had seen a few on our travels, and had decent views, but this one loved its territory which was in lowish trees easy to scan. There was a bit of a sign of a migration with a drab wood warbler we failed to identify, but the vireo took star billing here.

Black-whiskered Vireo

Castello Hammock SP



With the intention of finding a few small parks in the vicinity continuing, we were blown out by the Mary Krone park, which was now just bulldozed and an ex Mary Krone birding area. Undeterred, a few miles further on is Castello, part of the current Florida birding trail so very much still present. It is particularly good in the Winter when Painted Buntings and Hummingbirds abound. There is a nature centre here with toilets, placed in between open gardens to the front and a woodland nature trail to the rear. The advice was that the nature trail is nice for trees, but not so good for birds. We were also looking for migrants, especially after the rain through the night, so the open gardens seemed a better bet. We didn't find any as such, although one of the last birds noted was a calling Ruby-throated Hummingbird passing through, unfortunately not seen. Apparently there are half a dozen or so which overwinter here, and had left a week or two ago, so this was more likely a southern migrant. The park is also good for White-winged Doves – the highest concentration we had seen so far (not difficult since we had only seen one elsewhere!). They were a bit jumpy and generally preferred the canopy, but some could be seen on the ground with luck. Other common and vocal birds here were Common Grackle, Northern Mockingbird, Blue Jay, Common Starling and Red-bellied Woodpecker. Just outside of the visitor centre we struck again with snakes – yet another Eastern Black Racer in a tree nearby.



White-winged Dove



Set in a very urban area only a few miles from the airport, this is a good spot to spend the last hour of a trip. It is fairly large, with plenty of recreation areas, but the bit to head out to is the nature centre in the North-west of the park. The centre is a little run down with closed toilets (better ones nearby), but the small paved area behind was good for a small selection of migrant warblers. Chief among these was American Redstart, along with Black-throated Blue Warbler, and a few Parulas, Common Yellowthroat, and Ovenbird. Overhead was Chimney Swift.



Last action of the day was to rescue a male American Redstart from one of the many huge and sticky spiders' webs. It looked to almost have the properties of sticky lime for small birds. The good news is I managed to get the bird out in one piece and after a second or two to pull itself around off it went.



LIST OF SPECIES

BIRDS

Common Nighthawk

Chordeiles minor

26 Apr 2022 Everglades NP--
Mahogany Hammock (1);
Ingraham Highway, Homestead (6)
1 May 2022 Oscar Scherer SP (1);
Babcock-Webb WMA (1)

These are a fairly common site in the state, and I have even seen them along International Drive in Orlando in the past. Yet there is a lot more enjoyment in seeing them perched in wilder areas, which some were, and even more watching them calling and wing buzzing in display flights, which they also did just outside of the Everglades near Homestead

Chimney Swift

Chaetura pelagica

3 May 2022 A. D. Barnes Park (1)

Ruby-throated Hummingbird

Archilochus colubris

3 May 2022 Castellow
Hammock Park (1)

Unfortunately not seen, but a single bird was heard passing through Castello Hammock SP. The Winter residents had gone, which indicated this bird may have been a migrant from further South

Yellow-billed Cuckoo

Coccyzus americanus

1 May 2022 Oscar Scherer SP (1)

Mangrove Cuckoo

Coccyzus minor

30 Apr 2022 J. N. Ding Darling NWR--
Wildlife Drive (1 Calling at around
7.20am on Indigo Trail)
1 May 2022 Ponce de Leon City Park
(3 - 2 seen together + 1 calling)

Almost famously difficult to actually see, but much easier to hear, the first bird was predictably just a call from within the Ding Darling mangroves. Of the 3 birds which we encountered in the small and apparently not too well known Ponce de Leon City Park, there were 2 initially calling on opposite side of the channel, with the one on our side not only then showing ridiculously well, but also in flight with another

White-crowned Pigeon

Patagioenas leucocephala

27 Apr 2022 Key Largo Hammocks
State Botanical Site (8); Key West Bight
(~20)

Very easy to see in Key West, after initial birds were seen more in flight on Key Largo. At Key West they can even be seen regularly on overhead wires in the main streets near to the Tortugas ferry terminal

