

Florida

Naturetrek Tour Report

8th – 17th February 2022



Reddish Egret



Gulf Fritillary



American Bittern



Glossy Ibis

Tour report and images by Matthew Capper



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Summary

We had a great time on our tour around Florida. Each day brought a different set of habitats and some amazing wildlife. As ever, the wetland birds were the undoubted stars. It is hard to think of anywhere else that you can get quite so close to such a range of herons, egrets, bitterns, spoonbills, storks and ibis' – and all in bright warm winter sunshine.

Florida is a great place to catch up with American warblers - without the need to rely on a Spring or Autumn fall of migrants. Here, they feed in flocks, much the same way as our UK small birds do in winter. We saw twelve species over the course of the trip and there were frequently vireos, gnatcatchers and flycatchers in with them.

And of course, it wasn't just about the birds. A Nine-banded Armadillo truffling by the side of the road, lots of Manatees, both Alligator and American Crocodile and Raccoons and Bottle-nosed Dolphin all made sure that we looked down as much as we looked up.

Add in sunsets on the Gulf, Frigatebirds on the Atlantic, Hummingbirds buzzing from flower to flower, Burrowing Owls at point blank range, famous refuges like Merrit Island, the primordial swamp at Corkscrew Sanctuary and world-famous Everglades National Park, and you have all the ingredients of a superb trip.

Day 1

Tuesday 8th February

Arrival in Orlando

Our trip began in the arrivals hall at Orlando airport. Matthew arrived to meet two couples, before heading for the rental desk and being joined by another couple who had flown in from visiting family in California. The pick-up process for the bus was rather protracted and not helped by some rather unhelpful directions that meant we circled the airport only to end up back where we had started! Eventually, we were sorted though and off to a nearby hotel for our next pick up. As we drove east in the dark, the weather was very unseasonal with cold temperatures and rain, but we were hopeful that things would be a little more Florida-like in the morning. After seeing an Eastern Cottontail Rabbit, we pulled into the hotel in Titusville where our final couple were waiting for us. There was just time for a short introductory chat before we all retired for a well-earned night's sleep.

Day 2

Wednesday 9th February

Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge

Following the previous days rain, we were pleased to have a dry day, even if the wind was a bit chilly at times. We drove north to pick up food, driving alongside the Indian River lagoon. It was immediately apparent that there were thousands of scaup out on the water so we made an impromptu stop, getting the scope out to sift through them and ascertain that the flock contained both Greater and Lesser Scaup (although the latter were by far the more numerous). There was plenty of other stuff to see including a few Black Duck, the first of many Osprey, the ubiquitous grackles and a nice Spotted Sandpiper.

After picking up food, our next stop was the causeway over to Merritt Island, stopping at Parrish Park for a lovely mixed flock of Black Skimmer, Sanderling, Turnstone, Dunlin and gulls. More Osprey were fishing offshore along with Royal Terns and lots more scaup. A Bald Eagle was sat on a telegraph pole behind us and

patient scanning revealed a single Great Northern Diver (or Common Loon as the locals would call it). A Horseshoe Crab stranded on the tideline was rescued and righted by one of the group. By now the Turkey and Black Vultures were starting to become active and we decided it was time to head on to our next stop and look for Florida's only endemic bird species.



American Skimmer

As usual, Florida Scrub Jay did not take long to find, being present in the scrub around the pay booth at the entrance to the Canaveral National Seashore. We were treated to great views of these incredibly confiding birds and had seven in total. A Kildeer was stood by the road, Common Ground Doves flew up in front of us and we added our first Red-bellied Woodpeckers and a nice diminutive Downy Woodpecker too.

One of the animals high on the wanted list was Armadillo and we were lucky as we drove away to spot one feeding busily by the side of the road. A quick exit from the van had us all enjoying and photographing it as it probed the grass for invertebrates. After following it for fifteen minutes, it moved off into cover and we reluctantly moved on.



Nine-banded Armadillo

We knew the sea temperature would be too low but still felt a stop at the Manatee deck at the Haulover Canal would be worthwhile. Although there were no manatees, it proved to be so as we added several butterflies, a singing Carolina Wren and several warblers - including Black and White and Orange-crowned - in the car park. From the viewing deck, there were several herons, Brown Pelicans, more Royal Terns and a flyover Reddish Egret. Best of all though was a Bottlenose Dolphin that made its way through the canal from the Atlantic Ocean to the Indian River lagoon.

We took lunch at the Visitor Centre, but not before checking the feeders to look at the Painted Bunting. There were two males and a female on view, along with nesting Osprey, a lovely male Northern Cardinal, our first Alligator and several Red-bellied Turtle.

We spent the afternoon on the Black Point Wildlife drive, enjoying a wonderful selection of wildfowl and waders – the best of which were probably the American Avocets. A Swamp Sparrow crept in the trackside vegetation and there were more birds of prey around including Bald Eagle, a Cooper's Hawk and a nice Northern Harrier. Roseate Spoonbills near the entrance gave great views but it was the Reddish Egrets that stole the show – their habit of running around in active pursuit of prey endearing them to the group and earning them the alternative name of 'Demented Heron'!

