



**FLORIDA PENINSULA AND THE FLORIDA KEYS**

**TRIP REPORT APRIL - MAY 2018**

**By Christopher Collins**



Yellow-billed Cuckoo

Another successful Birding Ecotours' South Florida Specialties Tour has been wrapped up! Though a few species eluded the group early on, our persistence and perseverance paid off in the end with incredible looks at all of the South Florida target species. In addition to the birds we spent some time with **American Alligator** and **American Crocodile**, and Wil got down and dirty with the **Tarpon** on Marathon Key. Florida treated us very kindly with sunny skies, great food, and 161 bird species (plus 4 heard only) – including 15 warbler species and many other migrants. In all we traveled over 1800 miles from downtown Miami to the central pine forest, along the west coast to the Everglades, through the Keys, and out to the remote Dry Tortugas.

### **Day 1, April 24<sup>th</sup> 2018. Miami area**

Due to a delay in air travel we had a bit of a late start to the trip. After picking up the group at the airport I asked them, “Do you want to get some food, rest a bit, or go find some birds?”, and the response was an emphatic, “Find some birds!”. We decided to head just down the street to look for our first target bird of the trip. While seeking for our main target we picked up a **Grey Kingbird** and a fleeting glimpse of a **Common Myna**. A calling **Fish Crow** entertained us for a few minutes, and then our target finally arrived: Two beautiful **White-winged Parakeets** flew in and provided excellent looks for the group! We spent a little more time birding and then had an excellent Mexican dinner, featuring delicious chiles rellenos.

### **Day 2, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2018. Miami area, transfer to Ft. Pierce, birding along the way**

A late start the previous day meant that we had some catching up to do on day two. Our first stop was only four minutes away at a residential neighborhood in Miami Springs to see if we could locate the **Spot-breasted Orioles** that have been visiting the area. Success! We also picked up our first migrants of the trip with a pair of **American Redstarts** and a pair of **Palm Warblers**. There were also many small flocks of **Cedar Waxwings** flying over our heads. Before leaving the area we made a quick stop to add nesting **Monk Parakeets** to our list.

We headed south to the King's Creek Village neighborhood to see what would end up being John's favorite bird of the trip. The entire area was quiet. It seemed as if there were no birds around at all. After a few minutes we found out why: A beautiful **Cooper's Hawk** was standing sentry in a dead tree at the edge of the park. Once it had departed the trees came to life with birds seeking out an early morning meal. **Cape May Warbler**, **Black-and-white Warbler**, **Prairie Warbler**, and **Northern Parula** were added to our list of warblers for the trip, while three **Swallow-tailed Kites** circled overhead. John saw a bird in the trees above our heads, and just as he raised his binoculars the bird flew to another tree, revealing its red undertail. We had found the **Red-whiskered Bulbul**. Three of them gave us unforgettable looks. Time to head north!

On the way to our next destination we made a brief detour to Markham Park to add **Burrowing Owl** to the trip list (a lifer for Scott) and then headed to Plantation Preserve. We quickly added **Blackpoll Warbler** and **Pine Warbler** to our migrant list and collected a few of our targets. **Limpkin** and **Anhinga** were high on John's target list. We added those, as well as **Egyptian Goose**, while also ticking **Tricolored Heron** and **American White Ibis**. And now it was time for lunch.

After lunch we drove to Green Cay Wetlands to look for **Grey-headed Swamphen**. After walking the boardwalk for only a few minutes we had a great view of two swamphens right next to the boardwalk. While watching them forage we also added two flyover **Wood Storks** and a drop-in **Glossy Ibis**. Continuing around the boardwalk we were treated to a family of **Mottled**

**Ducks** with new chicks that were exploring the marsh, the chicks staying close to mom. We heard a **Sora** calling, and John picked out a **Least Bittern** in the reeds. A second one flew in, and we watched the pair for a few minutes. A large flock of **Bobolinks** and a **Black-throated Blue Warbler** were our next migrants for the tour. On our way out of the area the group spotted three **Painted Buntings** at the nature center's feeders.

Our last stop before heading to dinner and to Ft. Pierce was Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge to look for Nanday Parakeets along the road. The late hour made it a challenge, and after adding **Carolina Wren** and **Pileated Woodpecker** to the trip list we decided that the parakeet could wait. After dinner at a locally-owned pizza joint we drove to our hotel, where we watched **Common Nighthawks** diving in the dark!

### **Day 3, April 26<sup>th</sup> 2018. St. Sebastian River Preserve State Park, transfer to Tampa, Philippe Park, Safety Harbor Waterfront Park**

An early start got us to the St. Sebastian River Preserve State Park - just 40 minutes north of the hotel - shortly after breakfast. We stopped in at the ranger station to get the latest news on our targets. With fresh tips in hand we headed deeper into the park to try to locate them. Within minutes of setting off along the first trail Wil spotted a bird perched up on a dead tree. It started singing, and we knew we had found our first target - a gorgeous **Bachman's Sparrow** that paid little attention to us as it sang. Next we quickly found **Red-cockaded Woodpecker**. The nesting trees at the park were being wrapped with aluminum foil to deter snakes from disturbing the birds. Another stop at the ranger station gave us good looks at **Brown-headed Nuthatch**, and the ranger on duty gave us a recommendation for lunch. We spent a little time looking for our next target and decided to break for lunch and then return to the search.