Eurasian Collared Dove

Streptopelia decaocto

27 Apr 2022 Key West Bight (8)
3 May 2022 Castellow Hammock Park (3)

Common Ground Dove

Columbina passerina

26 Apr 2022 Everglades NP--Snake Bight Trail (2)
1 May 2022 Oscar Scherer SP (2)

Mourning Dove

Zenaida macroura

27 Apr 2022 Bahia Honda SP (1)
30 Apr 2022 J. N. Ding Darling NWR--Wildlife Drive (2); Estero Bay Preserve SP (1)
1 May 2022 Oscar Scherer SP (2)
3 May 2022 Biscayne National Park--Dante Fascell Visitor Center (1): Castellow Hammock Park (2)

White-winged Dove*Zenaida asiatica*

28 Apr 2022 Dry Tortugas NP--Garden Key (1)
3 May 2022 Castellow Hammock Park (9)

Common Gallinule*Gallinula galeata*

30 Apr 2022 J. N. Ding Darling NWR--Wildlife Drive (1); Bailey Tract (2)

Black-necked Stilt*Himantopus mexicanus*

29 Apr 2022 Big Cypress National Preserve -- Tamiami Trail (Miami-Dade Co.) (3)

Grey Plover*Pluvialis squatarola*

26 Apr 2022 Everglades NP--Snake Bight Trail (2)
27 Apr 2022 Bahia Honda SP (3)
30 Apr 2022 J. N. Ding Darling NWR--Wildlife Drive (4); Bailey Tract (5)

Semipalmated Plover*Charadrius semipalmatus*

27 Apr 2022 Bahia Honda SP (1)

Killdeer*Charadrius vociferus*

30 Apr 2022 J. N. Ding Darling NWR--Bailey Tract (6 – including at least 2 immatures with parents)
1 May 2022 Babcock-Webb WMA (1)

Ruddy Turnstone*Arenaria interpres*

27 Apr 2022 Bahia Honda SP (~15)
28 Apr 2022 Dry Tortugas NP--Garden Key (~10)

Sanderling*Calidris alba*

27 Apr 2022 Bahia Honda SP (~20)

Least Sandpiper*Calidris minutilla*

27 Apr 2022 Bahia Honda SP (4)
30 Apr 2022 J. N. Ding Darling NWR--Wildlife Drive (8); Bailey Tract (4)

Spotted Sandpiper*Actitis macularius*

26 Apr 2022 Everglades NP--Snake Bight Trail (1)
30 Apr 2022 J. N. Ding Darling NWR--Wildlife Drive (2); Bailey Tract (1)

Solitary Sandpiper*Tringa solitaria*

27 Apr 2022 Long Key SP (1)

Lesser Yellowlegs*Tringa flavipes*

28 Apr 2022 Dry Tortugas NP--Garden Key (1)
30 Apr 2022 J. N. Ding Darling NWR--Bailey Tract (2)

Willet*Tringa semipalmata*

26 Apr 2022 Everglades NP--Snake Bight Trail (3); Eco Pond (6)
27 Apr 2022 Long Key SP (2)
30 Apr 2022 J. N. Ding Darling NWR--Wildlife Drive (1)

Brown Noddy*Anous stolidus*

28 Apr 2022 Dry Tortugas NP--Garden Key (~200)

Black Noddy*Anous minutus***28 Apr 2022** Dry Tortugas NP--Garden Key (1)

We had wondered if this dainty Noddy would be difficult to differentiate from Brown Noddy, but it was perched with them on jetty posts to the rear of the fort, and the smaller slimmer, blacker bird also showed off its thinner bill. Quite different when seen together for the first time. It was on one of the left-hand posts as we observed, which couldn't be seen from where we were stood, so we had to be "creative" and walk along the top of the more restricted access area (not a problem for the birds - it was an area reserved for a few boats)

Laughing Gull*Leucophaeus atricilla***26 Apr 2022** Everglades NP--Nine Mile Pond (1); Flamingo (2)**27 Apr 2022** Bahia Honda SP (~80); Key West Bight (4)**3 May 2022** Biscayne National Park--Dante Fascell Visitor Center (4)**Ring-billed Gull***Larus delawarensis***27 Apr 2022** Bahia Honda SP (1)**Royal Tern***Thalasseus maximus***27 Apr 2022** Bahia Honda SP (1)**28 Apr 2022** Dry Tortugas NP--Garden Key (2)

The narrow beaches on the causeway to Sanibel where these birds had congregated with Black Skimmers on my first visit 30 years ago is now a playground for people and not birds, so they aren't to be seen there anymore. Hence worth checking any of the larger terns elsewhere