We stopped briefly on Gator Creek Road but with little other than more Scaup and a couple more Black Duck, we headed back to the hotel to freshen up ahead of our first dinner together.

Day 3

Thursday 10th February

Three Lakes Wildlife Management Area & Lake Kissimmee (Joe Overstreet Landing)

Today was one of the longer days of the trip but still full of interest. As we assembled at the vehicle, we were treated to four Cedar Waxwing and a couple of Common Myna. Better still were a pair of Sandhill Crane walking down the side of the road – just a few feet from the mini bus. We drove to St Cloud for provisions and with the telescope set up in the supermarket car park, we found it difficult to drive away! Tree Swallows were cruising through, Mockingbirds were perched up and a Bald Eagle was sitting nearby. We managed to drag ourselves away though and drove south, hoping for a Caracara. We succeeded in finding three but sadly there had been a road accident nearby and we couldn't find a safe place to park up and enjoy them.

We did manage to pull off the road at the Double C Bar Ranch though and here there were groups of Sandhill Cranes dotted around the landscape. An Eastern Phoebe was hunting along wires and a Red-tailed Hawk was circling behind us amongst the vultures.

Formerly a vast open cattle ranch, the Three Lakes Wildlife Management Area now preserves a significant proportion of the remaining Florida prairie habitat around lake Kissimmee. As with many of the US protected landscapes, at 265km² it dwarves the UK equivalent. Our target here was the rare Red-cockaded Woodpecker but despite finding marked nest trees, we couldn't find the bird itself. Instead we enjoyed great views of a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Zebra Swallowtail and in the Hunters Campground we all got great views of several Eastern Bluebirds in with the ubiquitous Palm Warblers - plus a single Pine Warbler. The residents of the campground, like many Americans over the course of the trip, were very friendly and very curious, several of them coming over to ask what the group were looking at.

We took a steady drive down to Joe Overstreet Landing on Lake Kissimmee, stopping to look at a Bald Eagle nest and a large mixed flock of Glossy Ibis, Sandhill Crane and Boat-tailed and Common Grackles. There was

another Phoebe on the fence line and an Eastern Meadowlark singing close by. The picnic benches under the trees gave some welcome shade from the sun and we relaxed for a while before gradually assembling at the viewpoint to see what was around. Limpkin and Purple Gallinule were out on the water lilies and we had a couple of sightings of Snail Kite hunting for Apple Snails in the distance. A young Red Shouldered Hawk was incredibly confiding and posed for photos, moving from close perch to close perch, almost as if it were trying to provide us with different photographic backgrounds!

After a quick visit to the restrooms, we drove back down the road, again stopping from time to time to enjoy the Loggerhead Shrikes, Mourning Doves, Savannah Sparrows and American Kestrels. A nice surprise awaited in the form of a Gopher Tortoise that was sprinting (okay, it's all relative!) along the side of a field. We got out to have a look and it stopped and waited patiently for us to admire it. Our last pull in brought us a nice Brown-Headed Cowbird, a couple of Red-bellied Woodpeckers, plenty more Mourning Doves and three striking Bryant's Fox Squirrel.



Gopher Tortoise

And then it was time to head down the east coast to our next destination at Boynton Beach. We didn't see a huge amount but a couple of Crested Caracara were seen briefly, flying off to the left of the minibus and best of all were six Wild Turkey that we were able to pull over to watch as they strutted around under some trees.

Day 4

Friday 11th February

Green Cay Wetland, Loxahatchee Wildlife Refuge & Boynton Beach Inlet

After the longer journey of yesterday, we had a lovely day today, enjoying a couple of superb local wetlands and a wander on the beach.

First up was Green Cay Wetland, a small man-made site that used to be agricultural land but was sold to the County on condition that it was given over to nature. As a result, the reserve is much more like the designed and managed nature reserves that we get in the UK rather than the more undisturbed, low intervention refuges found in the States.

We took our time going around the boardwalk - this is not a place where you want to rush. Immediately, we were seeing good birds, a Sora Rail was creeping around with the Common and Purple Gallinules, several Iguanas were hanging out in the trees and a Green Heron was perched just feet away. Purple Martins were hawking over the water and at the first pocket of woodland we had a nice wave of warblers go through with Black and White, Palm, Pine, Yellow-rumped, Prairie, Orange Crowned and Black-throated Green all in the space of a couple of minutes.

One good tip when birding on a boardwalk is to always ask people coming the other way what they have seen. This paid dividends when a birder reported that he had seen a dozen Wilson's Snipe and another told us that he had seen a Least Bittern, a much sought after but seldom seen bird. The bittern had last been seen disappearing into a clump of vegetation so he kindly agreed to walk back with us and show us exactly where he had found it. This proved to be essential as there was no way we would have seen it otherwise. After a few minutes of "up a bit" "down a bit" "it's just behind that leaf" it did the decent thing and walked out of the clump and began feeding in the relative open. What a bird – a bittern the size of a moorhen, exquisitely patterned and just feet from the boardwalk. Florida birding at its best!



