

Florida

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly Orlando
Day 2	Titusville
Day 3/4	West Palm Beach
Day 5/6	Fort Myers
Day 7/8	Homestead
Day 9	Miami – Fly London
Day 10	Arrive London

Departs

February

Focus

Birds

Grading

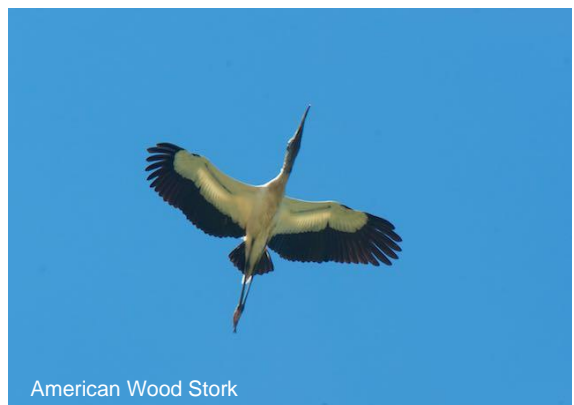
Day walks only. Grade A.

Dates and Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code USA02)

Highlights:

- Fantastic introduction to birding in the new world.
- Explore the world-famous Everglades.
- Enjoy warm winter sunshine.
- Snail Kite, Limpkin, Florida Scrub Jay
- Masses of herons, egrets and wintering wildfowl and shorebirds.



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Introduction

Florida, in the south-east corner of the USA, provides a great introduction to birding in North America with the added bonus of a sub-tropical climate. As well as a great selection of east coast birds there are a good number of “specialities” to be searched for such as the endangered Snail (Everglade) Kite, the unique Limpkin, and Caribbean species such as Short-tailed Hawk, Shiny Cowbird and White-crowned Pigeon. The southern latitude also encourages a number of other species to over-winter rather than migrate to Central and South America; these include a number of American warblers, the possibility of Scissor-tailed Flycatcher and there is always the chance of a Caribbean vagrant. Add to this the wealth of wintering wildfowl and shorebirds plus the array of resident species and introduced exotics (68 species of parrot have been recorded in Florida!), there are the makings of a mouth-watering trip.



February is normally a settled month weather-wise with temperatures at Miami averaging 24C with a humidity of 54% and precipitation of 47mm. Given a “normal year” then conditions should be perfect for pleasant birdwatching. The trip will have few long drives (more than two hours) without regular stops at some of the plethora of State Parks, Wildlife Refuges and National Preserves. We will visit Merritt Island (Cape Canaveral), not for the Space Centre but for one of Florida’s richest Wildlife Refuges, protected by its proximity to NASA HQ! The prairies and swamplands around Kissimmee and Lake Okeechobee will also focus our attention as will the complex of Refuges on the Gulf Coast around Sanibel Island and the primeval Corkscrew Swamp. Finally we will drive across the northern edge of the Everglades National Park, explore the park as far as Flamingo and bird around the Homestead/South Miami region for a strange mix of exotics!

Birds in Florida are often ridiculously tame, especially some of the herons and egrets, offering great photo opportunities to both beginner and experienced photographers. The relatively relaxed pace of the trip will accommodate such needs. It is unlikely that this will be your first and last trip to North America!

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Itinerary

Day 1

Orlando/Titusville

We depart London for Orlando arriving late this afternoon. We will collect our minibus and drive to Titusville where we will spend our first night. Depending on our arrival time there may be time to visit one or two local spots.

Day 2

Titusville

Our trip truly begins today by exploring one of Florida's premier birding "hot spots" - Merritt Island. More famous for being the centre for the US Space Programme (the Shuttle launch pads will be our backdrop!), the security needs of NASA have also protected a huge area of coastal swamp, bays, strands and inlets. Part of the Island is open to traffic and on a drive-round Nature Trail with plenty of stops - we should encounter an assortment of water-birds including various rails, birds of prey (Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier and Osprey are frequent) and other species such as the endemic Florida Scrub Jay and a variety of passerines. If we encounter on-shore winds sea-watching from the beach dunes can be very productive as the deep water beyond the continental shelf is less than ten miles offshore. We will visit the manatee viewing area in the hope of catching up with a sea cow or two, but success here very much depends on local sea temperatures.



Day 3

West Palm Beach

We will spend the day exploring the lakes and prairies between Kissimmee and Lake Okeechobee. Our target species include many of Florida's mouth-watering specialities: Snail Kite, Limpkin, Crested Caracara, plus Sandhill Crane, Wild Turkey and Bald Eagle. The pine woods host species such as Red-headed Woodpecker, Brown-headed Nuthatch and Bachman's Sparrow. There is also a chance of seeing the elusive and endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker though it is most easily seen at dawn and dusk. By mid-afternoon we will be heading towards West Palm Beach where we spend the night.