Least Tern*Sternula antillarum***27 Apr 2022** Bahia Honda SP (2)**28 Apr 2022** Dry Tortugas NP--Garden Key (colony of ~50)**Sooty Tern***Onychoprion fuscatus***28 Apr 2022** Dry Tortugas NP--Garden Key (~200)

A stunning site on the Dry Tortugas, and can be approached to a much closer safe distance than I had originally expected. They breed in the scrubby bushes on the sand bar which stretches from the main fort area, and some are as close as 20 metres or so. Bridled Tern was searched for but didn't seem to be around on our day there

Roseate Tern*Sterna dougallii***28 Apr 2022** Dry Tortugas NP--Garden Key (6)**Wood Stork***Mycteria americana***29 Apr 2022** Big Cypress National Preserve -- Tamiami Trail (Miami-Dade Co.) (1)**30 Apr 2022** J. N. Ding Darling NWR--Bailey Tract (4)**2 May 2022** Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (5)**Magnificent Frigatebird***Fregata magnificens***27 Apr 2022** Long Key SP (1); Bahia Honda SP (1)**28 Apr 2022** Dry Tortugas NP--Garden Key (~100)

Masked Booby*Sula dactylatra***28 Apr 2022** Dry Tortugas NP--Hospital Key (~60)

A much smaller group than expected can be seen on Hospital Key, one of 3 of what looked no more than uninviting sand bars on the way to Fort Jefferson. The crew of the ferry may need to be asked to pass by, and views of the birds are still a few hundred metres away, with the ferry slowing down some but not stopping

Brown Booby*Sula leucogaster***28 Apr 2022** Dry Tortugas NP (4)

Of the handful seen, the first was predictably perched on a buoy on the approach to Fort Jefferson, with the others flying to the rear of the ferry on the return journey

Anhinga*Anhinga anhinga*

26 Apr 2022 Everglades NP--Anhinga Trail (10)
29 Apr 2022 Tamiami Trail (Miami-Dade Co.) (2); Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk (1)
2 May 2022 Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (1)

Double-crested Cormorant*Nannopterum auritum*

26 Apr 2022 Everglades NP--Snake Bight Trail (3)
27 Apr 2022 Long Key SP (2); Bahia Honda SP (3)
28 Apr 2022 Dry Tortugas NP--Garden Key (~20)
30 Apr 2022 J. N. Ding Darling NWR--Wildlife Drive (3)
1 May 2022 Ponce de Leon City Park (2)
3 May 2022 Biscayne National Park--Dante Fascell Visitor Center (1)

American White Ibis*Eudocimus albus*

26 Apr 2022 Everglades NP--Anhinga Trail (2)
27 Apr 2022 Bahia Honda SP (3)
29 Apr 2022 Big Cypress National Preserve -- Tamiami Trail (Miami-Dade Co.) (2)
30 Apr 2022 J. N. Ding Darling NWR--Wildlife Drive (3)
1 May 2022 Oscar Scherer SP (8)
2 May 2022 Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (~20)
3 May 2022 Biscayne National Park--Dante Fascell Visitor Center (4)

Glossy Ibis*Plegadis falcinellus*

29 Apr 2022 Bonita Springs, Florida, US (1 flying)
1 May 2022 Oscar Scherer SP (2 flying)

Roseate Spoonbill*Platalea ajaja*

30 Apr 2022 J. N. Ding Darling NWR--Wildlife Drive (1)
2 May 2022 Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (3)

Black-crowned Night Heron*Nycticorax nycticorax*

29 Apr 2022 Big Cypress National Preserve -- Tamiami Trail (Miami-Dade Co.) (4)
30 Apr 2022 J. N. Ding Darling NWR--Wildlife Drive (1 on nest)
2 May 2022 Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (4)

Yellow-crowned Night Heron*Nyctanassa violacea*

30 Apr 2022 J. N. Ding Darling NWR--Wildlife Drive (1 on nest)

Green Heron*Butorides virescens*

- 26 Apr 2022** Everglades NP--Anhinga Trail (1)
- 29 Apr 2022** Big Cypress National Preserve -- Tamiami Trail (Miami-Dade Co.) (1)
- 30 Apr 2022** J. N. Ding Darling NWR--Wildlife Drive (1 on nest); Bailey Tract (4)
- 1 May 2022** Babcock-Webb WMA (1)
- 3 May 2022** Biscayne National Park--Dante Fascell Visitor Center (1)