Lunch was at a "hole-in-the-wall" Mexican place. It was literally a hole in the wall, located at the back of a local bakery. We walked up to the window, placed our order, and then had some of the most memorable, delicious food of the trip. After lunch we returned to the park to seek out Florida's only endemic species. We were able to quickly find our target: **Florida Scrub-Jay!** This species has suffered from habitat loss and fragmentation and is now limited to specific reserves and state parks. Areas within the state parks are regularly burned to maintain the habitat of this cooperative breeder that often lives in family groups. We also added a number of other birds to the trip list, including **Wild Turkey**, **Bald Eagle**, a close-up **Red-shouldered Hawk**, **Eastern Towhee**, and two gorgeous **Red-headed Woodpeckers**.

While driving to Tampa we added a surprise **Northern Harrier**, **Eastern Meadowlark**, and a beautiful pair of **Sandhill Cranes**. Upon arrival in Tampa our first stop was Philippe Park. We were hoping to see the small group of **Brown Boobies** that had been hanging out on an electrical tower in the bay, and they did not disappoint! There were at least six of them along with a few **Double-crested Cormorants**. We added our first **Laughing Gulls**, **Brown Pelicans**, and **Least Terns** to our list, and we picked up our first **Yellow-crowned Night Heron**.

We made one last stop for the day at Safety Harbor Waterfront Park and checked off **Lesser Scaup**, **Reddish Egret**, and **Royal Tern**. We found a local sports-themed restaurant for dinner that served great burgers, steaks, and some big bowl of Mexican something that Wil really seemed to enjoy.

### **Day 4, April 27<sup>th</sup> 2018. Fort De Soto Park**

Fort De Soto Park provided a good number of new species for our trip list. It also gave us one of our targets that we had given up on earlier in the trip. We spotted our first **Nanday Parakeet** on

a wire as we were entering the park. Excellent scope views allowed the group to see its trademark black hood. Later during the day we got a much better look as one landed in a bush a mere 20 feet away! Highlights from the morning included **Magnificent Frigatebird**, **Snowy Egret**, **Little Blue Heron**, more **Reddish Egrets**, and **Western Cattle Egret**.

As we walked along the east side of North Beach we found a small beach and wetland area full of shorebirds. **Wilson's Plover**, **Grey Plover**, **Whimbrel**, **Marbled Godwit**, and **Short-billed Dowitcher** were all hanging out there. A little further south on the west side more shorebirds were walking the beach, including **Ruddy Turnstone**, **Willet**, and **Western Sandpiper**. This park had provided our best variety of species so far on the trip.

After lunch at the park's gift shop we paid more attention to the migrants. We added **Grey-cheeked Thrush**, **Eastern Wood Pewee**, a stunning male **Rose-breasted Grosbeak**, and **Indigo Bunting** and also added **Bay-breasted Warbler** and **Tennessee Warbler** to our warbler list. After finding some **Common Ground Doves** (that weren't on the ground!) we returned to the beaches to scan for more new birds. **American Oystercatcher**, **Sandwich Tern**, and **Black Skimmer** were checked off before we left the park for the day and headed for a hearty Italian dinner near Sarasota.

#### **Day 5, April 28<sup>th</sup> 2018. San Carlos Bay, Everglades, transfer to Homestead**

"Breakfast is for winners". This became the group's motto when we decided to head out before breakfast on day five to look for Mangrove Cuckoo. Wil had asked if we would be stopping for breakfast, and that is when I said, "Get the bird first, then we can eat. Breakfast is for winners". They all agreed, and so off we went.

We had other spots on the itinerary to look for the cuckoo, but we had been so successful on previous days that we were left with some time to kill. It wouldn't hurt to maximize our chances with some of the harder-to-find species. This cuckoo can be a tough bird to get. A reliable source said that they had seen the cuckoo at San Carlos Bay – Bunche Beach Preserve a couple of years ago. No one in the group had been there before, as this was just a random stop along the way. My source told me that there is a blue sign about a hundred yards from the main road, and that would be a good place to start. Five minutes later we were looking at two incredibly close **Mangrove Cuckoos!** Now we could get breakfast.

After breakfast we continued south and then headed east along Route 41. Just after we passed Miccosukee Indian Village we ticked **Black-necked Stilt** in a puddle off the side of the road. We were then on a stretch of road that is well known for hosting our next target. We pulled into one of the many parking lots along Route 41 and walked back to the canal to scan. Within a minute or two we had a juvenile **Snail Kite** in our sights. The bird made a pass in front of the group and then landed in a tree directly in front of us. The entire group got killer looks at this snail-loving raptor. We also got to see the infamous "Great White Heron", a color morph of the **Great Blue Heron**. This was a specific target of John's, and we were all thrilled to check that one off the list. Other additions on the way to Homestead included **King Rail**, **Green Heron**, and a very cooperative **Purple Gallinule**.

Our final stop for the day was a home in east Homestead. Sometimes known as "The Purple Martin House", also known as "The Cowbird House", it is the home of a gentleman named Larry and his family. For some time they have had the good fortune to have a couple of rare birds consider their house "home" as well. The group had the privilege of joining Larry on his back patio to see all three cowbird species at once. The sun was starting to set as **Brown-headed Cowbird**, **Bronzed Cowbird**, and **Shiny Cowbird** all paid a visit to the feeders, while **Purple**

**Martins** flew over our heads. A perfect way to end the day! We stopped at a place that Larry recommended for a tasty Mexican dinner before retiring to our hotel in Homestead.