Least Bittern



Painted Buntings

One of the group had identified Green Cay as the site to see Mottled Duck – a wanted lifer. He finally got it when several were spotted on the open water near the end of the walk. However, he was to regret his decision to share his desire so openly, as every Mottled Duck for the rest of the trip was pointed out with great relish by the rest of us! Eventually we made it back round to the Visitor Centre, stopping to have a look at the exhibits and then assembling at the feeders outside where at least five Painted Bunting were coming to the seed.

After picking up our usual lunch, we drove twenty minutes east to the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge. A very friendly man at the entrance booth gave us directions to the picnic area and we sat in the shade, watching the heron species and finding a Brown Basilisk lizard in the nearby undergrowth.

We popped over to the visitor centre to use the facilities and bumped into a volunteer who was tending the butterfly garden. He pointed out a female Zebra Longwing butterfly in a cocoon. The females give off pheromones even as they are emerging and this was already attracting males who were fighting over her. We also saw a lovely Soldier butterfly and also an Atala, a rare butterfly that has been brought back from the verge of extinction in Florida by establishing its host plant in gardens such as this.

We took a stroll around one of the wetland cells, seeing more butterflies (another Soldier, White Peacock, Gulf Fritillary) and scoping a distant Monk Parakeet on a pylon. However, our main quarry was a Pileated Woodpecker that had been seen briefly during lunch and could now be heard drumming in a patch of nearby

woodland. With such a large woodpecker, the drumming sounded more like heavy plant machinery than a bird - quite a sound.



White Peacock

We moved slowly down the path, opening up different views into the woodland until we pinpointed a dead trunk that we knew could only be the spot. And our target did the decent thing and shimmied upwards, allowing everyone to get lovely views in the scope.

The walk continued, taking in Purple Gallinules, more Mottled Duck, Grey Headed Swamphen, a displaying Kildeer and a nice close Roseate Spoonbill in amongst the usual herons and ibises. The call of Pig Frogs was easy to pick out, but the other calling frog species went unidentified.

A couple of the group had stayed in the picnic area for a rest rather than take the walk and we were therefore pleased that the first bird we heard as we got back to the vehicle was a Pileated Woodpecker. Even better, one landed on the top of a dead tree just as we were leaving, meaning that everyone had had a good view.

As we left, we found both Monk and Nanday Parakeets on the wires but our thoughts were now turning to our final stop of the day on the Atlantic coast – the beach at Boynton Beach Inlet. It was nice to sit and chat and enjoy the Turnstones and Sanderling that fed around our feet and there were a few gulls too – Laughing, Ring Billed, American Herring and Lesser Black Backed. Best of all were several Magnificent Frigatebirds which were following a boat and hounding the gulls and terns for food. They were distant but eventually as the boat headed our way, they came close enough to make out the distinctive shape and plumage. With that, we decided it was time for a cup of tea back at the hotel – happily just a few minutes drive away.

Day 5

Saturday 12th February

Wakodahatchee Wetlands and a drive across the State

Our day started with Northern Mockingbirds singing in the hotel car park and several Egyptian Geese sitting on the roofs of neighbouring houses. We followed our visit to Green Cay with a walk on the boardwalk at Wakodahatchee – a similar and equally excellent site, a few miles down the road. As with Green Cay, the site is popular with locals going for a walk and we were pleased to be arriving nice and early while there was still ample parking. The birding was just as impressive but with a slightly different mix to the day before. We walked

amongst the Wood Storks that nest in the trees out in the water and there was the usual selection of herons, egrets, ibises and more Iguana. Black-bellied Whistling Duck were new for the trip and an Eastern Indigo Snake was right beneath the boardwalk. A Great Blue Heron was on the nest with two young chicks and a pair of Green Heron were also nest building close by. If yesterday was all about the Least Bittern, today was dominated by its larger relation – an American Bittern. Much easier to spot but equally impressive – and just as close. Again, it wandered slowly through the vegetation, periodically picking a small fish from the water and posing beautifully in the sunshine.



Black-bellied Whistling Ducks

Purple Martins were busy going in and out of a couple of large martin houses and were good to watch with a bright green Iguana on the grass beneath them. Plenty of Glossy Ibis were feeding in the marsh and Grey-headed Swamphen posed close to the boardwalk.

Ahead of us we had a drive across the State and so we left in good time, stopping at one of the Storm Water Treatment Areas for lunch. There were birds out on the marshes – American White Pelican, Caspian Tern, Blue-winged Teal and American Coot. A King Rail called from the dense cover but despite giving it a little time, we were unable to locate it.

The Sem Chi Rice Plant didn't detain us for long – the blackbirds and cowbirds that normally crowd around under the silos feeding on spilt grain were absent this year. We weren't sure why but it could possibly have been that the plant wasn't operational at the weekend and any available spilt rice had all been consumed?

Instead we drove on to the nearby town of Belle Glade and followed up a report of some good birds at the Torry Island Campground and Marina. The walk was slightly longer than expected but some Northern Rough-winged Swallow were good to see and then we found our target – a stunning male Vermillion Flycatcher sat on top of a small tree. Even better we followed it up with one and then two Tropical Kingbirds – and there was even a third later on. Both birds are rarities in Florida and were great additions to the trip list. But with time ticking on, we headed back to the vehicle enjoying a superb Short Tailed Hawk circling overhead.

