

## 9<sup>th</sup> Everglades Birding Festival January 12-16, 2017

### Holiday Inn Express, Ft. Lauderdale, Florida



Snowbirds of the feathered and human kind flocked to warm and sunny South Florida for the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Everglades Birding Festival. A NEW RECORD was set in finding 174 different species during the festival. The previous record was 166 species in 2016.

Birders came from 20 states as far away as Maine, Washington and California. They came from all regions of the U.S. to descend on one of the Top 10 birding destinations in the country. The field trips headed north, south, east and west of Ft. Lauderdale to explore the Everglades ecosystem in places like: Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, Stormwater Treatment Area 5, Everglades National Park, Upper Keys and birding hotspots in Broward, Palm Beach and Miami-Dade Counties.

The focus of the festival is not only to find target birds but for participants to gain birding skills. Each morning starts with a mini-workshop with topics such as: family groups; silhouette; bird behavior; habitat; birding by ear and season. These are taught by Event Coordinator, Paddy Cunningham. The festival is designed to allow for small groups of birders to work closely with our expert guides-David Simpson, Jim Eager and Paddy Cunningham on every field trip. It is our goal to have everyone see the located birds and to learn the identification of them. Yummy picnic lunches and homemade

dinners of chicken, shepherd's pie, and baked ziti with wine encourage birders to socialize and make new friends.

Evening programs included an Opening Reception with Dr. Frank Mazoti, "The Croc Doc" from the University of Florida. He informed us on a variety of current issues including the utter decimation of small mammal populations due to the highly invasive and prolific Burmese Pythons. Current research on Alligators and Crocodiles in the Everglades was also discussed. Dr. Mazoti is very excited about a community based project in Belize encouraging local farmers to take pictures of jungle cats such as Jaguars, and Ocelots for cash to encourage the preservation of tropical forest.

## **FIELD TRIPS    BROWARD HOT SPOTS**



BROWN BOOBY, Photo by David Simpson





REDDISH EGRET, Photo by David Simpson

### **BROWARD HOT SPOTS-THURSDAY-1/12-55 species**

Broward County was hopping with lots of rare and target birds and we got quite a few of them on our first trip. Our “go to” place for Burrowing Owl is Brian Piccolo Park in Hollywood. It didn’t disappoint with Owls easily seen among the purple flowers and grass. The park lights and open grass attract lots of insects for them to eat when hunting at night. The jetty at John Lloyd State Park held up to its’ promise and the Brown Booby was there as requested on a Port Everglades channel marker. It sat for all of us to see before it flew off fishing for the afternoon. Two surprises awaited as Reddish Egret, a miss for the festival for many years and Bonaparte’s Gull, a new species for the festival was also found. For eastern U.S. birders, a rare Black-throated Gray Warbler was found at the famous Evergreen Cemetery and for western birders they were thrilled with Prairie, Cape May and Northern Parula Warblers. Blue-headed Parakeets flew in to roost as we departed for our Opening Reception at Long Key Nature Center. On “clean up” day the Bananaquit was located at nearby Richardson Park by Nancy Christenson and Mel Sanac from San Diego. Leaders-Paddy Cunningham, Jim Eager, David Simpson

## **CORKSCREW SWAMP SANCTUARY & CENTRAL PRAIRIES**



CRESTED CARACARA

BLACK CROWNED NIGHT HERON

Photos by David Simpson

## **CORKSCREW SWAMP SANCTUARY & CENTRAL PRAIRIES-FRIDAY-1/13-60 species**

Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary is one of the most visited nature preserves in the U.S., famous for its 2.5 mile boardwalk through a pristine Cypress Swamp. Its ancient virgin Bald Cypress harbors a variety of sought after birds. But it is its' primordial walk back in time that never fail to awe and amaze. A festival favorite, Painted Buntings were easily found at the feeder. A great collection of Woodpeckers were there with 5 out of the 8 possible species including the Hairy Woodpecker, a South Florida rarity. The group luckily got onto the mixed wintering flock and the uncommon Black-throated Green Warbler was present along with other warblers. The uncommon Yellow-throated Vireo showed and David was able to show everyone its clear distinctive white belly delineation against the yellow throat. It can be confused with Pine Warbler with a more streaky yellow into the white. Limpkin, a target bird was easily seen. There were great views of Crested Caracara, Wild Turkey and Sandhill Cranes on the drive back home along Snake Road through the central prairies.