### **Day 6, April 29<sup>th</sup> 2018. Fairway Inn, the Everglades, and an amazing Cuban dinner**

With first light came a flock of **Monk Parakeets** flying over our hotel and **Common Mynas** searching the parking lot for scraps. We had a quick breakfast and then began our journey to the Everglades.

Our first stop would be the Anhinga Trail area near the Royal Palm Visitor Center. Strange sounds greeted us as we crossed the parking lot to start the trail. Spring was in the air as we entered the courtyard to find a number of **American Alligators** bellowing and rumbling in the water in the hopes of attracting a mate. The group was fascinated by this behavior, and we spent some time observing them before getting back to the birds. The trail was quiet that day, but we added **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** and a pair of **Black-crowned Night Herons** to our trip list, as well as a pair of **Peregrine Falcons** soaring with the vultures overhead. We found two **White-eyed Vireos** singing in the trees next to the pond as we made our way back to the van and then headed to the Mahogany Hammock Trail.

The parking area here was noisy, as **Red-Eyed Vireos** competed with their **White-eyed Vireo** cousins to see who could sing more loudly. A nice stroll around the boardwalk yielded **Common Yellowthroat** for the group and a calling **King Rail** for Scott and Wil. Flyover **Roseate Spoonbills** were our first sighting of this species and another new bird for the tour.

Our final stop for the day was at Paurotis Pond, where we saw **Wood Storks**, **Roseate Spoonbills**, **American White Ibis**, and **Tricolored Herons** tending to their young in their nests. The scope views from the bank were unforgettable! We stopped early to allow the group to get some rest and get ready for dinner.

Dinner was at a local Cuban restaurant, where the group was treated to some amazing food and enjoyed the company and stories of local birder and photographer Homer Gardin. Homer was on hand to help explain the culture and the cuisine and to offer suggestions to suit everyone's palate. It was another unforgettable experience for the group and a highlight of the trip! (Wil immediately went to the store next door to buy some Cuban coffee to take home.)

### **Day 7, April 30, 2018. Lucky Hammock, Carysfort Circle, transfer to Key West**

We started the day at a local Homestead hotspot called Lucky Hammock, which is part of Frog Pond Wildlife Management Area. The small stand of hardwood trees that makes up the hotspot only took a few minutes to investigate. We heard **Northern Bobwhites** calling as we got out of the car and started down the road toward the trees. In addition to spring migrants such as **Blackpoll Warbler**, **Northern Parula**, **White-eyed Vireo**, and **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** we also added a late **Western Kingbird** to our tour list.

We began our journey south through the Florida Keys with a stop in Key Largo at a small paved loop called Carysfort Circle. Even at a "birder's pace" it only took us forty-five minutes to make the complete loop. In this short period we were able to locate one of our target species, **Black-whiskered Vireo**! We only had a brief, half-hidden look at the bird, to which John said, "I wish it would just land right there so we could get a better look at it." A minute later the vireo obliged, landing in the exact spot that John had pointed to. Before leaving John also discovered an adorable **Ovenbird** for our list. Just down the road we made a stop at Dagny Johnson Key Largo Hammock Botanical State Park to explore the different varieties of plants and trees that make up this stop on the Florida Birding Trail.

One final stop on Key Largo in a residential neighborhood netted four **White-crowned Pigeons**, spotted out of the van window by Scott. I had instructed the group to keep an eye out for “black blobs” in the trees, and Scott immediately responded with “I’ve got some black blobs in a tree right over here!” After that quick pickup we headed south toward Key West.

We did make one brief stop on the way to Key West at a small open-air market and restaurant called Robbie’s. As Wil had never been in the Keys before, I thought it would be fun for him to experience the local **Tarpon** population up close! We had a lot of laughs as Wil tried his hand at feeding the fish – while trying not to lose a hand to the hungry **Brown Pelicans** that fearlessly patrol the dock. Afterward we stopped for lunch at a local pub, then continued south.

After arriving in Key West we strolled through the town to Fort Zachary Taylor Historic State Park. The late hour provided gorgeous views of the sun over the water, and the birds were still active near the fort. **Black-and-white, Cape May, Black-throated Blue, and Palm Warblers** foraged along the water’s edge, while multiple **Indigo Buntings** bathed in the stream. Following another unforgettable Mexican dinner we retired to our rooms to prepare for the exciting trip we had planned for the next day.

### **Day 8, May 1, 2018. Dry Tortugas National Park, quick chase to Marathon**

The trip to the Dry Tortugas is always a highlight of the tour! The boat ride is just over two hours and provides great opportunities to see many species over the open water. Before leaving the dock the group got great looks at another “Great White Heron” and watched **Least Terns** diving around the piers.

On the trip out we rode the bow, scanning for birds. Highlights included a juvenile **Northern Gannet** and a **Brown Booby** as well as a number of sea turtles and the occasional flying fish. As we passed Hospital Key we were all treated to the sight of almost 40 **Masked Boobies** resting, flying, and feeding on the island – which is the ABA’s only breeding colony of the species. Terns and noddies performed flybys off the bow as we covered the last part of the journey to Fort Jefferson on Garden Key.

