

# Florida

## Naturetrek Tour Report

7th – 16th February 2023

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Nine-banded Armadillo



Alligator



Brown Pelicans



Black and White Warbler

Tour report by Toby Collett, images by Nick Snape

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Tour participants: Matthew Capper & Toby Collett (leaders) with 12 Naturetrek clients.

## Summary

While Florida may initially conjure up images of beaches, palm trees and sun tans, this fantastic tour very quickly replaces them. This low-lying state is a sprawling wetland paradise. From the mangrove coves and sandy beaches on either coast to the freshwater swamps and lakes through the middle, it feels like one huge nature reserve.

Isolated woodlands and swathes of farmland provide good habitat variety and we even looked forward to our daily lunch shop to see what the car parks would turn up! This tour moves south in a mirrored S, stopping at all the best sites to give us a broad and varied bird list.

It doesn't have to be that easy though. For those wanting more of a challenge, the mixed warbler flocks flitting in the canopy or picking along the water's edge can be fun. There is also the chance to find something more unusual. Migrants that should be further south often stay this side of the Caribbean to save the extra miles so while we have a good idea of expected birds, there is always the chance of a surprise or two.

With plenty of eager eyes on the lookout it's inevitable that we enjoy more than birds. Designated stops for Manatee, Alligator and American Crocodile are included and our pan species list grows each year with butterflies, dragonflies, lizards, snakes all being enjoyed.

Florida is the ideal gateway tour for those wanting to dip their toe in The Americas. Gentle pace, great weather, easy travel, familiar food and an absolute abundance of wildlife everywhere you look. The hardest part of this tour isn't finding the birds or trying to get a good photo, it's tearing ourselves away from nesting colonies of storks and egrets metres away or worrying if we've brought enough memory cards.

## Day 1

**Tuesday 7th February**

### Arrival in Orlando

Although day 1 for most of us, it was day 2 for Matthew who arrived on Monday to pick the hire car up and recce a few sites. Eager eyes had already picked up both Turkey Vulture and Black Vulture from the monorail before we joined forces in the arrivals lounge. We agreed to a rendezvous down the road, but that plan was soon out the window after waiting over an hour in the queue to pick the second vehicle up. After navigating the multi storey car park and filling the boot with luggage we were finally on our way east.

A quick lobby gathering in the hotel allowed for proper introductions and a brief summary of the planned itinerary. With jet lag kicking in we kept things short and retired to make sure we were perky enough to enjoy all that tomorrow had to offer

## Day 2

## Wednesday 8th February

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

The devastating effects of Hurricane Ian, the worst hurricane to hit Florida in nearly 90 years, were still evident in the state. Our itinerary had to have a quick tweak as the area we planned to visit was closed for repair works. A quick chat the night before meant Days 1 and 2 were swapped and we were heading south after breakfast. Usually, these tours pick up common birds here and there as we travel to our first site proper but not today. We stopped to pick up lunch and quickly replaced wallets with optics due to a Crested Caracara sat on the roof. This bird can be tricky to catch up with so to have one looking down on us on day one was a good omen.

The group got familiar with the Publix supermarket wares, which would be our staple stop during the tour, and with lunches on board we moved on.

The open farmland to the south of Orlando supports a resident population of Sandhill Crane, with numbers bolstered by wintering birds at this time of year. The Double C Ranch holds good numbers, and this was our first stop. A large group were feeding in the open with a small group of Turkeys in the scrub behind. The ever-present Turkey and Black Vultures were joined by both a Red-tailed and Red-shouldered Hawks. American Robins fed among Boat-tailed and Common Grackles which had some tag along Brown-headed Cowbirds when spooked. Whatever had flushed them also moved a large flock of Kildeer that called and wheeled in front of us.

Just round the corner from the ranch, Joe Overstreet starts and on the junction is a small woodland. This was a good place to find Red-headed Woodpecker and we were joined by several local birders also on the lookout. We were treated to not one but two of these striking woodpeckers on the southern limit of their range. A little walk down the road delivered the gorgeous Eastern Meadowlark singing on fence posts. Savannah Sparrows feeding on the roadside and several American Kestrels and Loggerhead Shrikes looked down on us from their telegraph wire perches.

Lake Kissimmee is one of a network of large water bodies running down the middle of the state. We took a waterside lunch stop here in the shade of the trees. Cattle Egret, Great Egret and Great Blue Heron fed in a small pool just metres away and pumpsey-tail Palm Warblers flicked above our heads and around the cars. The Bald Eagle we saw feeding a chick just before the entrance flew overhead, prompting several groups of Glossy Ibis and White Ibis to lift off and feed elsewhere. Habitat management to control invasive vegetation had also taken some of the natives away and there wasn't as much cover as we were used to. We were resigned to having distant views of our target species until a close Snail Kite fly by as we headed to the vans had us leaving on a high.