Foremost on our minds was a toilet stop and eventually we managed to track down a restroom at the campground laundry. Just the one though which meant that the queue took a little while to clear! Eventually though, we were back on the road and picked up a couple of Bonaparte's Gulls as we left the marina. The drive across to Fort Myers was largely uneventful but it was a good insight into the rural heart of Florida and we saw a few good birds too – Northern Harrier and a Caracara being the best of the bunch.

We checked in and had a short break before heading out for dinner and a well-deserved meal.

Day 6

Sunday 13th February

Bunche Beach, Cape Coral, Lee County Manatee Park and Sanibel / Captiva Islands

The forecast for the morning was for heavy rain, clearing up by late morning. We re-jigged the itinerary slightly given a later weekend breakfast time, giving some the chance of a dawn visit to the beach and others a welcome lie in. It is fair to say that the forecast wasn't wrong and several who might have joined us took one look at the rain and promptly went back to bed! So it was a merry band of just five of us who drove down to Bunche Beach. Yes, we got wet. But it soon died back to a lighter drizzle and it meant we had the beach and the birds to ourselves. A lone Reddish Egret was stalking the shallows and Western Sandpipers were scurrying around with Semipalmated, Black-bellied and Piping Plovers in amongst them. We moved further along, adding Willet, Short-billed Dowitcher, Least Sandpiper, Turnstone, Sanderling and a lone Knot to the list. Both White and Brown Pelicans were loafing offshore and as we walked back, a Great Northern Diver was fishing close to the beach.

Breakfast allowed us to dry off and by the time we set off again, the rain had largely cleared up. We gave it a little longer by picking up lunch first and then headed across the bridge from Fort Myers into Cape Coral. Immediately we pulled in at the Chamber of Commerce and bingo – target bird achieved. A Burrowing Owl was sat outside its burrow, drying itself off. We started off by standing a little way away but need not have worried. This was one tame owl! Eventually its mate joined it, popping out for a few minutes to have a stretch and swallow a headless lizard that seemed to have been stashed for just such a peckish moment. A pair of Osprey kept us entertained as did the fishing pelicans but it was soon time to head to our next stop – the Lee County Manatee Park.



Burrowing Owl



Yellow-crowned Night Heron

The wind was a little disruptive, disturbing the surface of the water but there must have been 50-60 manatees in the warm water outflow of the powerplant – probably reflecting cooler weather in the run up to our visit. It was great to see adults and young ones although the number of scars on their backs from boat propellers was testament to the need for us to learn to live alongside them better.

After lunch at the Park and a visit to the gift shop, we headed across to Sanibel Island and the JN Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge. We made a couple of stops along the wildlife drive. At the first, there was a feisty pair of Osprey that were seeing off all comers, including a Bald Eagle that was repeatedly dive bombed. Also present in amongst the usual heron species were Reddish Egret and a Yellow-crowned Night-heron. Waders included

Least Sandpipers, Willet and Greater Yellowlegs and there were lots of snoozing White Pelican at both stops. Hooded Merganser were a nice find and, just as we were about to leave, a fabulous party of Roseate Spoonbill flew in and began to feed in front of us.

Okay, so the beach at Captiva was as beautiful as ever and the skimmers, terns (including an unexpected Least Tern) and pelicans did us proud. We even had ice cold beer at the ready. But the wind had picked up and it was probably more like Skegness than Sanibel if we're being honest! Still, the sun did a reasonable job of setting into the Gulf of Mexico and we enjoyed the moment, taking a little while to relax - beer in hand.



Sunset on Captiva Island

We stopped for dinner at the Island Cow on Sanibel – a quirky place that is normally very busy. Tonight however, they welcomed us gratefully, giving us the choice of virtually any table. We had struck lucky – nearly every other American was watching the LA Rams beat the Cincinnati Bengals in the Superbowl final.

Day 7

Monday 14th February

Bunche Beach, Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary and down to Homestead

Yesterday's wind had not abated and suppressed the bird activity a little today. We started by quickly revisiting Bunche Beach to give those that had missed out the day before a chance to experience this hidden gem. A Barred Owl called as we arrived – a distinctive hoot. The weather was much better this morning, but the birds were a little more distant. However, with a little patience, we picked out much of the same assemblage as yesterday and enjoyed the sunrise.

Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary is a special place. A primordial landscape of pines, prairie and cypress trees rising up out of a swamp. This year, the National Audubon Society were still cautiously emerging from the Covid pandemic and so visitor numbers and facilities were limited. But we were soon out and enjoying another boardwalk experience. The aforementioned wind meant we saw surprisingly little for the first mile or so, a Halloween Pennant dragonfly and the background song of Carolina Wren being the main highlights. But eventually the wind did die back and the warmth of the sun became more apparent. Immediately we hit a small wave of birds – Blue-grey Gnatcatchers were the dominant species, a Blue-headed Vireo was calling, Black and White Warbler was creeping down the trunk of a tree and a Black-throated Green Warbler was above our heads.

This increased activity continued with a couple more parties of birds. More of the same and also great views of a male Yellowthroat, a nice yellow Pine Warbler, a couple of Northern Parula and lovely views of White-eyed Vireo and Great Crested Flycatcher.