Once on the island our first stop was to see the large breeding colony of **Sooty Terns**. An estimated 80,000 nest annually on Bush Key, a protected area visible from the east end of Garden Key. We were also treated to amazing views of soaring **Magnificent Frigatebirds**, some carrying nesting material. Next we scanned the hundreds of **Brown Noddies**, hoping to spot the single **Black Noddy** that had been reported the previous day. With a little help from ABA President Jeff Gordon and his wife, Liz, who were also visiting the island that day, we had excellent looks at this ABA rarity. A new life bird for the entire group (including me!).

We had one primary target left on the island, and I guided the group to a spot where I had seen the birds the week before. A trio of **Bridled Terns** were sitting on the outer wall of the helipad, right where I had previously found them. The group was able to see these fighter pilots of the bird world from only 20 feet away as they performed their mating rituals and took occasional laps around the south coaling dock ruins.

Venturing into Fort Jefferson we watched **Peregrine Falcons** soaring with the frigatebirds and added a few new tour birds to our list, including **Sand Martin** (Bank Swallow) and **American Cliff Swallow, Northern Waterthrush, and Merlin. Western Cattle Egrets** guarded the fountain on the parade grounds, while migrant warblers and a **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** patrolled the trees.

After returning to Key West we all decided to try to make a run back to Marathon before dark to see if we could check another target off our list for the day. We had a false alarm as a **Swallow-**

**tailed Kite** came soaring over the Marathon airport, but then our target announced its presence with a killy-ka-dick call. A total of four **Antillean Nighthawks** were flying and diving over the runways and over our heads in the fading light. Smiles and high-fives all around! We made a stop for some delicious pizza at The Hurricane Grill in Marathon before we made our way back to our hotel in Key West.

#### **Day 9, May 2, 2018. Back to Marathon, chase to Lantana Nature Preserve**

Since we had made the effort to get the nighthawk the night before, we didn't have to worry about staying local in the Keys all day to wait for dusk, so we left Key West after breakfast and made our way to Marathon. We pulled into the Marathon Government Center to see if the nesting **Roseate Terns** had returned this year. They had! We found nine on the pier behind the building with over fifty **Least Terns**, five **Laughing Gulls**, and a **Royal Tern**. We had successfully located all of our targets in the Keys and decided to make it an early day and maybe get some rest.

That plan only lasted until the next gas station stop. We received word that an ABA Code 4 rarity was being seen in Palm Beach County – three hours north of where we were. We briefly discussed the possibility, and off we went to Lantana Nature Preserve. Upon arrival we found other birders searching the area as well. It took some time, but eventually we all found the **Bahama Mockingbird** that was visiting the park. Another life bird for the entire group! We returned to Homestead and had an incredible BBQ Dinner at a local restaurant.

#### **Day 10, May 3, 2018. Last-ditch effort in the Everglades, Snapper Creek, departure**

After nine days in south Florida it was time to wrap up and head out. Since the group didn't need to be at the airport until the early afternoon, we decided to skip breakfast and make one more attempt at finding our one big miss of the trip. We pulled into the Everglades just before sunrise, flushing a pair of **Chuck-will's-widow** from the side of the road.

While diligently watching the roadside and the skies as we drove through the park, we eventually made our way to the Royal Palm Visitor Center. Around 9:00 a.m. **Turkey Vultures** and **Anhingas** started soaring up from the tree line. I followed one as it flew over the visitor center and caught a flash of a fast-moving raptor diving behind the center. I hollered for the group "**Short-tailed Hawk**"! The entire group was able to see this gorgeous bird up close as it made passes 20 to 30 feet in the air in front of us before soaring high into the sky. A great ending to a fantastic tour!

After a quick breakfast we began making our way to the airport. On the way we decided to try to add one more bird to the tour list. A quick stop near Snapper Creek allowed us to add **Cave Swallow** to the list and a chance to see some of the local **Common Green Iguana** population up close. We were also treated to views of recently-hatched **Muscovy Ducks**. Then we made our way to the airport, said our goodbyes, and concluded another successful south Florida tour.

**FLORIDA TOUR SYSTEMATIC BIRD LIST, APRIL/MAY 2018**

Taxonomy: IOC (International Ornithological Congress) 8.1

**ANSERIFORMES****Anatidae**

**Egyptian Goose** *Alopochen aegyptiaca* – We saw a single of this newly-ABA-countable non-native at Plantation Preserve.

**Muscovy Duck** *Cairina moschata* – An ABA-countable “feral” population is common in the Miami area.

**Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos* – A single bird at each Fort De Soto Park and Philippe Park

**Mottled Duck** *Anas fulvigula* – A mother with ducklings was seen at close range at Green Cay Nature Center and Wetlands.

**Lesser Scaup** *Aythya affinis* – A large raft of nearly 40 birds offshore at Safety Harbor Waterfront Park

**Red-breasted Merganser** *Mergus serrator* – A single bird seen well at Fort De Soto Park

**GALLIFORMES****Odontophoridae**

**Northern Bobwhite (H)** *Colinus virginianus* – A calling bird was heard at Lucky Hammock in Homestead. The species is listed as Near-threatened.

**Phasianidae**

**Wild Turkey** *Meleagris gallopavo* – A pair was seen walking along the side of the road near St. Sebastian River Preserve State Park.

**PODICIPEDIFORMES****Podicipedidae**

**Pied-billed Grebe** *Podilymbus podiceps* – Seen well at Green Cay Nature Center and Wetlands

**CICONIIFORMES****Ciconiidae**

**Wood Stork** *Mycteria americana* – Regularly seen in flight, but we had the best studies of roadside birds and a small rookery in the Everglades, especially at Paurotis Pond.