We now moved to Three Lakes Wildlife Management Area, the second largest remaining expanse of dry prairie in the United States. We would only touch the fringe of this area to get a feel of the scale and try for a few select species. A pair of Eastern Bluebirds attended a nest hole near the car park, the blue of the male shining in the shade. Yellow-rumped Warblers, two Pine Warblers and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker were also in attendance. With the temperature peaking, we stayed close to the car and opted to enjoy what we had. This is a good spot for Brown Creeper and Red-cockaded Woodpecker but not guaranteed this late in the day.

A gentle drive back allowed us to soak in our first day in the field and gave us lots to talk about over our Dixie Crossroads supper.

## Day 3

Thursday 9th February

### Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge

After having to rearrange our itinerary to make sure we didn't miss out on Merrit Island, we had our fingers crossed it was going to be worth it. We needn't have worried. The Publix stop delivered once more with a pair of nesting Osprey and Loggerhead Shrike all close by. Ospreys are all over the place here, both nesting, hanging out and fishing. While we didn't get a three figure count this time around, it would be easily achievable if you tried. The first proper stop was Parrish Park beach. The sheltered Indian River held hundreds of Greater Scaup with a couple of Great Northern Divers among them. A small group of waders on the beach included Turnstone, Sanderling and Willet and a small group of Forster's Terns were fishing just offshore.

We headed onto the island proper to enjoy our main target and Florida's only endemic bird. Luckily Florida Scrub Jays are both nice to look at and easy to see and we had a party of six flying to and fro over the road. A brief Downy Woodpecker and Red-bellied Woodpecker would also join the group on the bare branches of the bushes they were frequenting. A Merlin perched high up allowed good scope views and would be one of several we saw on the trip.

The main drive of the island is a ticketed affair, so we popped to the visitor centre to pick ours up. It would be rude not to have nipped down to the feeders to look for the Painted Buntings and our decision paid off with both male and female present.

Time was pressing so we headed out to our planned highlight of the day and in doing so encountered a highlight of the trip. Right next to the road was a Nine-banded Armadillo. A quick disembark and we were all soon out watching it snuffling through the short grass looking for grubs and worms. As sensibly as we tried to arrange ourselves at a respectable distance, it didn't seem to make any difference as it foraged in our direction and a few had to retreat a bit to get photos. What an encounter.

The Black Point Wildlife Drive takes you on a tour of creeks and pools at the northern end of the island. It started off quite slowly, a few Little Blue, Tricoloured and Green Herons fishing in the channel to our right. A small traffic jam up ahead teased us to something of note and it certainly was. We arrived at a pool with thousands of birds. A mix of waders and wildfowl greeted us, and we found a spot to park up. Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Stilt and Least Sandpipers, American Avocets and Long-billed Dowitchers all fed, roosted and bustled in front of us. Blue-winged Teal, Green-winged Teal, American Coot, Lesser Scaup and Ring-necked Ducks all mixed around with some tucked away in the shade and others feeding in the shallows. Distantly a Northern Harrier cruised over the mangroves moving even more waders about. The place was heaving and it was hard to tear ourselves away but there was a lot of the drive left and lunch was calling.

On the way to the picnic site, we enjoyed watching the distinctive feeding behaviours of both Reddish Egret and Roseate Spoonbills among even more groups of feeding duck and waders. Lunch was taken in the shade and was a pretty swift affair as we didn't want to be off the trail for long. A few more stops allowed us to fill more memory cards which include our closest views of Least Sandpiper and some skulky and some showy Wilson's Snipe as well. We finished the drive in good time, allowing us an opportunity to visit the Manatee observation deck. This is a channel connecting the seaward lagoon to the Indian River which is also used by dolphins and manatees. We

didn't see any dolphins but were treated to eight manatees right below us and in a sheltered bay to the side. What a way to finish the day's viewing and see us on our way south to our next hotel.

## Day 4

Friday 10th February

### Green Cay Wetland, Loxahatchee Wildlife Refuge & Boynton Beach Inlet

The set up of American nature reserves range from the huge vast expanses of their National Parks to small, formal, well managed sites. Today we would get a taste of both, heading first to the boardwalks of the 100 acre Green Cay Wetlands before moving on to lunch at a spot in the 145,000 acre Loxahatchee Refuge.

Green Cay Wetland is 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. A board walk snakes over several isolated cells, filled with native plants to filter dirty water before returning it to the wider system. This set up offers a formal and picturesque recreation opportunity for local residents to get some exercise but from a birder's perspective, it is absolute heaven. The way of birding these sites is very alien through our UK eyes. In most wetlands we find ourselves scanning at mid to long distance and from range so as not to disturb anything. Here you actively have to look below you to find ducks, herons, egrets and even warblers. Within 10 minutes of being on the boardwalk we did just that, finding a motionless Least Bittern less than 5m away. These have the body size of a Skylark so we did well to find one and enjoy it.