In the Cypress Swamp at Corkscrew Sanctuary

With the café closed, we bought pre-packaged sandwiches and ate them in the picnic area before heading off on the drive to Homestead. On route we added our second party of Turkey for the day, the first having been seen just before we got to Corkscrew. And right by the side of the road we finally got everyone a decent view of a Crested Caracara. A pull in allowed us to get out and put the scope on the bird and watch it eating a snake. Great stuff.

Having passed through several miles of orange groves and then the Big Cypress Indian Reservation, we turned onto Alligator Alley and headed east in a straight line across the State. On hitting the Miami area, the road bent to the right and then it was south all the way, but sadly straight into a traffic jam! Six lanes of traffic and not much option but to creep slowly forward and wait for it to clear. We arrived slightly later than planned but still had time for a break and to freshen up before heading out for southern BBQ food.

Day 8

Tuesday 15th February

The Everglades

Today we drove all the way down to Flamingo, the Southernmost point on mainland United States. We picked up lunch first thing and then headed off through a patchwork of fields to Lucky Hammock - a small patch of woodland surrounded by abandoned farmland. This combination makes it particularly good for birds with a mix of good species.

On arrival we picked up a Blue Grosbeak and there were several Red-winged Blackbirds and a distant Meadowlark sat on the wires. Grey Catbirds were particularly abundant and we enjoyed a nice male Painted Bunting – good to see one in its natural habitat rather than on a feeder. Least Flycatcher in the scrub was a new bird for the trip, as was a White-tailed Kite, albeit only seen by a couple of us. There was a White-eyed Vireo and a few Blue-grey Gnatcatcher in the woodland and we watched a Monarch butterfly moving through the edge of the canopy.

The sight of hundreds of vultures coming out of the woodland and kettling in the morning sun was something to behold, although we couldn't pick up a Short-tailed Hawk amongst them. As we walked back, an Eastern Pheobe was hawking from the wires and both Loggerhead Shrike and American Kestrel perched up, allowing extended views in the 'scope.

At the Royal Palm Visitor Centre, we took the Anhinga Trail. It was relatively quiet but we stopped for a group photo and with a little time and patience, it was possible to get a view into the crystal-clear water and pick up on the fish, turtles and cormorants. Several Black Vultures were hanging out on the roof of the shelter, looking quite sinister as they stared down on us from a couple of feet away. As we headed back to the mini bus we had a superb view of a Short-tailed Hawk that circled low over our heads. These are a very rare bird in the States so it was great to get out second of the trip – another pale phase bird.



The Anhinga Trail, Everglades National Park

We used the picnic tables at the campground at Flamingo for lunch so that we could keep an eye on the sea as we ate. Osprey were fishing, both species of pelicans were present and hundreds of laughing gull and black skimmers were stood on a submerged sandbar. We took a short walk over to a pair of nesting Osprey, the whole group amazed at just how tame and unconcerned by people they were. They didn't know what was coming next though!

A quick drive to the marina and we were stood underneath another Osprey nest, this one just a few feet away with a female feeding three chicks. Incredible! Almost beneath the nest was a large American Crocodile and in the entrance the marina were a couple of Manatee. Better still though were three just off from the jetty that we were able to photograph. We watched a few long thin fish that were later identified as Atlantic Needlefish.

We took a leisurely drive back up through the Everglades - such a vast open landscape of grasses and broke the drive with a walk at Mahogany Hammock. On arrival a lady came over to show us a photo of a Barred Owl on the back of her camera. With directions to a large Mahogany tree, we quickly made our way round, hoping the bird would still be sat out for us. Sadly not. We could see the nest hole and a few feathers around the entrance but no owl. We heard its mate close by in the dense understory and even got a hoot from the bird in the nest hole. But no sighting. Instead we had a great experience with a party of warblers, Gnatcatchers and Great Crested Flycatcher. Northern Parula were the dominant species with a supporting cast of Yellow-rumped, Prairie and Black-throated Green. The main find though was a Magnolia Warbler, another new bird for the trip.

We assembled early to fill in passenger locator forms, check in online and help those staying on with potential birding spots down in the Keys. Dinner was at a local Italian restaurant and it was nice to be given our own room so that we could enjoy our last meal of the trip together.

Day 9

Wednesday 16th February

Miami area and return to the UK

Our last morning in Florida. And a nice sunny day, albeit still breezy. We started by heading twenty minutes up the road to Castellow Hammock Park. We parked up by the road and walked in, hoping to find our target species – Ruby Throated Hummingbird.

After a few minutes we started to see birds – a female painted bunting on the feeder, a Northern Cardinal and then – zip – a hummingbird. Brief views at first but then a second and then a bird perched up for a short while to give everyone a view. A few small birds were moving through the trees – White-eyed Vireo, a couple of lovely Northern Parula, a Black and White Warbler, a Palm Warbler and best of all, a stunning Black-throated Blue Warbler.