**PELECANIFORMES****Threskiornithidae**

**American White Ibis** *Eudocimus albus* – Very common

**Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus* – Common, with a close bird at Green Cay Nature Center and Wetlands

**Roseate Spoonbill** *Platalea ajaja* – Best seen at Paurotis Pond in the Everglades – a known nesting site offering incredible scope views

**Ardeidae**

**Least Bittern** *Ixobrychus exilis* – Two gave excellent views at Green Cay Nature Center and Wetlands.

**Great Blue Heron** *Ardea herodias* – Common in wetlands and roadside areas. We also saw one "Great White Heron" at Miccosukee Indian Village in the Everglades and another in Key West.



**Reddish Egret *Egretta rufescens*** – Three birds seen at Fort De Soto Park, one hunting in the shallows. Others seen at Bunche Beach near Ft. Meyer's. The species is listed as Near-threatened.

**Great Egret *Ardea alba*** – Common

**Snowy Egret *Egretta thula*** – Common

**Little Blue Heron *Egretta caerulea*** – Typically a common species, only one was seen on the trip at Fort De Soto Park.

**Tricolored Heron *Egretta tricolor*** – Common, with good views at Green Cay Nature Center and Wetlands

**Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*** – Common, we also saw many inside Fort Jefferson. Many of these migrating birds don't survive, and some try to catch swallows.

**Green Heron *Butorides virescens*** – Fairly common, seen at several locations

**Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*** – A few seen in the Everglades

**Yellow-crowned Night Heron *Nyctanassa violacea*** – A skittish bird at Philippe Park and another observed feeding at Lantana Nature Preserve

### Pelecanidae

**Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis*** – Common in coastal areas. Super-close looks on the pier at Robbie's in Marathon

## SULIFORMES

### Fregatidae

**Magnificent Frigatebird *Fregata magnificens*** – First seen at Fort De Soto Park and then many seen in the Dry Tortugas, which harbors the only breeding colony of this species in the United States. Many hung in the breeze above Fort Jefferson.



Magnificent Frigatebird female

**Sulidae**

**Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra*** – We saw the colony on Hospital Key in the Dry Tortugas very well, where at least three dozen birds were present in the only colony of this species in the United States.



Masked Booby

**Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster*** – Six were scoped on an electrical tower at Philippe Park, and another was seen from the ferry on the way to the Dry Tortugas.

**Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*** – A juvenile rested briefly in the water by the ferry during the trip to the Dry Tortugas from Key West.

**ACCIPITRIFORMS****Cathartidae**

**Black Vulture *Coragyps atratus*** – Common

**Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura*** – Common

**Accipitridae**

**Swallow-tailed Kite *Elanoides forficatus*** – We saw this stunning raptor near Miccosukee Indian Village, hunting for snails along the canal.

**Cooper's Hawk *Accipiter cooperii*** – A close adult bird at King's Creek Village kept the bulbuls away for the first 30 minutes of our visit.

**Northern Harrier *Circus hudsonius*** – Seen flying low over a field while we were driving from Ft. Pierce to Tampa

**Bald Eagle *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*** – Two birds, an adult and a juvenile, were spotted at St. Sebastian River Preserve State Park. Another was seen at Safety Harbor Waterfront Park near Clearwater.

**Snail Kite *Rostrhamus sociabilis*** – In addition to a juvenile on the way to Homestead we had an adult male fly right over us at Shark Valley and then two distant males along the Tamiami Trail.

**Red-shouldered Hawk *Buteo lineatus*** – The most common raptor in south Florida

**Short-tailed Hawk *Buteo brachyurus*** – Spotted the morning before we left, flying in front of the Royal Palm Visitor Center

**Red-tailed Hawk *Buteo jamaicensis*** – One seen near St. Sebastian River Preserve State Park and another at Fort De Soto Park

**Pandionidae**

**Western Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*** – Daily sightings, including many active nests



Western Osprey

**GRUIFORMES**

**Aramidae**

**Limpkin *Aramus guarauna*** – Close-up views of two birds at Plantation Preserve near Ft. Lauderdale

**Gruidae**

**Sandhill Crane *Antigone canadensis*** – Three spotted in a field on the journey from Ft. Pierce to Tampa

**Rallidae**

**King Rail *Rallus elegans*** – One seen along Route 41 and another heard-only at Mahogany Hammock in the Everglades. The species is listed as Near-threatened.

**Sora (H) *Porzana carolina***– Heard only at Green Cay Nature Center and Wetlands

**Grey-headed Swamphen *Porphyrio poliocephalus*** – A pair of this introduced-but-countable species was seen at near-arm's length at Green Cay Nature Center and Wetlands.

**Common Gallinule *Gallinula galeata*** – Fairly common

**American Coot *Fulica americana*** – Fairly common

**Purple Gallinule** *Porphyrio martinica* – A single bird hanging out at the Everglades came right up to the group.



Purple Gallinule

## CHARADRIIFORMES

### Scolopacidae

**Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus* – Seen along the inner beach at Fort De Soto Park

**Marbled Godwit** *Limosa fedoa* – Also seen along the inner beach at Fort De Soto Park

**Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres* – Seen at Fort De Soto Park and at the Dry Tortugas, where they wandered among the picnic benches

**Sanderling** *Calidris alba* – Seen at Fort De Soto Park

**Dunlin** *Calidris alpina* – Several seen at Fort De Soto Park

**Least Sandpiper** *Calidris minutilla* – A single bird seen at Fort De Soto Park

**Semipalmated Sandpiper** *Calidris pusilla* – Single birds at both Fort De Soto Park and Dry Tortugas. The species is listed as Near-threatened.