Another bird we may have missed by not looking down was the masked Common Yellowthroat feeding around the boardwalk struts. Anhingas and Double-crested Cormorant nested at eye level in the mangroves opposite us and feeding around the water's edge of one mangrove we found a Marsh Rabbit. The boardwalk led us to a tree lined bank and our first opportunity to enjoy/struggle with a warbler flock. Palm and Yellow-rumped Warblers made up the bulk but we also enjoyed American Redstart, Parula, Orange-crowned Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, Pine Warbler and some tiny Blue-grey Gnatcatchers.

The boardwalk resumed and we were greeted by some massive iguanas in a range of colours. A huge tiger striped individual was staking his claim to a tree, a few splashes alerted us to escaping individuals as he earned his spot. Our first Grey-headed Swamphens were striding around on the lilies, their obvious presence in contrast to the smaller and skulkier Sora we found further down. Like the Least Bittern, this was a bird we wouldn't have seen looking 'out' as it picked for food items a few feet below us.

Herons, egrets and ibises are everywhere, and it is a challenge to tear yourself away from the spectacle and keep moving. We stumbled on another warbler feeding group just off the main track, giving ourselves a bit more time to enjoy the smaller birds the site hosts. Our attentions moved away from birds every now and then as we found a Brown Basilisk on the board walk and a few Alligators and turtles enjoying the sun on the water's edge. A few of the interpretation boards had Little Bittern, Sora and Limpkin on them as three birds to find and we just needed one more to complete the trio. Luckily, Limpkins are the larger and easier of the three to find and rounding a bend that's exactly what we did. With the three key species seen well and under our belt we headed back to the centre and out past the feeders where several Painted Buntings were entertaining the photographers.

Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge was our next stop where we enjoyed an intermittent lunch, breaking off twice to enjoy a Pileated Woodpecker and then again for point blank views of a Red-shouldered Hawk above the van. Our after lunch walk took us around a wetland cell and we had only just got through the first gate when we



had to move out of the way to let a Sandhill Crane stroll past that was on the way to look for left over lunch scraps. Butterflies, dragonflies and herons were feeding along a drainage ditch separating us from a track around a small field. A Kildeer was in the field and further along the track out popped two young Raccoons. They ummed and ahed about crossing the track and eventually trundled over, giving everyone great views of this secretive and often nocturnal mammal.

We headed towards the lookout, playing shade hopscotch and using the trees for shelter as we scanned. A pair of Monk Parakeets diverted our attention from the Halloween Pennants, Gulf Fritillaries and White Peacocks flitting on the bank. We were accompanied at the lookout by an alarm calling American Moorhen below us, scolding a close alligator that had just slunk into the reeds.

We left for our final stop of the day at Boyton Beach. A big high tide had dropped large numbers of Portuguese Man 'o War on the shoreline; luckily these are bright blue so easily avoided. The beach held a few Sanderling and off shore we watched Caspian and Royal Tern following fishing boats. After a packed few days, the Atlantic Ocean gently rolling onto the sand is a great opportunity to just let the experiences and memories soak in with the warm evening rays. A Yellow-bellied Sapsucker in the car park was a nice way to end the day before we headed back to the hotel.

## Day 5

## Saturday 11th February

### Wakodahatchee Wetlands and a drive across the State

We try and get breakfasts in as soon as possible to make the most of the day, and this morning we timed it by the skin of our teeth. We arrived at Wakodahatchee to a full car park but luckily spaces soon opened up for us. A few minutes later and cars were backed up down the entrance drive. Phew! Wakodahatchee is a similar set up to Green Cay, being a boardwalk through a water treatment area. The nesting birds here are much closer though and we were standing underneath Wood Stork nests nearly immediately. The boardwalk splits opposite eye level nests of Great Egret and Great Blue Heron. Memory cards were filling fast. It was hard not to scour and inspect every branch and mangrove root for something tucked away, there are just so many birds. Another varied warbler flock in the wooded area was followed by more herons and ibis lining our route. Sharp eyes picked out a sunning Florida Green Watersnake and a change in tone from the aerial Purple Martins drew our attention upwards to see them mobbing a pair of Cooper's Hawks. Another bund crossing through some scrub and pishing from Matt brought out more warblers, the conditions being ideal for them to be there and us to enjoy them. As we headed back onto the final stretch, more stork and heron nests within touching distance would end our walk nicely and wrap up this part of the tour as we gathered ourselves to head west.