Day 4

West Palm Beach

Today we will visit some excellent wetlands south of West Palm Beach to look for both resident and migrant birds. Birding from the boardwalks at Green Cay and Wakodahatchee Wetlands is incredibly rewarding. Small stands of trees should hold a variety of species. Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler should be the commonest but Black-throated Green, Black and White and Ovenbird are all possible as well as the beautiful, resident Yellow-throated Warbler. Black-bellied Whistling Duck and American Bittern are both regular and on top of this will be the "background" species –grackles, herons/egrets and various birds of prey.

Day 5

Fort Myers

We will cross the State, taking in a stop or two along the way. The route will depend on the latest sightings but may include one of the vast Stormwater Treatment Areas that filter water from agricultural areas before it is released into the Everglades wetlands system. Northern Harriers quarter the agricultural areas and flooded fields will hold large concentrations of wetland birds. Flocks of Red-winged Blackbird and Brown-headed Cowbird may include something rarer like a Yellow-headed Blackbird. If there is time after arriving on the Gulf Coast, we will either try for manatee or head to a birding site in the Fort Myers area before checking in to our hotel for two nights.

Day 6

Fort Myers

There are many excellent birding areas in the vicinity and we will visit various local sites especially to try and pick up species we may have missed earlier. JN Ding Darling Reserve on Sanibel Island and Corkscrew Swamp are both within easy reach. A range of shorebirds including Wilsons and Piping Plovers and Long-billed Curlew are all possible as well as the usual array of egrets, Roseate Spoonbill and American White Pelican. Corkscrew Swamp may provide Painted Bunting on the feeders and Barred Owl in the Cypress trees. We will end the day on the beach where we will watch the Brown Pelicans fishing offshore as the sun sinks into the Gulf of Mexico.



Day 7

Homestead

We depart Fort Myers heading southwards towards Naples where will search for Burrowing Owl and visit an excellent wader site. Keeping an eye on the sea here can always produce a Magnificent Frigatebird, especially if there are on-shore winds or enticing, large flocks of terns and gulls. After lunch we will head east on the Tamiami Trail. This takes us through the two outstanding areas of Big Cypress National Preserve and the Everglades National Park. This huge swamp is a sea of saw-grass interspersed with "hammocks" (tropical hardwood trees growing on areas of slight elevation) and stands of Bald Cypress trees. Much of the swamp is impenetrable, other than by hover boat, but the road offers great birdwatching opportunities along its 78 miles! We hope to encounter a variety of birds of prey, including Snail Kite and Swainson's Hawk; plus more chances to see Limpkin, American Bittern, American Purple Gallinule and Wood Stork. On reaching the end of the Trail we head south to Homestead for our last two nights.

Day 8

Homestead

Our day will be spent in and around the Everglades National Park taking in the 50 mile drive from Homestead to Flamingo with stops at such well named places as Royal Palm Hammock (the most reliable Short-tailed Hawk site in the USA) and the Anhinga trail (usually provides superb close up views of Little Blue Heron, Tricolored Heron, Great White Egret, Anhinga and American Purple

Gallinule. The drive can also provide views of White-crowned Pigeon, White-winged Dove and a variety of sparrows. This part of Florida has been one of the most regular sites for the Shiny Cowbird - a recent "invader" from the Caribbean. The parasitic habits (it lays its eggs in other birds nests - often the endangered ones!) of cowbirds makes it a less than welcome addition to Florida's avifauna. Scissor-tailed Flycatchers often winter in the area as well as a good selection of warblers. Amongst the numerous Alligators there is also the possibility of seeing the much rarer American Crocodile. Overnight will again be in Homestead.

Day 9

Homestead/Miami, Fly London

Our last day (late afternoon departure) will be spent around the Homestead area and South Miami looking for any "missing" species and perhaps encountering some of Florida's "exotic" birdlife. This



part of Miami is home to a whole variety of species, some well-established as breeding birds which have escaped from captivity and settled happily into the leafy suburbs and parks. Red-whiskered Bulbul, Hill and Crested Mynas from Asia, Spot-breasted Orioles and a wide selection of parrots from central and South America can all be found! Despite the development throughout the area, Burrowing Owls still occur at a number of locations - often on golf courses! We will aim to

be at Miami International Airport well before check-in in late afternoon.

Day 10

London

We are scheduled to arrive in London early this morning.

Tour grading

Grade A - a standard bird watching tour with no prolonged treks.

Food & accommodation

In common with most tours in the USA, no meals are included in the tour cost, although we expect most of our hotels will include a free breakfast. Please allow about £25 - £40 per day for food although the multitude of available eating establishments in the USA mean that a wide choice is possible and depending on preference and appetite this figure could be reduced or exceeded. Generally we'll have breakfast in the hotel or at a nearby coffee/waffle house or similar. We'll try to take lunch in the field, having called in at a supermarket, Subway or sandwich shop. Dinner will be at a variety of restaurants close to our overnight accommodations. People are free to wander off to do their own thing for dinner, although generally we'd expect to stick together. Accommodation will be in standard motels with private facilities on the basis of sharing a twin-bedded room. Single

rooms will be available but the supplement is high because motels charge per room whether double or single occupancy.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website.

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