**Western Sandpiper** *Calidris mauri* – A pair was spotted along the beach at Fort De Soto Park.

**Short-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus griseus* – Huge flocks at Fort De Soto Park, some in breeding plumage

**Spotted Sandpiper** *Actitis macularius* – Seen at both Philippe Park and in the Dry Tortugas

**Willet** *Tringa semipalmata* – Fort De Soto Park held one.

### Recurvirostridae

**Black-necked Stilt** *Himantopus mexicanus* – Two were spotted in a puddle along Route 41 near the Miccosukee Indian Village.

### Haematopodidae

**American Oystercatcher** *Haematopus palliatus* – A single specimen was spotted at Fort De Soto Park.

**Charadriidae**

**Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*** – Incredibly-close views of a breeding-plumage bird at Fort De Soto Park

**Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus*** – Seen at Fort De Soto Park

**Wilson's Plover *Charadrius wilsonia*** – Views from three feet away at Fort De Soto Park



Wilson's Plover

**Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus*** – Seen at St. Sebastian River Preserve and heard at Marathon airport

**Laridae**

**Laughing Gull *Leucophaeus atricilla*** – Abundant

**Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus*** – Hundreds in the Dry Tortugas, where we observed the only colony of this species in the United States; about 4,000 nest on Bush Key. We also had great, close studies of birds roosting on the old south coaling dock ruins.

**Black Noddy *Anous minutus*** – A very rare species occasionally found in the Dry Tortugas. Great scope views of one on the south coaling dock ruins

**Sooty Tern *Onychoprion fuscatus*** – Thousands in the Dry Tortugas, the only major breeding colony of the species in the United States

**Least Tern *Sternula antillarum*** – Common

**Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii*** – We found nine roosting on a pier in Marathon for exceptional scope studies of this rare species.

**Royal Tern *Thalasseus maximus*** – Seen at Fort De Soto Park and other locations

**Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis*** – Seen at Fort De Soto Park and in Key West

**Bridled Tern *Onychoprion anaethetus*** – A total of four birds resting and mating on the helipad wall at Fort Jefferson in the Dry Tortugas



Bridled Tern

**Black Skimmer *Rynchops niger*** – A small group seen at Fort De Soto Park

## COLUMBIFORMES

### Columbidae

**Rock Dove *Columba livia*** – Abundant

**White-crowned Pigeon *Patagioenas leucocephala*** – First seen along the Grouper Trail on Key Largo and again in Key West near the docks. The species is listed as Near-threatened.

**Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*** – Abundant

**Common Ground Dove *Columbina passerina*** – Observed at Fort De Soto Park, primarily on the wires, not on the ground...

**White-winged Dove *Zenaida asiatica*** – Good numbers up close at Plantation Preserve and many more in Homestead

**Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura*** – Common

## CUCULIFORMES

### Cuculidae

**Yellow-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus americanus*** – Spotted at both the Anhinga Trail in the Everglades and at Lucky Hammock in Homestead

**Mangrove Cuckoo *Coccyzus minor*** – Two birds were located near Ft. Myers at Bunche Beach Preserve.

## STRIGIFORMES

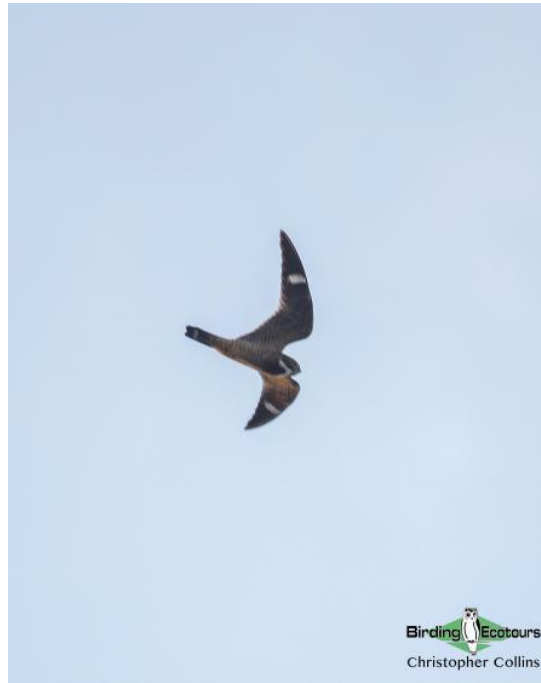
### Strigidae

**Burrowing Owl *Athene cunicularia*** – Great scope views of a family with three young at Markham Park

**CAPRIMULGIFORMES****Caprimulgidae**

**Common Nighthawk** *Chordeiles minor* – Fairly common, including over the hotel parking lot in Fort Pierce and at Homestead

**Antillean Nighthawk** *Chordeiles gundlachii* – Four seen and heard at the Marathon airport just before sunset



Antillean Nighthawk

**Chuck-will's-widow** *Antrostomus carolinensis* – At least two were flushed along the entrance road into the Everglades.