Western Cattle Egret*Bubulcus ibis*

- 28 Apr 2022** Dry Tortugas NP--Garden Key (12)
- 29 Apr 2022** Big Cypress National Preserve--Kirby Storter Roadside Park & Boardwalk (11)

Great Blue Heron*Ardea herodias*

- 26 Apr 2022** Everglades NP--Mahogany Hammock (1); Snake Bight Trail (2)
- 29 Apr 2022** Tamiami Trail (Miami-Dade Co.) (~25); Kirby Storter Roadside Park & Boardwalk (1)
- 30 Apr 2022** J. N. Ding Darling NWR--Bailey Tract (1)
- 1 May 2022** Babcock-Webb WMA (2)
- 2 May 2022** Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (1)

Great Egret*Ardea alba*

- 26 Apr 2022** Everglades NP--Snake Bight Trail (2), Anhinga Trail (6)
- 27 Apr 2022** Bahia Honda SP (1)
- 29 Apr 2022** Tamiami Trail (Miami-Dade Co.) (2); Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk (2)
- 30 Apr 2022** J. N. Ding Darling NWR--Bailey Tract (33)
- 1 May 2022** Babcock-Webb WMA (1)
- 2 May 2022** Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (8)

Reddish Egret*Egretta rufescens*

- 27 Apr 2022** Bahia Honda SP (3)
- 30 Apr 2022** J. N. Ding Darling NWR--Wildlife Drive (3)

Tricoloured Heron*Egretta tricolor*

- 26 Apr 2022** Everglades NP--Snake Bight Trail (1); Eco Pond (1 juvenile); Flamingo (1 juvenile)
- 27 Apr 2022** Long Key SP (2 – 1 adult, 1 juvenile)
- 30 Apr 2022** J. N. Ding Darling NWR--Wildlife Drive (1); Bailey Tract (4)
- 1 May 2022** Oscar Scherer SP (1)
- 2 May 2022** Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (1)

Little Blue Heron*Egretta caerulea*

- 30 Apr 2022** J. N. Ding Darling NWR--Wildlife Drive (2)
- 1 May 2022** Oscar Scherer SP (1)
- 2 May 2022** Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (1 adult, 1 juvenile)

Snowy Egret*Egretta thula*

- 26 Apr 2022** Everglades NP--Mahogany Hammock (1); Eco Pond (1)
- 27 Apr 2022** Bahia Honda SP (2)
- 29 Apr 2022** Big Cypress National Preserve -- Tamiami Trail (Miami-Dade Co.) (1)
- 30 Apr 2022** J. N. Ding Darling NWR--Bailey Tract (4)
- 2 May 2022** Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (8)

Brown Pelican*Pelecanus occidentalis*

- 26 Apr 2022** Everglades NP--Snake Bight Trail (3)
- 27 Apr 2022** Long Key SP (2); Bahia Honda SP (3)
- 28 Apr 2022** Dry Tortugas NP--Garden Key (~20)
- 30 Apr 2022** J. N. Ding Darling NWR--Wildlife Drive (3)
- 1 May 2022** Ponce de Leon City Park (2)
- 3 May 2022** Biscayne National Park--Dante Fascell Visitor Center (1)

Black Vulture*Coragyps atratus*

26 Apr 2022 Everglades NP—Flamingo (3)
29 Apr 2022 Big Cypress National Preserve -- Tamiami Trail (Miami-Dade Co.) (~30)
1 May 2022 Oscar Scherer SP (7)

Turkey Vulture*Cathartes aura*

26 Apr 2022 Everglades NP--Mahogany Hammock (2); Nine Mile Pond (4); Flamingo (8)
29 Apr 2022 Fakahatchee Strand Preserve SP--Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk (2)
2 May 2022 Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (2)

Western Osprey*Pandion haliaetus*

26 Apr 2022 Everglades NP--Nine Mile Pond (2), Snake Bight Trail (1), Flamingo (3)
27 Apr 2022 Long Key SP (1), Bahia Honda SP (1), Key West Bight (1)
29 Apr 2022 Tamiami Trail (Miami-Dade Co.) (1), Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk (1)
30 Apr 2022 J. N. Ding Darling NWR--Wildlife Drive (5), Bailey Tract (2)
1 May 2022 Ponce de Leon City Park (1)