At 9am, the staff member arrived to open the centre and came out to join us. She was a mine of information and lovely to chat to, enhancing the visit for everyone. She pointed out the best spot to watch from and as the sun cleared the trees, the hummingbird activity ramped up accordingly. We had prolonged views of two birds sat between feeds and others buzzing around from flower to flower – at least five different birds in total.

After our great start to the morning, we headed further north to the Kendal Baptist Hospital, a known site for parakeets. A Mitred Parakeet was sat in a tree as we drove in and six more flew off calling but no-one else got on to them so we parked up and made our way over to the parking lot next to the lake. A small duckling turned out to be a young Muscovy Duck – there were several families - but our second Canada Goose sighting of the trip turned out to be like our first – plastic decoys! Luckily there was plenty to keep us entertained because the parakeets were not playing ball. Both Red-tailed and Sharp-shinned Hawks circled overhead, White Ibis were abundant and Blue Jays were in the trees. Still no parakeets though. Never mind, you can't win them all, so we headed back to the minibus. "Wait! Come back!" One last scan revealed four sat together in a tree with a fifth close by. Phew! Scope views all round and success.

We made one more stop for lunch, picking up our third Short-tailed Hawk of the tour, and then made our way over to A.D. Barnes Park. This is a lovely spot where we could sit by the lake under the shade of the trees and have our picnic. Lime flavoured crisps were a new one for some of us. Zesty, but not to be repeated I think! There was a Belted Kingfisher sat on an overhanging branch, an Iguana on the edge of the lake and two Peninsula Cooters hauled out on a floating mat on the water. We set the scope up on a Raccoon that was sleeping the day away in the crook of nearby tree and that was to be our last notable sighting of the trip.



Mitred Parakeets

It was a short drive to the rental return where we filled up with petrol and dropped off the mini bus. Two couples were heading off to collect their own vehicles ahead of additional nights down on the Florida Keys so the rest of us said our farewells and made our way to departures. Our late afternoon flight was forty minutes late leaving but with a good tailwind, we arrived half an hour early into Heathrow the following morning. The journey through arrivals was quick and the bags were waiting for us on the carousel. All in all, a very smooth and satisfying end to a wonderful trip.

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	February 2022							
			9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1	Gt. Northern Diver	<i>Gavia immer</i>	1				1			
2	Pied-billed Grebe	<i>Poilymbus podiceps</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓			
3	American White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus erythrorhynchos</i>		✓		✓	✓		✓	
4	Brown Pelican	<i>P. occidentalis</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
5	Magnificent Frigatebird	<i>Fregata magnificens</i>			4					
6	Anhinga	<i>Anhinga anhinga</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7	Double-crested Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax auritus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
8	American Bittern	<i>Botarus lentiginosus</i>				1				
9	Least Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus exilis</i>			1					
10	Great Blue Heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
11	Great Egret	<i>Egretta alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
12	Snowy Egret	<i>E. thula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
13	Little Blue Heron	<i>E. caerulea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
14	Tricoloured Heron	<i>E. tricolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
15	Reddish Egret	<i>E. rufescens</i>	7+				4+	2		
16	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
17	Green Heron	<i>Butorides virescens</i>	1		✓	✓	✓			1
18	Black-crowned Night-Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>			2	1	1	✓	1	
19	Yellow-crowned Night-Heron	<i>N. violacea</i>					2			
20	American White Ibis	<i>Eudocimus albus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
21	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	✓	150 +	✓	✓		✓		
22	Roseate Spoonbill	<i>Ajaia ajaja</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
23	Wood Stork	<i>Mycteria americana</i>	2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
24	Black-bellied Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna autumnalis</i>				40+				
25	Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>			2	5				2
26	Muscovy Duck	<i>Cairina moschata</i>	✓	3	2	✓	✓			✓
27	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		2						
28	Mottled Duck	<i>A. fulvigula</i>			✓	✓	✓			
29	American Black Duck	<i>A. rubripes</i>	12	2						
30	Northern Pintail	<i>A. acuta</i>	✓							
31	Blue-winged Teal	<i>Spatula discors</i>	✓	2	✓	✓	✓			
32	Ring-necked Duck	<i>Aythya collaris</i>		2						
33	Greater Scaup	<i>A. marila</i>	✓							
34	Lesser Scaup	<i>A. affinis</i>	++							
35	Hooded Merganser	<i>Lophodytes cucullatus</i>					12			
36	Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
37	Black Vulture	<i>Coragyps atratus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
38	Northern Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	1			3		1	2	
39	Snail Kite	<i>Rostrhamus sociabilis</i>		2						
40	White-tailed Kite	<i>Elanus leucurus</i>								1
41	Sharp-shinned Hawk	<i>Accipiter striatus</i>		1						1
42	Cooper's Hawk	<i>A. cooperii</i>	1							
43	Red-shouldered Hawk	<i>Buteo lineatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