The state is practically one enormous wetland with the north and middle being farmed and the southern end being where the water gathers, and wildlife thrives. This next part of the trip takes us across the divide. Several storm water treatment areas, making up thousands of hectares, operate in the same way as the wetlands we visited. Filtering and treating water but on a much larger scale. We stopped at one of these sites for lunch, sitting in the shade and looking out over the water and reeds. Ospreys and Northern Harriers hovered and quartered while Gull-billed, Caspian and Forster's Terns dived for fish. The heat kept the smaller birds in cover, so we opted to move on. We bumped into some locals who told us of a few interesting birds down the road but despite some searching we couldn't add anything new to the trip list. This didn't stop us enjoying Yellowthroat, American Redstart and Long-tailed Skipper in a sheltered spot. The drive west continued, and we enjoyed numerous

Northern Harriers hunting the flat farmlands while Northern Rough-winged Swallows, American Kestrels and Loggerhead Shrikes adorned the telegraph wires.

As we arrived in the Fort Myers area, we soon started to see some of the impacts of Hurricane Ian. Fort Myers was where the third worst storm in US history made landfall, with some areas still inaccessible several months later. Luckily our hotel was away from the main area of impact, so we were able to check in and after a long drive we had an enjoyable supper at the hotel.

## Day 6

## Sunday 12th February

### Bunche Beach, Cape Coral, Lee County Manatee Park and 6 Mile Cypress Slough

This was a slightly different day to previous years, with the itinerary tweaked to take into account the inaccessibility of several sites. We started at Bunche Beach overlooking the Gulf of Mexico. It was the drive down to the coast that really opened our eyes to the hurricane devastation. When driving along the mangrove lined roads and looking up at boardwalks and gates lodged in the vegetation, you got a feel for how powerful the storm was. The beach was unrecognisable. Palm trees snapped and lying broken, wind driven sand blown well up the beach and new creeks and sandbars making previous routes unusable. Not to be deterred, we headed out and were soon treated to Sanderling and Western Sandpipers running along the falling tideline. A group of Royal Terns and Laughing Gulls roosted on a sand bar with a few American Herring Gulls and Ring-billed Gulls for company. A large group of waders were on the far side of the creek, and we had to settle for 'scope views of Semipalmated Plover, Piping Plover, Black-bellied Plover and Short-billed Dowitchers. Luckily a Reddish Egret was feeding in close and allowed us to watch it hunting in the shallows. The wind was churning up the water so not much chance to look for sea duck and divers, so we made our way to our next stop.

Some great groundwork by Matt meant that our target species was in situ. Burrowing Owls really struggled with the high-water levels that resulted from a tidal surge when the hurricane hit but a few had made it through unscathed. Watching one resting at its nest hole next to the highway from 5m away was a truly memorable experience. Next, we headed upriver to the Lee County Manatee Park. Unfortunately, the windy conditions that curtailed our viewing experience at the beach also meant viewing conditions at the river were a little frustrating. Rather than have lunch here, we opted to move to a new site - Six Mile Cypress Slough. We spent the next hour alternating between eating and butterfly watching, with the picnic tables being right next to the garden.

After lunch, we headed out on to the boardwalk and got lucky with a Yellow Rat Snake hunting among the Cypress buttresses. Above we had a choice of woodpeckers to enjoy. Red-bellied Woodpecker, Northern Flicker and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker could all be seen and heard along the first stretch of the walk. Belted Kingfishers flew across the pools in front of the viewing screens, warbler flocks passed overhead, and the final pool held both Yellow-crowned and Black-crowned Night Heron tucked away. A very showy Downy Woodpecker back in the car park was a great end to our first trip here and was enough to tempt us to work the reserve into the itinerary for next year.

## Day 7

Monday 13th February

### Corkscrew Swamp, Shark Alley and drive across the State.

It was breakfast at dawn to get to Corkscrew Swamp before the boardwalk got too busy and we timed it well by being one of the first cars there. We would have a clear run at the birder-free boardwalk but couldn't resist enjoying the Painted Buntings on the feeders first. Corkscrew is a little more open than the Cypress Slough from the previous day and the warbler flocks were a little easier to enjoy. This would be the only site where we picked out White-eyed Vireo in one of these species rich flocks and we ended the morning with seven alongside three of the previously seen Blue-headed Vireos. Carolina Wrens continued to taunt us with song though we never got good views, only snippets as they flicked and skulked. A Pileated Woodpecker drummed in the distance but catching a view just wasn't possible. Grilling another 50 strong warbler flock gave us our second new bird of the trip with a female Ruby-throated Hummingbird zipping past. This would be our best site for Black and White Warbler, Pine Warbler and Northern Parula with five, four and 14 seen.

The hardest part of these walks is judging it right, giving enough time to watch the birds and to keep moving at the same time. The warm winter had been perfect for holding wintering warblers in the state and our early starts allowed us to enjoy them. Push on we did and enjoyed watching Anhinga, Green Heron, Great Egret and Belted Kingfisher hunting in the dappled pools below the canopy. Not only are the birds incredible but the conditions and habitats to watch them in are just fantastic. At one of these pools, we glimpsed a Great Crested Flycatcher appear and disappear with only a few of the group getting on it. Luckily we needn't have worried as an Eastern Pheobe feeding on the forest fringe drew the eye and along with it, one then two then a third Great Crested Flycatcher. Everyone got some pretty good views of these in the sun, but the temperature was climbing so we headed for lunch in the shade.