Swallow-tailed Kite*Elanoides forficatus*

26 Apr 2022 Everglades NP--Snake Bight Trail (1); Flamingo (1); Anhinga Trail (3)
29 Apr 2022 Big Cypress National Preserve--Kirby Storter Roadside Park & Boardwalk (1); Marco Island (1)
1 May 2022 Oscar Scherer SP (1)
2 May 2022 Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (2)

Probably one of the most delicately handsome birds of prey to be seen, all but two were in flight, which arguably shows them off to their best. However, no complaints about the pair perched at the start of the day at Corkscrew Swamp

Bald Eagle*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*

30 Apr 2022 Estero Bay Preserve SP--Winkler Point (1)

Red-shouldered Hawk*Buteo lineatus*

26 Apr 2022 Everglades NP--Mahogany Hammock (1), Snake Bight Trail (1)
28 Apr 2022 Dry Tortugas NP--Garden Key (1)
29 Apr 2022 Big Cypress National Preserve--Kirby Storter Roadside Park & Boardwalk (3); Fakahatchee Strand Preserve SP--Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk (2)
30 Apr 2022 Estero Bay Preserve SP--Winkler Point (1)
1 May 2022 Oscar Scherer SP (1)
2 May 2022 Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (6, including immatures)

Red-tailed Hawk*Buteo jamaicensis*

1 May 2022 Oscar Scherer SP (1)

Burrowing Owl*Athene cunicularia*

29 Apr 2022
 Marco Island
 (15)

The owls of Marco Island are an experience that just has to be done. It just seems wrong in every way. Enigmatic birds that quite often have to be worked for, nesting in numbers in one of the affluent suburbs of Naples. It's almost as if the moneyed people here have an owl on the lawn as a status symbol. To make things even easier, the local residents place a wooden 'T' for a perch and rope of the nesting burrow for all the birds, and there is a map available of all the nest sites

Short-eared Owl*Asio flammeus domingensis*

26 Apr 2022 Everglades NP--Mahogany Hammock (1)

This was the first bird we saw as we approached the Everglades NP on the first morning. It is a variant called "Antillean" Short-eared Owl, a subspecies rather than full species, and is perhaps a lot less common here than we had thought

Barred Owl*Strix varia*

2 May 2022 Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (1)

The bird we saw was likely to be a juvenile, with another bird, possibly a parent, calling nearby. A separate bird was heard calling at another part of Corkscrew Swamp. It had not been present on our first pass, along the Lettuce Creek area, but when seen was loyal to its perch