	Common name	Scientific name	February 2022							
			9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
44	Red-tailed Hawk	<i>B. jamaicensis</i>		1						1
45	Swainson's Hawk	<i>B. swainsoni</i>		2						
46	Short-tailed Hawk	<i>B. platypterus</i>				1			1	1
47	Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	4+	✓	✓	✓	1	1	1	
48	Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	++	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
49	Northern Caracara	<i>Caracara cheriway</i>		6		1		1		
50	American Kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>	✓	✓	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
51	Wild Turkey	<i>Meleagris gallopavo</i>		6				11		
52	King Rail	<i>Rallus elegans</i>				h				
53	Sora	<i>Porzana carolina</i>			1					
54	Grey-headed Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio poliocephalus</i>			✓	✓				
55	Purple Gallinule	<i>Porphyrio martinica</i>		4+	✓	✓			1	
56	Common Gallinule	<i>Gallinula galeata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
57	American Coot	<i>Fulica americana</i>	✓		✓	✓				
58	Limpkin	<i>Aramus guarana</i>		3	✓	✓		1		
59	Sandhill Crane	<i>Grus canadensis</i>	2	++		h				
60	American Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra americana</i>	4							
61	Black-bellied (Grey) Plover	<i>Pluvialis squaterola</i>					✓	✓		
62	Piping Plover	<i>Charadrius nivosus</i>					✓			
63	Semipalmated Plover	<i>C. semipalmatus</i>					✓	✓		
64	Killdeer	<i>C. vociferus</i>	4+	✓	✓	✓		✓	1	
65	Greater Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>	✓				2			
66	Lesser Yellowlegs	<i>T. flavipes</i>	✓							
67	Willet	<i>Catoptrophorus semipalmatus</i>					70+			
68	Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularia</i>	1							
69	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	✓		✓		✓	✓		
70	Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>					1			
71	Dunlin	<i>C. alpina</i>	✓				✓			
72	Sanderling	<i>C. alba</i>	✓		✓		✓	✓		
73	Western Sandpiper	<i>C. mauri</i>					✓	✓		
74	Least Sandpiper	<i>C. minutilla</i>					✓	✓		
75	Short-billed Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus griseus</i>					✓	✓		
76	Long-billed Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus scolopaceus</i>	✓				✓			
77	Wilson's Snipe	<i>Gallinago delicata</i>			c12					
78	Bonaparte's Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus philadelphia</i>				2				
79	Laughing Gull	<i>Leucophaeus atricilla</i>	✓		✓		✓		++	
80	Ring-billed Gull	<i>Larus delawarensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
81	American Herring Gull	<i>L. argentatus smithsonianus</i>	1		✓					
82	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>L. fuscus</i>		1			✓			
83	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>L. marinus</i>	1							
84	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>				3	1			
85	Royal Tern	<i>Thalasseus maximus</i>	✓		✓		✓		2	
86	Forster's Tern	<i>Sterna forsteri</i>	✓	2			✓			
87	Cabot's Tern	<i>Thalasseus acutiflavus</i>					✓			
88	Least Tern	<i>Sternula antillarum</i>					1			
89	Black Skimmer	<i>Rhynchops niger</i>	✓				✓		++	
90	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia (feral)</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
91	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	February 2022							
			9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
92	Mourning Dove	<i>Zenaidura macroura</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
93	White-winged Dove	<i>Z. asiatica</i>			h	3+			✓	✓
94	Common Ground-Dove	<i>Columbina passerina</i>	2			2	1			
95	Burrowing Owl	<i>Athene cunicularia</i>					2			
96	Barred Owl	<i>Strix varia</i>						h	2h	
97	Belted Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle alcyon</i>	✓	✓	2	✓	✓	✓		1
98	Red-bellied Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes carolinus</i>	2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
99	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	<i>Sphyrapicus varius</i>		1				1		1
100	Downy Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates pubescens</i>	1							
101	Hairy Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates pubescens</i>					1			
102	Pileated Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus pileatus</i>		1	3					
103	Mitred Parakeet	<i>Psittacara mitrata</i>						3		6+
104	Nanday Parakeet	<i>Aratinga nenday</i>			3+					
105	Monk Parakeet	<i>Myiopsitta monachus</i>			✓					2
106	Ruby-throated Hummingbird	<i>Archilochus colubris</i>								5+
107	Least Flycatcher	<i>Empidonax minimus</i>							1	
108	Eastern Phoebe	<i>Sayornis phoebe</i>	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	1	✓	
109	Great Crested Flycatcher	<i>Myiarchus crinitus</i>						1	1	
110	Tropical Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus melancholicus</i>				3				
111	Vermilion Flycatcher	<i>Pyrocephalus rubinus</i>				1				
112	Loggerhead Shrike	<i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>	1	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
113	Blue-headed (Solitary) Vireo	<i>Vireo solitarius</i>						h	1	
114	White-eyed Vireo	<i>Vireo flavifrons</i>						2	✓	1
115	Blue Jay	<i>Cyanocitta cristata</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		2
116	Florida Scrub Jay	<i>Aphelocoma coerulescens</i>	7							
117	American Crow	<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
118	Fish Crow	<i>C. ossifragus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
119	Cedar Waxwing	<i>Bombycilla cedrorum</i>		4						
120	Purple Martin	<i>Progne subis</i>			✓	✓				
121	Northern Rough-winged Swallow	<i>Stelgidopteryx serripennis</i>				✓				
122	Tree Swallow	<i>Tachycineta bicolor</i>		✓		✓		✓	++	✓
123	Carolina Wren	<i>Thryothorus ludovicianus</i>	1					h		
124	Blue-grey Gnatcatcher	<i>Polioptila caerulea</i>			✓	1	✓	✓	✓	✓
125	Eastern Bluebird	<i>Sialia sialis</i>		✓						
126	American Robin	<i>Turdus migratorius</i>	1				2			
127	Grey Catbird	<i>Dumetella carolinensis</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
128	Northern Mockingbird	<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
129	Eurasian Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
130	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>		2					✓	2
131	Brown-headed Cowbird	<i>Molothrus ater</i>		1				✓	✓	
132	Northern Parula	<i>Parula americana</i>						2	3+	2
133	Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler	<i>Setophaga coronata</i>	1		1	1		1		
134	Pine Warbler	<i>S. pinus</i>		✓	✓			✓		
135	Palm Warbler	<i>S. palmarum</i>	3+	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
136	Prairie Warbler	<i>S. discolor</i>			1				1	
137	Yellow-throated Warbler	<i>S. dominica</i>		1						
138	Magnolia Warbler	<i>S. magnolia</i>							1	
			February 2022							