With the reserve closing at 2pm we just about got out before the gates closed and we headed east. There are several options for a stop to break up the trip and we chose to head to Shark Valley. This has a small circular walk and a long walk out into the northern part of the Everglades. We didn't have time for a long walk so just wanted to stretch our legs for an hour or so. We headed past the visitor centre to start the circular walk and in the only tree there was a stunning Yellow-throated Warbler that gleaned all the branches as we enjoyed fantastic views from only a few metres away. The boardwalk was relatively quiet, so we headed a little further down the 'alley', a clear ditch of water with a cycleway and footpath on one side and mangroves overhanging on the other. The water was like glass and we watched fish moving around beneath us while terrapins munched lily flowers. Even though we had been in the state for seven days, it was still amazing to see so many birds so close. Snowy Egrets, Green, Tri-coloured and Little Blue Herons all had their preferred fishing perches, and we witnessed a few scuffles and disputes over fishing rights. A couple of Eastern Pheobe's flicked out and up, picking up insects from their perches and behind us, we had very close views of a Florida Racer, basking in the last of the sun's heat. It was incredibly tempting to keep going, but after the fourth or fifth "We'll give it five minutes more." it was definitely time to go to make sure we got to our accommodation and evening meal in time.



## Day 8

## Tuesday 14th February

### The Everglades (C11A canal/Lucky Hammock, Anhinga Trail, Flamingo, Pah-hay-okee)

Another early breakfast meant another early start to beat the crowds. We stopped off just outside the everglades at Lucky Hammock and the C11A canal. This is a small spot the locals watch regularly and often find unusual overwintering species. A Vermillion Flycatcher and Tropical Kingbirds had been seen the day before and while we got lucky with the kingbird, we didn't find the flycatcher. A Merlin on the wires had got his early morning eye in though, and on looking at pictures it turned out his breakfast was a Northern Bobwhite! This would be a new species for our trip but being alive is part of the addition criteria so not to be. We headed down to Lucky Hammock, flushing a dozen Chipping Sparrows from the verge. As we followed them in flight, two larger birds were picked up on the overhead wires. These were the smaller and more expected Western Kingbirds a nice contrast to the scarcer cousin we had just seen. With time ticking we didn't get time to really get round the rest of the hammock but while scanning the thousands of vultures overhead we did pick out a local speciality very low. The distinctive Short-tailed Hawk is only found in this part of Florida, and it is still tricky to find one so to get one so close was a real treat.

We dragged ourselves away and headed to the entrance to the Everglades National Park and onto the Anhinga Trail. This is a board walk over pristine clear water and the best chance to get up and close, but not too close, to alligators. These often lie out right next to the path and often on it so you have to walk round them. Plenty of lizards dashed up and down the boardwalk uprights while Anhingas and Double-crested Cormorants sat close by in the mangroves. Then we drove from the trail to Flamingo, the southern headquarters of the park. On the way we enjoyed this vast landscape, stretching off as far as the eye can see. Our visit had coincided with a control burn which was fascinating to see. Rangers and fire officers lined the road to make sure the burn only happened where it was needed. This did mean that part of the site was closed off, and of course this was the part we were planning to visit after lunch. Not to be put off we headed to the picnic area. Ospreys were fishing out in the bay with Royal and Forster's Terns for company. Needing something cool we headed to the quayside to get some ice-creams and a great bit of timing that was. Up to 12 Manatee were surfacing/playing/feeding/courting around the jetties, coming in so close we were only metres away. As tempting as ice-creams were, this was an experience not to be cut short. Even walking under the Osprey nest a few metres up with a chick in didn't get a look in for 20 minutes. Those that did tear themselves away to check out the chick were also rewarded with an American Crocodile down under the bridge. We eventually got round to our frozen treats and just before we left, we picked out a Spotted Sandpiper feeding on the water's edge.

With our preferred location out of the running, we did spend a bit longer at Flamingo and headed to the Pah-hay-okee look out. The elevated platform gives a unique landscape scale perspective of this remarkable part of the world and was a great spot to sit and scan. Several Halloween Pennants posed perfectly for us with Great and Snowy Egrets gliding gracefully between pools below us. The change in plans meant we could have another crack at finding that flycatcher. We pulled up where the Merlin was picked up that morning and found ourselves looking up at another Merlin in exactly the same spot. When we re-found the kingbird, we were worried this would be a case of birding deja-vu from this morning. Luckily a sharp shout of "I've got it!" from Matt meant we would not be missing out for a second time. The bright red was not quite as incandescent when in full breeding finery, but it certainly stood out in this lush green environment. A great bird to end our final full day with.