**APODIFORMES****Apodidae**

**Chimney Swift** *Chaetura pelagica* – Fairly common and best seen at Plantation Preserve. The species is listed as Near-threatened.

**Trochilidae**

**Ruby-throated Hummingbird** *Archilochus colubris* – Only two sightings, one at Fort De Soto Park and the other at Fort Zachary Taylor Historic State Park.

**PICIFORMES****Picidae**

**Red-headed Woodpecker** *Melanerpes erythrocephalus* – A pair spotted working the trees along the Yellow Trail at St. Sebastian River Preserve State Park

**Red-bellied Woodpecker** *Melanerpes carolinus* – The most common woodpecker of the trip

**Downy Woodpecker *Dryobates pubescens*** – Seen in Miami at King's Creek Village and in Sarasota

**Red-cockaded Woodpecker *Leuconotopicus borealis*** – The group had the opportunity to watch the park naturalist wrap the nesting trees with foil to deter snakes at St. Sebastian River Preserve State Park. As we moved away from the tree the woodpeckers returned to their nest. The species is listed as Near-threatened.

**Pileated Woodpecker *Dryocopus pileatus*** – One in flight over the entrance road to Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge

## FALCOMIFORMES

### Falconidae

**Merlin *Falco columbarius*** – One spotted at Fort Jefferson in the Dry Tortugas

**Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*** – A pair seen on the Anhinga Trail in the Everglades and another pair in the Dry Tortugas

## PSITTACIFORMES

### Psittacidae

**Monk Parakeet *Myiopsitta monachus*** – Seen at the nest near King's Creek Village

**White-winged Parakeet *Brotogeris versicolurus*** – We saw them well at a nesting colony in the Miami area on the first evening of the tour.



White-winged Parakeet

**Nanday Parakeet *Aratinga nenday*** – Several seen in flight at Fort De Soto Park, now a countable exotic



**PASSERIFORMES****Tyrannidae**

**Eastern Wood Pewee** *Contopus virens* – Heard and seen along the trail at Fort De Soto Park

**Great Crested Flycatcher** *Myiarchus crinitus* – First seen at St. Sebastian River Preserve State Park and again very close along the Anhinga Trail in the Everglades

**Western Kingbird** *Tyrannus verticalis* – A single sighting of a late-departing bird at Lucky Hammock

**Eastern Kingbird** *Tyrannus tyrannus* – Seen at Fort De Soto Park

**Grey Kingbird** *Tyrannus dominicensis* – Our first sighting was at Ocean Bank the first day of the tour, and then seen often over the next few days.



Grey Kingbird

**Laniidae**

**Loggerhead Shrike** *Lanius ludovicianus* – Fairly common in open habitats. The species is listed as Near-threatened.

**Vireonidae**

**White-eyed Vireo** *Vireo griseus* – Common in the Everglades and seen at Fort Zachary Taylor Historic State Park

**Red-eyed Vireo** *Vireo olivaceus* – Seen at Fort Zachary Taylor Historic State Park and in the Everglades

**Black-whiskered Vireo** *Vireo altiloquus* – We only saw this south Florida specialty at Carysfort Circle on Key Largo. We had excellent, close-up views!

**Corvidae**

**Blue Jay** *Cyanocitta cristata* – Common on the Florida mainland

**Florida Scrub Jay (E)** *Aphelocoma coerulescens* – Excellent views of Florida's only endemic species at St. Sebastian River Preserve State Park. The species is listed as Vulnerable.

**American Crow** *Corvus brachyrhynchos* – Common in the Everglades

**Fish Crow** *Corvus ossifragus* – Common throughout coastal areas of the south Florida mainland. This species is identified best by voice.

**Bombycillidae**

**Cedar Waxwing** *Bombycilla cedrorum* – Large flocks observed at both King's Creek Village and in the Miami Springs area

**Pycnonotidae**

**Red-whiskered Bulbul** *Pycnonotus jocosus* – Multiple birds seen at King's Creek Village in Miami



Red-whiskered Bulbul

**Hirundinidae**

**Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia* – Seen at Fort Jefferson

**Northern Rough-winged Swallow** *Stelgidopteryx serripennis* – Two or three in the grassy strips along the beach at Fort De Soto Park

**Tree Swallow** *Tachycineta bicolor* – A small flock flying over the bay at Philippe Park

**Purple Martin** *Progne subis* – Common, with the largest numbers seen at Plantation Preserve

**Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica* – Common, with a large flock in the Dry Tortugas

**American Cliff Swallow** *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota* – One or two among migrating swallows in the Dry Tortugas

**Cave Swallow** *Petrochelidon fulva* – Seen in small numbers at the Snapper Creek Cave Swallow colony

**Troglodytidae**

**Carolina Wren** *Thryothorus ludovicianus* – Only one was spotted during a late evening trip to Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge.

**Sittidae**

**Brown-headed Nuthatch** *Sitta pusilla* – Two seen behind the park office at St. Sebastian River Preserve State Park

**Mimidae**

**Grey Catbird** *Dumetella carolinensis* – Fairly common with many sightings

**Brown Thrasher** *Toxostoma rufum* – A single sighting at Plantation Preserve

**Bahama Mockingbird** *Mimus gundlachii* – An ABA Code 4 rarity gave us great looks at Lantana Nature Reserve in Palm Beach County. A true “chase” for the group

**Northern Mockingbird** *Mimus polyglottos* – Abundant

**Sturnidae**

**Common Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris* – Abundant

**Common Myna** *Acridotheres tristis* – This introduced species, now countable, was seen in the Homestead area and throughout Miami.