Leader David Simpson



## **SOUTH DADE HOTSPOTS**



**BUFF-BELLIED HUMMINGBIRD**

**RUFOUS HUMMINGBIRD**

Photos by Paul Weller

## **SOUTH DADE HOTSPOTS-FRIDAY 1/13-62 species**

Nothing is hotter than a Western Spindalis that had been reported at Crandon Park on Key Biscayne along with a very uncommon Common Eider. We toughed out the commuter traffic past downtown only to dip on both. We were rewarded with Lesser black backed Gull, and a nice collection of shorebirds including Piping Plover. Both rare birds were later found on “cleanup day” by great San Diego birders Nancy Christenson and Mel. In the Kendall/Baptist Hospital area, a dark morph of a Short-tailed Hawk flew directly overhead as we searched in vain for the Red-whiskered Bulbul. We also saw a very fast flying White-crowned Pigeon. We had our best looks at target birds at Castellow Hammock in South Dade. Among the brilliant, salmon flowers of the Chinese Hat bush with patience the very rare Buff-bellied Hummingbird made an appearance. Also the Ruby-throated and the uncommon Rufous Hummingbirds. Paddy called out an elusive Yellow-breasted Chat as it flew out of the same bush and paused briefly along the fence line.

Leaders-Paddy Cunningham, Jim Eager

## **SOUTH DADE EXOTICS**



Photo by David Simpson

### **South Dade Exotics-1/14-52 species**

Matheson Hammock County Park is a great place to start an exploration for exotic birds in Miami-Dade. Things starts out with a dramatic visit by a Pileated Woodpecker pair excavating a nest cavity in a telephone pole. Red-masked Parakeets were already fighting over who is going to take it over once it is completed. Good looks were also seen of a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. Orange-winged Parrots were seen with their short stiff wing beats flying by. A pair and family group of Blue-and-yellow Macaws was seen flying in the early morning light which really brought out the blue in the upper parts. The very small Scaly-breasted Munias flew by and were seen at feeder at the Deering Estate. It is ABA countable bird only in California.