## Day 9

## Wednesday 15th February

### Miami area and return to the UK

The beginning of the end, but rather than a whisper, the itinerary was set to go out with a bang. The hardest part of the final day is working out where to end it. As heavily built up as Miami is, its location on the coast means it hosts a variety of good birding spots. We picked our sites and stuck to our guns so with breakfast finished and bags packed, we were off. Our first destination was Castello Hammock Park and a certain bushy tree in particular. The Powder Puff Tree has bright red tennis ball sized pom-pom flowers, and this was our focus. We weren't looking at the plants themselves, as pretty as they were but what might whizz in and out to feed on the nectar. Less than five minutes after our arrival, we were in. A female Ruby-throated Hummingbird dropped in and zoomed out. A male soon followed and after 10 minutes we got our angles and lines sorted so we knew where they were coming from and going to and which flowers were their favourites. It was an absolute joy to watch up to four birds feeding and chasing, a first hummingbird for several in the group. Other birds of note in the park were a low flying Broad-winged Hawk, sheltering Great Crested Flycatcher in the shade and a nimble Golden-crowned Kinglet in the canopy. A catch up with the site wardens, who recognised Matt from last year, put us on the trail of the best cinnamon rolls in the county at Knaus Berry Farm. Luckily, we weren't too far away and the shop wasn't too busy so an early elevenses was taken with a couple of freshly prepared milkshakes. Rather than zip around on the last day, we had decided on two options.

Spending more time at fewer sites would improve our chance of finding something good. Matheson Hammock Park has sea views, coastal mangroves, a bit of beach and some mature woodland so a little bit of everything. Ideal for us to take as much time as we needed. We hit the coastal park first and found a few Great Northern Divers and gulls on the water with a group of Semipalmated Plovers and Turnstones roosting out on the shoreline. This part of the park is crawling, literally, with lizards. The buildings are ideal to retain the heat and hosted vibrant Red-headed Agamas and Cuban Brown Anole's everywhere you looked. As the heat of the day rose, we relocated to the woodlands. Here we would finish off our last snacks and nibbles and look back on an incredible tour. The wooded canopy is sparse enough to enjoy warbler flocks overhead and allowed us to pick out our favourites of the tour while we ate. The stripey Black and White Warbler, tiny Blue-grey Gnatcatcher, colourful Northern Parulas and the constantly vocal Palm and Yellow-rumped Warblers. A last scan of one group gave us a Black-throated Green Warbler, a new one for the trip and a great bird to end on. We returned to the vehicles to unpack and repack our bags for the airport, but one final scan found us another new bird, a gorgeous male Black-throated Blue Warbler. What an absolute fantastic finish to the day and the tour. All packed up we made our way with the airport, the car filled with the indecisive chatter and discussion of the best moment of the tour. The best thing about listening to these discussions is that everyone has their own individual highlights and it's brilliant to be able to help make this trip so memorable.

With the hire vehicles returned safely, we gathered on the other side of security to grab a bite to eat and get ready for our flight.

## Day 10

## Thursday 16th February

An overnight flight got us back mid-morning and we gathered around the baggage claim exchanging contact details so we didn't miss out on the fantastic pictures that were taken by everyone in the group. A wonderful tour with memories that will last for a long time and a brilliant group to share them with.

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## Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

Codes: E=Endemic, I=Introduced		February 2023							
Common name	Scientific name	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Fulvous Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna bicolor</i>	5			80+				
Egyptian Goose - I	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>				2				
Muscovy Duck - I	<i>Cairina moschata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Blue-winged Teal	<i>Spatula discors</i>		1500+	10+	10+				
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		60+		40+				
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>		12						
American Wigeon	<i>Mareca americana</i>				20+				
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	2							
Mottled Duck	<i>Anas fulvigula</i>		8	8+	10+	2			
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>		40+		20+				
Green-winged Teal	<i>Anas carolinensis</i>		150+		30+				
Ring-necked Duck	<i>Aythya collaris</i>	12	200+		40+				
Greater Scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>		500+		20+				
Lesser Scaup	<i>Aythya affinis</i>		50+						
Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>		2						
Ruddy Duck	<i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>				1				
Wild Turkey	<i>Meleagris gallopavo</i>	8	4				18		
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	<i>Archilochus colubris</i>						1		4
Rock Dove - I	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Collared Dove - I	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	20		10	2	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Ground Dove	<i>Columbina passerina</i>		4	2	20+	4	2	20+	4
Mourning Dove	<i>Zenaida macroura</i>	30+	30+	20+	30		✓	10+	10+
White-winged Dove	<i>Zenaida asiatica</i>			1	4			10+	8
Sora	<i>Porzana carolina</i>			1					