**Turdidae**

**Eastern Bluebird** *Sialia sialis* – A pair seen at St. Sebastian River Preserve State Park

**Grey-cheeked Thrush** *Catharus minimus* – Multiple birds seen up close at Fort De Soto Park, also at Fort Zachary Taylor Historic State Park.

**Passeridae**

**House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus* – Common

**Passerellidae**

**Bachman's Sparrow** *Peucaea aestivalis* – Point-blank views at St. Sebastian River Preserve State Park. The species is listed as Near-threatened.



Bachman's Sparrow

**Eastern Towhee** *Pipilo erythrophthalmus* – Seen at St. Sebastian River Preserve State Park

**Icteridae**

**Bobolink** *Dolichonyx oryzivorus* – A large flock made a brief flyby appearance at Green Cay Nature Center and Wetlands.

**Red-winged Blackbird** *Agelaius phoeniceus* – Common

**Eastern Meadowlark** *Sturnella magna* – Singing birds spotted at St. Sebastian River Preserve State Park and in the Everglades

**Common Grackle** *Quiscalus quiscula* – Abundant

**Boat-tailed Grackle** *Quiscalus major* – Abundant

**Shiny Cowbird** *Molothrus bonariensis* – We saw a male of this species, which is rare in Florida, visiting a feed in Homestead.

**Bronzed Cowbird** *Molothrus aeneus* – Multiple birds visiting the same feeder as the Shiny Cowbird in the Homestead area.

**Brown-headed Cowbird** *Molothrus ater* – Seen along with the Shiny and Bronzed Cowbirds

**Baltimore Oriole** *Icterus galbula* – A brilliant male at King's Creek Village

**Spot-breasted Oriole** *Icterus pectoralis* – A pair of this beautiful exotic was seen in the Miami Springs area

### Parulidae

**Ovenbird** *Seiurus aurocapilla* – A single bird found at Carysfort Circle

**Northern Waterthrush** *Parkesia noveboracensis* – Seen by the group in the Dry Tortugas

**Common Yellowthroat** *Geothlypis trichas* – Several sightings of males and females in the Everglades and at Fort Zachary Taylor Historic State Park

**American Redstart** *Setophaga ruticilla* – Common migrating warbler, with birds seen at a number of sites

**Cape May Warbler** *Setophaga tigrina* – One of the most frequently-sighted warbler species

**Northern Parula** *Setophaga americana* – Fairly common with sightings at six different locations

**Bay-breasted Warbler** *Setophaga castanea* – A gorgeous male gave the group good looks at Fort De Soto Park.

**Blackpoll Warbler** *Setophaga striata* – Found from Plantation Preserve south to Fort Zachary Taylor Historic State Park

**Black-throated Blue Warbler** *Setophaga caerulescens* – Seen at Green Cay Nature Center and Wetlands, Fort Zachary Taylor Historic State Park, and at the Dry Tortugas

**Palm Warbler** *Setophaga palmarum* – Seen at multiple locations

**Pine Warbler** *Setophaga pinus* – One male at Plantation Preserve

**Prairie Warbler** *Setophaga discolor* – Close views of a singing male at Plantation Preserve and also seen at Fort Zachary Taylor Historic State Park

**Black-and-white Warbler** *Mniotilta varia* – This was one of the most widespread migrants and was seen in several places.

**Tennessee Warbler** *Leiostyris peregrina* – Found along a trail at Fort De Soto Park

### Cardinalidae

**Rose-breasted Grosbeak** *Pheucticus ludovicianus* – A difficult-to-spot male at Fort De Soto Park was followed by a much-easier-to-see bird at the Dry Tortugas.

**Northern Cardinal** *Cardinalis cardinalis* – Common

**Indigo Bunting** *Passerina cyanea* – Seen at Fort Zachary Taylor Historic State Park and Fort De Soto Park

**Painted Bunting** *Passerina ciris* – Seen at various locations, with the high count at the feeders at Green Cay Nature Center and Wetlands. The species is listed as Near-threatened.

**FLORIDA TOUR SYSTEMATIC MAMMAL LIST, APRIL/MAY 2018****RODENTIA****Sciuridae**

**Eastern Grey Squirrel** *Sciurus carolinensis* – Common

**CARNIVORA****Procyonidae**

**Northern Raccoon** *Procyon lotor* – Seen at Green Cay Nature Center and Wetlands

**FLORIDA TOUR SYSTEMATIC REPTILE LIST, APRIL/MAY 2018****TESTUDINES****Trionychidae**

**Florida Softshell Turtle** *Apalone ferox* – One laying eggs at Royal Palm Visitor Center in the Everglades

**Emydidae**

**Red-eared Slider** *Trachemys scripta elegans* – This subspecies of the Yellow-bellied Slider Turtle was common.

**CROCODYLIA****Crocodylidae**

**American Crocodile** *Crocodylus acutus* – A relatively large individual seen closely at Flamingo. The species is listed as Vulnerable.

**Alligatoridae**

**American Alligator** *Alligator mississippiensis* – Frequent sightings in the Everglades

**SQUAMATA****Iguanidae**

**Common Green Iguana** *Iguana iguana* Seen on our last day near Snapper Creek