Photo by David Simpson

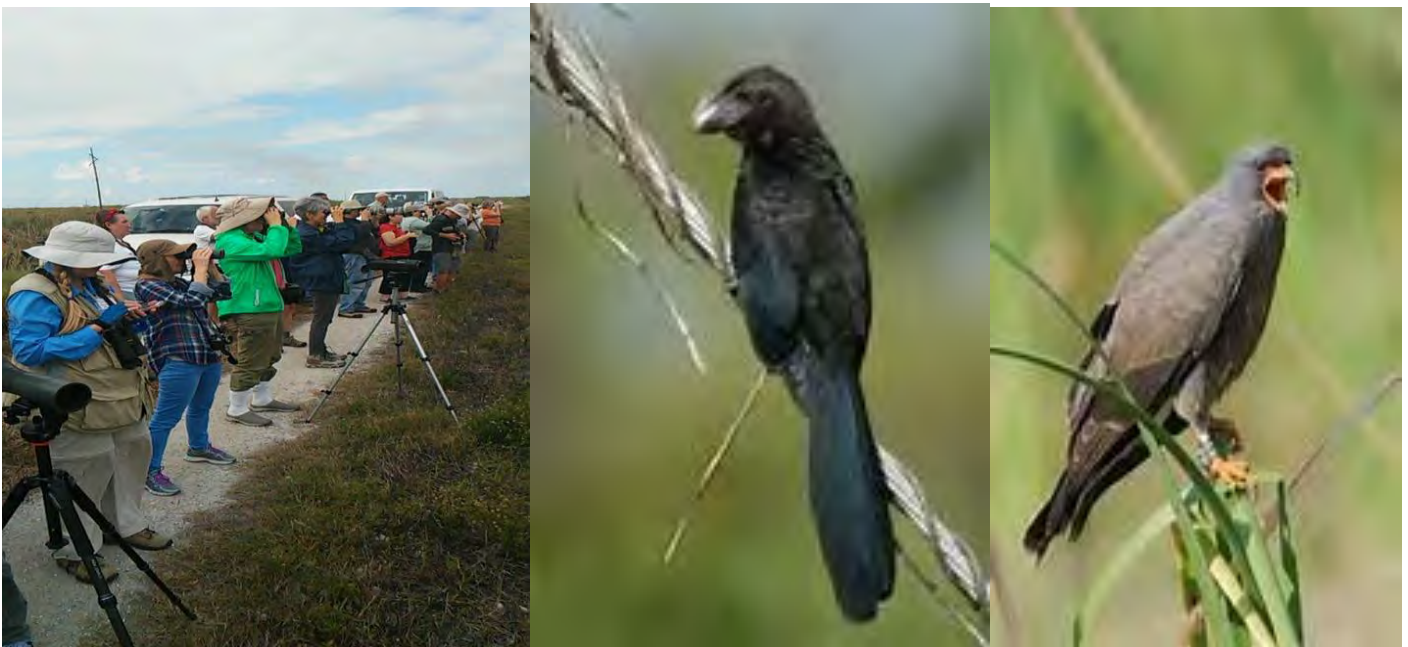


At Fuchs Park a Ruby-throated Hummingbird was seen, along with a beautiful Green Heron. At Kings Village two uncommon Buteos were seen Broadwing and Short-tailed Hawks. At Kendall Baptist Hospital a variety of domesticated waterfowl were seen, along with now countable Egyptian Goose. At the MCH parking an American Kestrel was seen with a captured lizard. Yellow-chevroned Parakeets were found and Mitred Parakeets were seen in palms.

Back in Broward at Markham Park, a large variety of birds (24) were seen including the only sighting of a Sharp-shinned Hawk during the festival. A Gray-headed Swamphen was seen flying over with its long legs and toes trailing behind them.

Leader-David Simpson

## **STORMWATER TREATMENT AREA 5**



### **STA 5-Stormwater Treatment Area 5 and Central Prairies-1/14-72 species**

STA 5-Stormwater Treatment Area 5 has been named one of the Top 100 birding hotspots in the country. It was designed to take fertilizer rich farm water runoff, place it in impoundments which will allow wetland plants to absorb the nutrients, resulting in cleaner water heading to the Everglades. The birds don't care about all of this. They just LOVE the habitat.

Starting out with a big bang we had the rare Smooth billed Ani calling with its eerie whiny. These birds are getting harder and harder to get so we were all thrilled that it was landing very close in nearby grasses for all to see. This was a life bird for many of the birders. Margaret England, "Queen of STA 5" informed us that many of the Snail Kites had moved over to Lake Okeechobee, but we had beautiful views of two males perching



low near wetland islands with their bright red face and legs. Paddy pointed out the different flight patterns of the Snail Kite with a more continuous wingbeats and M shaped silhouette versus the tilting V shape of the Northern Harrier. A Peregrine Falcon kept careful watch from the powerline poles.