Red-bellied Woodpecker*Melanerpes carolinus*

26 Apr 2022 Everglades NP--Mahogany Hammock (2); Nine Mile Pond (2); Snake Bight Trail (1); Flamingo (2)

27 Apr 2022 Key Largo Hammocks State Botanical Site (3); Long Key SP (1)

29 Apr 2022 Kirby Storter Roadside Park & Boardwalk (3); Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk (1)

30 Apr 2022 J. N. Ding Darling NWR--Wildlife Drive (2)

1 May 2022 Oscar Scherer SP (3); Babcock-Webb WMA (3)

2 May 2022 Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (15)

3 May 2022 Biscayne National Park--Dante Fascell Visitor Center (2); Castellow Hammock Park (1)

Downy Woodpecker*Dryobates pubescens*

29 Apr 2022 Big Cypress National Preserve--Kirby Storter Roadside Park & Boardwalk (1)

1 May 2022 Babcock-Webb WMA (2)

2 May 2022 Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (1)

Northern Flicker*Colaptes auratus*

26 Apr 2022 Everglades NP--Snake Bight Trail (1)

1 May 2022 Babcock-Webb WMA (3)

Pileated Woodpecker*Dryocopus pileatus*

26 Apr 2022 Everglades NP--Anhinga Trail (1)

29 Apr 2022 Fakahatchee Strand Preserve SP--Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk (3)

30 Apr 2022 J. N. Ding Darling NWR--Wildlife Drive (1)

2 May 2022 Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (4)

Merlin*Falco columbarius*

28 Apr 2022 Dry Tortugas NP--Garden Key (1)

Eastern Kingbird*Tyrannus tyrannus*

26 Apr 2022 Everglades NP--Mahogany Hammock (4); Everglades NP--Anhinga Trail (1)

Grey Kingbird*Tyrannus dominicensis*

26 Apr 2022 Everglades NP--Snake Bight Trail (1)

27 Apr 2022 Key West Bight (5)

28 Apr 2022 Dry Tortugas NP--Garden Key (3)

Great Crested Flycatcher*Myiarchus crinitus*

26 Apr 2022 Everglades NP--Nine Mile Pond (2); Everglades NP--Snake Bight Trail (9)

29 Apr 2022 Big Cypress National Preserve--Kirby Storter Roadside Park & Boardwalk (1)

1 May 2022 Babcock-Webb WMA (2)

2 May 2022 Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (5)

Loggerhead Shrike*Lanius ludovicianus*

26 Apr 2022 Ingraham Highway, Homestead (1)

Black-whiskered Vireo*Vireo altiloquus*

26 Apr 2022 Everglades NP--Mahogany Hammock (2)
27 Apr 2022 Key Largo Hammocks State Botanical Site (1)
30 Apr 2022 J. N. Ding Darling NWR--Wildlife Drive (3)
3 May 2022 Biscayne National Park-Dante Fascell Visitor Center (1)

These birds were quite often more easily heard than seen, but with patience they can eventually be viewed well. The moustache or "whisker" is often said to be difficult to observe, but our experience found all birds to be showing this well

White-eyed Vireo*Vireo griseus*

26 Apr 2022 Everglades NP--Mahogany Hammock (1); Snake Bight Trail (6)
27 Apr 2022 Key Largo Hammocks State Botanical Site (5)
29 Apr 2022 Big Cypress National Preserve--Kirby Storter Roadside Park & Boardwalk (3)
30 Apr 2022 J. N. Ding Darling NWR--Wildlife Drive (1)
1 May 2022 Oscar Scherer SP (1)
2 May 2022 Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (6)

Blue Jay*Cyanocitta cristata*

1 May 2022 Oscar Scherer SP (~20); Babcock-Webb WMA (4)
3 May 2022 Castellow Hammock Park (2)

Florida Scrub Jay*Aphelocoma coerulescens*

1 May 2022 Oscar Scherer SP (3)

We hadn't thought too much about the fact that we saw 3 separate individuals at Oscar Scherer was a bit of a treat, until a bit of background reading revealed that in recent years the total population of the park was only 27 birds. When seen, they are very confiding, almost giving the impression that you are being stalked rather than the opposite

American Crow*Corvus brachyrhynchos*

26 Apr 2022 Everglades NP--Mahogany Hammock (6); Snake Bight Trail (1); Flamingo (4); Anhinga Trail (4)
1 May 2022 Oscar Scherer SP (1)

Fish Crow*Corvus ossifragus*

30 Apr 2022 J. N. Ding Darling NWR--Wildlife Drive (9); Bailey Tract (1)
1 May 2022 Oscar Scherer SP (1)

The two-tone call of this bird is very distinctive when compared with the American Crow, so it's not a bad idea to familiarise before the trip. Not all birds are obliging enough to give the sound away, but it is necessary for positive ID. In our opinion, all of the crows seen on Sanibel were of this species, since a good number did call and we didn't hear an American Crow call there

Tufted Titmouse*Baeolophus bicolor*

29 Apr 2022 Fakahatchee Strand Preserve SP--Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk (2)
1 May 2022 Oscar Scherer SP (2)
2 May 2022 Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (5)

Purple Martin*Progne subis*

29 Apr 2022 Big Cypress National Preserve -- Tamiami Trail (Miami-Dade Co.) (6)

Barn Swallow*Hirundo rustica*

28 Apr 2022 Dry Tortugas NP--Garden Key (2)

Carolina Wren*Thryothorus ludovicianus*

29 Apr 2022 Big Cypress National Preserve--Kirby Storter Roadside Park & Boardwalk (2)
1 May 2022 Oscar Scherer SP (1)
2 May 2022 Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (12)