	Common name	Scientific name	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
139	Black-throated Green Warbler	<i>S. virens</i>			1			1	2+	
140	Black-throated Blue Warbler	<i>S. caeruleus</i>								1
141	Black and White Warbler	<i>Mniotilta varia</i>	1		1			2+		1
142	Common Yellowthroat	<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>	1		1	1		1		
143	Orange-crowned Warbler	<i>Vermivora celata</i>	1		1					
144	Northern Cardinal	<i>Cardinalis cardinalis</i>	✓	✓	1	✓	✓	✓		✓
145	Blue Grosbeak	<i>Passerina caerulea</i>							1	
146	Painted Bunting	<i>P. ciris</i>	3		5+				1	1
147	Savannah Sparrow	<i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>		✓						
148	Swamp Sparrow	<i>Melospiza georgiana</i>	1							
149	Eastern Meadowlark	<i>Sturnella magna</i>		✓					1	
150	Red-winged Blackbird	<i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
151	Common Grackle	<i>Quiscalus quiscula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
152	Boat-tailed Grackle	<i>Q. major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
153	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓

Mammals

	Common name	Scientific name	February 2022							
	Common name	Scientific name	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1	Nine-banded Armadillo	<i>Dasypus novemcinctus</i>	2							
2	Marsh Rabbit	<i>Sylvilagus palustris</i>				1				
4	Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>	2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
5	Bryant's Fox Squirrel	<i>Sciurus niger</i>		3						
6	Northern Raccoon	<i>Procyon lotor</i>	1							1
7	White-tailed Deer	<i>Odocoileus virginianus</i>						4		
8	Common Bottle-nosed Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>	1							
9	West Indian Manatee	<i>Trichechus manatus</i>					✓		5+	

Reptiles/Amphibians

	Common name	Scientific name	February 2022							
	Common name	Scientific name	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1	Florida Red-bellied Turtle	<i>Pseudemys nelsoni</i>	✓	1	✓	✓		✓	✓	
2	Peninsula Cooter	<i>Pseudemys peninsularis</i>								2
3	Red-bellied Terrapin	<i>Pseudemys rubriventris</i>			✓					
4	Florida Gopher Tortoise	<i>Gopherus polyphemus</i>		1						
5	Florida Softshell Turtle	<i>Apalone ferox</i>			✓				1	
6	Brown Basilisk	<i>Basiliscus vittatus</i>			1					
7	Green Anole	<i>Anolis carolinensis</i>			1					✓
8	Cuban Brown Anole	<i>Anolis sagrei</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
9	Green Iguana	<i>Iguana iguana</i>			✓	✓				✓
10	Eastern Indigo Snake	<i>Drymarchon couperi</i>				1				
11	American Alligator	<i>Alligator mississippiensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
12	American Crocodile	<i>Crocodylus acutus</i>							1	

Butterflies/Moths

	Common name	Scientific name	February 2022							
	Common name	Scientific name	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1	Monarch	<i>Danaus plexippus</i>				1				1

	Common name	Scientific name	February 2022							
			9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
2	Soldier	<i>Danaus eresimus</i>			2					
3	Zebra Longwing	<i>Heliconius charithonia</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓
4	Gulf Fritillary	<i>Agraulis vanillae</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
5	Black Swallowtail	<i>Papilio polyxenes</i>		✓						
6	Eastern Tiger Swallowtail	<i>Papilio glaucus</i>								✓
7	Zebra Swallowtail	<i>Eurytides marcellus</i>		1						
8	Ruddy Daggerwing	<i>Marpesia petreus</i>			1					
9	White Peacock	<i>Anartia jatrophae</i>			✓	✓			1	
10	Cabbage White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>		1						
11	Julia Heliconian	<i>Dryas iulia</i>	✓							
12	Cloudless Sulphur	<i>Phoebis sennae</i>		✓						
13	Orange-barred Sulphur	<i>Phoebis philea</i>			✓		✓			✓
14	Atala	<i>Eumaeus atala</i>			1					
15	Long-tailed Skipper	<i>Urbanus proteus</i>	1							



Florida Scrub Jay



Joe Overstreet Landing