Codes: E=Endemic, I=Introduced		February 2023							
Common name	Scientific name	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Common Gallinule	<i>Gallinula galeata</i>	1	100+	40+	60+	4	✓		
American Coot	<i>Fulica americana</i>		400+	40+	00's			4+	
Purple Gallinule	<i>Porphyrio martinica</i>	2	20+	10+		2		3	
Grey-headed Swamphen - I	<i>Porphyrio poliocephalus</i>				6				
Sandhill Crane	<i>Antigone canadensis</i>	200+	6	1		3	2	1	
Limpkin	<i>Aramus guarauna</i>			2		2			
Pied-billed Grebe	<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>		50+	20+	40+	2	1	2	
American Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra americana</i>		120+						
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>		H	6	6	20+			
Semipalmated Plover	<i>Charadrius semipalmatus</i>					8+			25+
Killdeer	<i>Charadrius vociferus</i>	90+			2		1		
Piping Plover	<i>Charadrius melodus</i>					6+			
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		20+			10+			20+
Stilt Sandpiper	<i>Calidris himantopus</i>		30+						
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>		60+	5+		200+			
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		200+			100+			
Least Sandpiper	<i>Calidris minutilla</i>		500+						
Western Sandpiper	<i>Calidris mauri</i>					80+			
Long-billed Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus scolopaceus</i>		300+						
Short-billed Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus griseus</i>					60+			
Wilson's Snipe	<i>Gallinago delicata</i>		10+						
Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularius</i>							2	
Lesser Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa flavipes</i>		250+						
Willet	<i>Tringa semipalmata</i>		30+						
Greater Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>		80+						
Bonaparte's Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus philadelphia</i>		4	2					
Laughing Gull	<i>Leucophaeus atricilla</i>		8	40+				50+	20+
Ring-billed Gull	<i>Larus delawarensis</i>	70+	4	6					2
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		5	3					1
American Herring Gull	<i>Larus smithsonianus</i>					7+			
Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>				6			20+	
Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>				4		20+	1	
Royal Tern	<i>Thalasseus maximus</i>		2	20+		50+			
Forster's Tern	<i>Sterna forsteri</i>	8			40+	30+		20+	
Common Loon	<i>Gavia immer</i>		4					2	2
Wood Stork	<i>Mycteria americana</i>	6	12	4	60+	8	4		
Anhinga	<i>Anhinga anhinga</i>	20+	40+	40+	50+	10+	20+	10+	4+
Double-crested Cormorant	<i>Nannopterum auritum</i>		80+	40+	10+	10+	40+	30+	15+
American White Ibis	<i>Eudocimus albus</i>	30+	60+	50+	70+	60+	40+	50+	15+
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	70+	200+	200+	200+	80+	✓	60+	
Roseate Spoonbill	<i>Platalea ajaja</i>		50+	20+			2		
Least Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus exilis</i>			1					
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>			1	2	3	2		

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Common name	Scientific name	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Yellow-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nyctanassa violacea</i>					2			
Green Heron	<i>Butorides virescens</i>		20+	30+	20+	10+	10+	6+	
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	100+	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Blue Heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>	5	30+	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	9	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	20+
Reddish Egret	<i>Egretta rufescens</i>		4			1			
Tricolored Heron	<i>Egretta tricolor</i>	1	15+	20+	40+	✓	✓	6+	
Little Blue Heron	<i>Egretta caerulea</i>		20+	20+	10+				
Snowy Egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>	1	30+	20+	30+	✓	✓	✓	
American White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus erythrorhynchos</i>		40+		4	12+			
Brown Pelican	<i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>		30+	30+		10+		20+	2
Black Vulture	<i>Coragyps atratus</i>	100+	400+	50+	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>	00's	2,000+	200+	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>		90+	15+	20+	✓	✓	✓	
Sharp-shinned Hawk	<i>Accipiter striatus</i>		2	2					
Cooper's Hawk	<i>Accipiter cooperii</i>				2			1	1
Northern Harrier	<i>Circus hudsonius</i>	3			20+			2	
Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	15+	8+	2+	1			1	
Snail Kite	<i>Rostrhamus sociabilis</i>	4							
Red-shouldered Hawk	<i>Buteo lineatus</i>	14	10+	10+	3	10+	4	5	11
Short-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo brachyurus</i>							1	
Broad-winged Hawk	<i>Buteo platypterus</i>							1	1
Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	1	1						
Swainson's Hawk	<i>Buteo swainsoni</i>				1				
Burrowing Owl	<i>Athene cunicularia</i>					1			
Barred Owl	<i>Strix varia</i>						H		
Belted Kingfisher	<i>Megasceryle alcyon</i>	1	3	3	15+	4	2	2	
Red-headed Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes erythrocephalus</i>	2							
Red-bellied Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes carolinus</i>		2	4	3		8+	3	1
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	<i>Sphyrapicus varius</i>	1	1	1			2		
Downy Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates pubescens</i>		1			1	3		
Northern Flicker	<i>Colaptes auratus</i>		3						
Pileated Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus pileatus</i>			1			1		
Crested Caracara	<i>Caracara plancus</i>	10+			3				
American Kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>	10+	10+	8+	10+	10+	20+	20+	10+
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	1	1		1	1		2	
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	1			1				
Monk Parakeet - I	<i>Myiopsitta monachus</i>			6+					
Nanday Parakeet - I	<i>Aratinga nenday</i>								
Eastern Phoebe	<i>Sayornis phoebe</i>	3	4	2	1	1	2	6+	
Vermilion Flycatcher	<i>Pyrocephalus obscurus</i>							1	
Western Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus verticalis</i>						3		
Tropical Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus melancholicus</i>						1		