Blue-grey Gnatcatcher*Polioptila caerulea***29 Apr 2022** Big Cypress National Preserve--Kirby Storter Roadside Park & Boardwalk (2)**1 May 2022** Oscar Scherer SP (1)**2 May 2022** Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (3)**Brown-headed Nuthatch***Sitta pusilla***1 May 2022** Babcock-Webb WMA (3)**Grey Catbird***Dumetella carolinensis***28 Apr 2022** Dry Tortugas NP--Garden Key (1)**29 Apr 2022** Big Cypress National Preserve--Kirby Storter Roadside Park & Boardwalk (1)**30 Apr 2022** J. N. Ding Darling NWR--Wildlife Drive (2)**Northern Mockingbird***Mimus polyglottos***26 Apr 2022** Everglades NP--Mahogany Hammock (2)**27 Apr 2022** Key West Bight (2)**1 May 2022** Babcock-Webb WMA (4)**3 May 2022** Biscayne National Park--Dante Fascell Visitor Center (2); Castellow Hammock Park (4)**Common Starling***Sturnus vulgaris***27 Apr 2022** Key West Bight (1)**3 May 2022** Biscayne National Park--Dante Fascell Visitor Center (7); Castellow Hammock Park (6)**House Sparrow***Passer domesticus***3 May 2022** Castellow Hammock Park (3)**Eastern Towhee***Pipilo erythrophthalmus***1 May 2022** Oscar Scherer SP (1); Babcock-Webb WMA (1)**Eastern Meadowlark***Sturnella magna***26 Apr 2022** Ingraham Highway, Homestead (1)**1 May 2022** Babcock-Webb WMA (1)**Baltimore Oriole***Icterus galbula***27 Apr 2022** Key Largo Hammocks State Botanical Site (1)**Red-winged Blackbird***Agelaius phoeniceus***26 Apr 2022** Everglades NP--Mahogany Hammock (2)**27 Apr 2022** Key Largo Hammocks State Botanical Site (1); Long Key SP (2); Bahia Honda SP (~20); Key West Bight (3)**1 May 2022** Oscar Scherer SP (1)**Brown-headed Cowbird***Molothrus ater***26 Apr 2022** Everglades NP--Flamingo (5, including juveniles)**Common Grackle***Quiscalus quiscula***26 Apr 2022** Everglades NP--Mahogany Hammock (1); Nine Mile Pond (2); Flamingo (6); Anhinga Trail (12)**27 Apr 2022** Bahia Honda SP (2); Key West Bight (2)**29 Apr 2022** Fakahatchee Strand Preserve SP--Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk (4)**30 Apr 2022** Estero Bay Preserve SP--Winkler Point (3)**1 May 2022** Babcock-Webb WMA (1)**3 May 2022** Biscayne National Park--Dante Fascell Visitor Center (4); Castellow Hammock Park (~30)

Boat-tailed Grackle*Quiscalus major*

29 Apr 2022 Tamiami Trail (Miami-Dade Co.) (10); Marco Island (1)
1 May 2022 Oscar Scherer SP (3); Babcock-Webb WMA (4)

Ovenbird*Seiurus aurocapilla*

28 Apr 2022 Dry Tortugas NP--Garden Key (1)
3 May 2022 A. D. Barnes Park (1)

Northern Waterthrush*Parkesia noveboracensis*

28 April 2022 Dry Tortugas NP--Garden Key (1)
[**3 May 2022** A. D. Barnes Park – Louisiana/Northern Waterthrush (1)]

Black-and-white Warbler*Mniotilta varia*

26 Apr 2022 Everglades NP--Mahogany Hammock (1); Snake Bight Trail (1)
27 Apr 2022 Key Largo Hammocks State Botanical Site (1)
28 Apr 2022 Dry Tortugas NP--Garden Key (3)
29 Apr 2022 Fakahatchee Strand Preserve SP--Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk (2)
3 May 2022 A. D. Barnes Park (1)

Common Yellowthroat*Geothlypis trichas*

26 Apr 2022 Everglades NP--Mahogany Hammock (5)
27 Apr 2022 Key West Bight (1)
28 Apr 2022 Dry Tortugas NP--Garden Key (4)
30 Apr 2022 J. N. Ding Darling NWR--Wildlife Drive (1)
3 May 2022 A. D. Barnes Park (1)

American Redstart*Setophaga ruticilla*

26 Apr 2022 Everglades NP--Snake Bight Trail (1)
27 Apr 2022 Bahia Honda SP (1)
28 Apr 2022 Dry Tortugas NP--Garden Key (6)
29 Apr 2022 Kirby Storter Roadside Park & Boardwalk (1); Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk (1)
1 May 2022 Oscar Scherer SP (1)
3 May 2022 A. D. Barnes Park (8)

Cape May Warbler*Setophaga tigrina*

27 Apr 2022 Key Largo Hammocks State Botanical Site (3); Key West Bight (1)
28 Apr 2022 Dry Tortugas NP--Garden Key (10)

Northern Parula*Setophaga americana*

26 Apr 2022 Everglades NP--Snake Bight Trail (1)
27 Apr 2022 Key West Bight (1)
28 Apr 2022 Dry Tortugas NP--Garden Key (2)
29 Apr 2022 Kirby Storter Roadside Park & Boardwalk (4); Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk (2)
1 May 2022 Oscar Scherer SP (1)
2 May 2022 Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (9)
3 May 2022 A. D. Barnes Park (3)