In between the tens of thousands of American Coots were a good collection of waterfowl-Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Ruddy Duck, Redhead, Mottled Duck, American Wigeon, Ring-necked Duck, Blue & Green-winged Teals. But the most desired Fulvous Whistling-duck with its unique burnt orange tan color was easily seen in flight and in the water, along with the Black-bellied Whistling Duck. Jim was able to coax out a Marsh Wren, and Swamp Sparrow at the observation deck. We ended our time at STA 5 with some great Kingbirds: the rare and lost Tropical Kingbird, a confused usually summer Gray Kingbird and a Western Kingbird on Deer Fence Rd. Along Snake Road on the way home we had many of our target species: Crested Caracara, Sandhill Crane, Wild Turkey, and Yellow crowned Night Heron.

Leaders-Paddy Cunningham, Jim Eager

## **EVERGLADES NATIONAL PARK**



Photo collage by James Pascatore



## **Everglades National Park-1/15-86 species**

Everglades National Park has been recognized as one of the unique places on Earth; an International Biosphere. Its biodiversity is due to its numerous distinct habitats and sub-tropical climate. Unfortunately, it has the most rare and endangered plants and animals of any continental national park. The preservation of the park and its need of clean water has been a constant battle. This festival was developed to explore the vast ecosystem, admire its' subtle beauty and find its' amazing birds.



Anhinga Trail Boardwalk photo by James Pascatore



Anhinga Trail is the most visited part of the park because of your ability to get up close and personal with alligators, wading birds and Purple Gallinules. As the morning air warmed 500 Turkey and Black Vultures rode the rising thermals in a spiral spectacle. Always check these kettles for the rare South Florida Short-tailed Hawk who tends to fly at the very highest level. One was there. Along the little know Research Road we found our Brown-headed Nuthatch excavating holes in a dead snag, along with the beautiful mustard colored, singing Pine Warblers. At Long Pine Key, Eastern Towhee serenaded our cold chicken, potato salad and chocolate cake picnic.



Mrazek Pond photo by Paddy Cunningham Mrazek Pond had a nice collection of waterfowl-Northern Shoveler, Green and Blue winged Teals, Wood Storks and a fly over of Roseate Spoonbill. We were are to get a good study of the difference between Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs.



Flamingo Breezeway photo by James Pascatore



Flamingo is a vast area with many great birding hot spots. But birding is at its best on the pink breezeway overlooking Florida Bay on a low tide. We hit it on a just incoming tide and had a good collection of Caspian, Royal and Foresters Terns, along with many wading birds. We had fun looking comparing our own Royal Tern-Donald Allen of Bloomington, Indiana and Caspian Tern Michelle Goebel



The highlight was the rare viewing of all phases of the Great Blue Heron: Great Blue, Great White and the extremely rare Wurdemanns Heron on mangrove islands in Florida Bay. I can honestly say I have seen them less than 10 times in my life.

PLATE 10



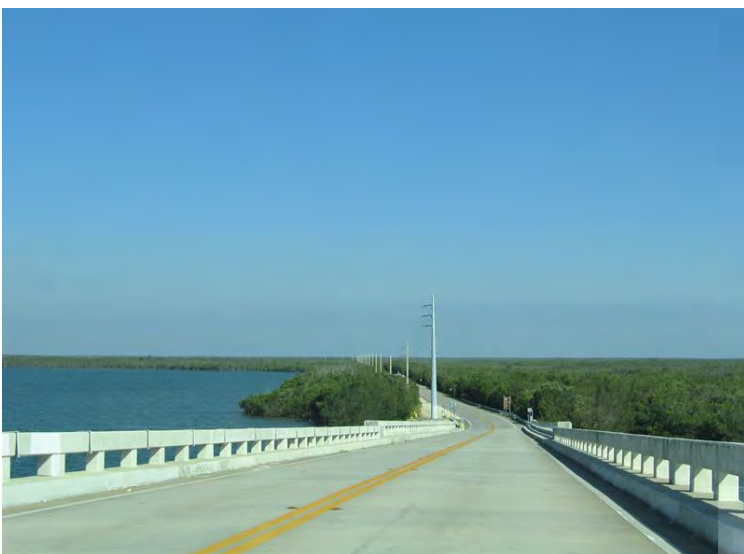
At the Marina we were thrilled with looks at Manatees and an American Crocodile. The amphitheater can be great for shorebirds and last year all the planets aligned and there were 4000 birds feeding in the shallow puddles. But this year fisherman and romping dogs keep the birds away. On the way out of the park as the sun began to set we saw White-crowned Pigeons flying across the road. David's van lucked out as a few of this South Florida specialty were perched briefly on a dead snag. They are very skittish and when the other vans pulled up they flew off as they do at great speed.



### **BARN OWL by [jacanaent.com](http://jacanaent.com)**

At Lucky Hammock against a peach lit sky and lavender clouds, A Barn Owl searched for its' dinner, flying low over the brush field in the dying sun. A life bird for many of our birders. Grasshopper Sparrows called but no Lesser Nighthawks this year. At the local and authentic Rosita's Mexican Restaurant during our dinner fun awards are given out to participants. Our Guides-David Simpson, Jim Eager and Paddy Cunningham talk about the future trips they are conducting and invite everyone to bird with them in the future.

### **UPPER KEYS NATURAL HISTORY TOUR**



View from Card Sound Road to Crocodile National Wildlife Refuge



A trip to South Florida wouldn't be complete without a trip to the Florida Keys. After 5 busy days of birding, this trip takes on the laid back ease characteristic of the keys. It explores what makes special the keys environment so unique. The Card Sound Bridge is the first stop where we usually get the Cuban Yellow Warbler, but missed this year. But we were happy with a Magnificent Frigatebird, the fastest ascender of Earth who floated by both male (dark throated) and female (white throated). Lesser Black backed Gull was also seen with other gulls and Double-breasted Cormorant. Driving down this road through the North Key Largo National Wildlife Refuge home to 3 endemic species.



Greeting us at Dagny Johnson State Botanical Preserve was a high pitched whistle of an uncommon wintering Broad winged Hawk. Searching the dense foliage of this tropical hardwood hammock and second call was heard in response. One eventually flew out for all to see. This can be hopping or dead depending on the season, but with some effort we saw Black-throated Blue Warbler and the much desired from birders out west Prairie Warbler.

At John Pennekamp State Park there is a chance for some personal exploration of this destination that is mostly used for snorkeling in the U.S. only coral reefs. There is a beach where we saw Ruddy Turnstones and Sanderlings. A small but excellent museum/aquarium with many wonderful tanks filled with tropical fish and corals. David took birders down the nature trail to continue to look for the very elusive Mangrove Cuckoo but we added Blue-headed Vireo instead. The highlight of the visit was the AMAZING display of a dark morph Short tailed Hawk who kited motionless directed overhead. We were all able to see the checkered patterning of its underwing usually not visible due to this birds extremely high flight behavior. Many of these rare birds are overlooked but they can look like the dark Vultures that they will kettle with.

The festival ends at his annual visit to Alabama's Jack, home of the best Conch Fritters in the Keys. It gives all the participants of the taste of the keys with its' outdoor setting along the water and Jimmy Buffett crooner. We go over the final list and tally up the success of a great festival of birding.

## **EVERGLADES BIRDING FESTIVAL 2017 AWARD WINNERS**

### **MOST LIFE BIRDS 90 sp.**

**Mary Schilling, Brandon, Fl.**



86 Life Birds seen-Alfred Margerum

49 Life Birds seen-Marvin Nelson

32 Life Birds seen-Dr. Mel Senac

### **AMERICAN GOLDEN PLOVER**

**Mike & Carolyn Barry**

**Birders that has flown the furthest**



### **EAGLE EYE**

**Nancy Christensen, San Diego, Ca**

**Helped find the most birds**



### **HOMING PIGEON**

**Deborah Fellows, Coon Rapids, Minn.**

**Second time at festival**



### **LAUGHING GULL**

**Alfred Margerum, Philadelphia, Pa.**

**Most fun & kept us laughing**



86 Life Birds seen