American Yellow Warbler*Setophaga aestiva*

28 Apr 2022 Dry Tortugas NP--Garden Key (1)

Blackpoll Warbler*Setophaga striata*

27 Apr 2022 Key Largo Hammocks State Botanical Site (1)

Black-throated Blue Warbler*Setophaga caerulescens*

- 27 Apr 2022** Bahia Honda SP (1)
- 28 Apr 2022** Dry Tortugas NP--Garden Key (2)
- 3 May 2022** A. D. Barnes Park (4)

Palm Warbler*Setophaga palmarum*

- 27 Apr 2022** Key Largo Hammocks State Botanical Site (1)
- 28 Apr 2022** Dry Tortugas NP--Garden Key (20)
- 1 May 2022** Oscar Scherer SP (2)

Pine Warbler*Setophaga pinus*

- 26 Apr 2022** Everglades NP--Snake Bight Trail (3)

Prairie Warbler*Setophaga discolor*

- 26 Apr 2022** Everglades NP--Snake Bight Trail (2)
- 27 Apr 2022** Key Largo Hammocks State Botanical Site (2); Long Key SP (3); Key West Bight (1)
- 28 Apr 2022** Dry Tortugas NP--Garden Key (1)
- 30 Apr 2022** J. N. Ding Darling NWR--Wildlife Drive (3)

Calls from within the mangroves on the first 2 days which sounded very similar to European Yellowhammer were a bit of a mystery until we came across a visible calling male on Key Largo. It was then obvious they were a common warbler in many of the mangrove type habitats

Black-throated Green Warbler*Setophaga virens*

- 26 Apr 2022** Everglades NP--Mahogany Hammock (1)

Northern Cardinal*Cardinalis cardinalis*

- 26 Apr 2022** Everglades NP--Mahogany Hammock (3); Snake Bight Trail (8)
- 27 Apr 2022** Key Largo Hammocks State Botanical Site (~20)
- 29 Apr 2022** Kirby Storter Roadside Park & Boardwalk (1); Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk (2)
- 30 Apr 2022** J. N. Ding Darling NWR--Wildlife Drive (5)
- 1 May 2022** Oscar Scherer SP (~15)
- 2 May 2022** Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (10)
- 3 May 2022** Castellow Hammock Park (1)

Indigo Bunting*Passerina cyanea*

- 28 Apr 2022** Dry Tortugas NP--Garden Key (3)

Pileated Woodpecker

MAMMALS

West Indian Manatee

Trichechus manatus

26 April 2022 Everglades NP – Flamingo (2 – mother and calf)

30 April 2022 Ding Darling NWR – Wulfert Keys Trail

We had thought the manatees wintered in the coast and then went upriver after Spring, so weren't surprised when none were seen at the freshwater outfall at Flamingo where I had seen them previously. However, even the subsequent very close mother and calf in the marina where relatively distant when compared to the singleton feeding at our feet on Sanibel

Eastern Grey Squirrel

Sciurus carolinensis

Not specifically recorded – they were regular in small numbers in many of the locations

Eastern Cottontail

Sylvilagus floridanus

1 May 2022 Oscar Scherer SP (2)

American River Otter

Lontra canadensis

2 May 2022 Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (8)

This family party of 8 was blissfully unperturbed by our presence on the boardwalk along Lettuce Creek, feeding voraciously on fish and crustaceans. A young Alligator which came on to their log didn't hang around when it saw them

Raccoon

Procyon lotor

2 May 2022 Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (2)

White-tailed Deer

Odocoileus virginianus

2 May 2022 Picayune State Forest (2)

REPTILES

Eastern Racer

Coluber constrictor

26 April 2022 Snake Bight Trail (1)

29 April 2022 Big Cypress bend Boardwalk (1)

2 May 2022 Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (2 together then single further on)

3 May 2022 Castello Hammock Park (1)

Eastern Rat Snake

Pantherophis alleghaniensis

2 May 2022 Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (1 in toilet block)

American crocodile

Crocodylus acutus

26 April 2022 Everglades NP – Flamingo (Pair guarding nest)

American alligator

Alligator mississippiensis

Regular but in small numbers