Codes: E=Endemic, I=Introduced		February 2023							
Common name	Scientific name	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Great Crested Flycatcher	<i>Myiarchus crinitus</i>						4		1
Loggerhead Shrike	<i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>	10+	10+	10+	10+	10+	10+	10+	4+
Blue-headed Vireo	<i>Vireo solitarius</i>			1		2	3		
White-eyed Vireo	<i>Vireo griseus</i>						7		
Blue Jay	<i>Cyanocitta cristata</i>	1	2	1					1
Florida Scrub Jay - E	<i>Aphelocoma coerulescens</i>		8						
American Crow	<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Fish Crow	<i>Corvus ossifragus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓
Tufted Titmouse	<i>Baeolophus bicolor</i>					3	2		
Tree Swallow	<i>Tachycineta bicolor</i>	80+	50+	40+	2	10+	10+	10+	
Northern Rough-winged Swallow	<i>Stelgidopteryx serripennis</i>				250+			20+	
Purple Martin	<i>Progne subis</i>				30+			1	
Golden-crowned Kinglet	<i>Regulus satrapa</i>							2	
Carolina Wren	<i>Thryothorus ludovicianus</i>	1+				2	4		
Blue-grey Gnatcatcher	<i>Poliophtila caerulea</i>			10+	20+	10+	20+	10+	10+
Grey Catbird	<i>Dumetella carolinensis</i>	2	3+	3+	2+	5+	4+	10+	10+
Northern Mockingbird	<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>	20+	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Myna - I	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>							10+	10+
Common Starling - I	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	2	✓	300+	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eastern Bluebird	<i>Sialia sialis</i>	2							
American Robin	<i>Turdus migratorius</i>	200+	20+						
House Sparrow - I	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Chipping Sparrow	<i>Spizella passerina</i>							10+	
Savannah Sparrow	<i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>	20+							
Eastern Meadowlark	<i>Sturnella magna</i>	20+			H			1	
Red-winged Blackbird	<i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>	1	20+	20+	100+	✓	✓	✓	✓
Brown-headed Cowbird	<i>Molothrus ater</i>	50+						1	
Common Grackle	<i>Quiscalus quiscula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Boat-tailed Grackle	<i>Quiscalus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Waterthrush	<i>Parkesia noveboracensis</i>						1		
Black-and-white Warbler	<i>Mniotilta varia</i>			4	3	4	5	1	1
Orange-crowned Warbler	<i>Leiothlypis celata</i>				1				
Common Yellowthroat	<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>			3	2	1	2		
American Redstart	<i>Setophaga ruticilla</i>				2		1		
Northern Parula	<i>Setophaga americana</i>			6	4	3	10+	2	2
Palm Warbler	<i>Setophaga palmarum</i>	40+	✓	✓	✓	✓	30+	✓	✓
Pine Warbler	<i>Setophaga pinus</i>	2		1	1	2	4		1
Yellow-rumped Warbler	<i>Setophaga coronata</i>	30+	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Yellow-throated Warbler	<i>Setophaga dominica</i>						2		
Prairie Warbler	<i>Setophaga discolor</i>		1	1					2
Black-throated Green Warbler	<i>Setophaga virens</i>								1
Black-throated Blue Warbler	<i>Setophaga caerulescens</i>								1



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Common name	Scientific name	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Northern Cardinal	<i>Cardinalis cardinalis</i>		2	4	2	2	4	2	1
Indigo Bunting	<i>Passerina cyanea</i>				2				
Painted Bunting	<i>Passerina ciris</i>		2	2+	1		2	2	2

## Others

E=Endemic		February 2023							
Common name	Scientific name	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
<b>Mammals</b>									
Nine-banded Armadillo	<i>Dasypus novemcinctus</i>	2							
West Indian Manatee	<i>Trichechus manatus</i>	7						13	
Northern Raccoon	<i>Procyon lotor</i>			2					
White-tailed Deer	<i>Odocoileus virginianus</i>	1							
Marsh Rabbit	<i>Sylvilagus palustris</i>				1				
Eastern Gray Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>			2	4		2	10+	10+
Bryant's Fox Squirrel	<i>Sciurus niger</i>	1							
<b>Reptiles/Amphibians</b>									
American Alligator - E	<i>Alligator mississippiensis</i>			10+	30+		✓	✓	
American Crocodile	<i>Crocodylus acutus</i>							2	
Florida Red-bellied Turtle	<i>Pseudemys nelsoni</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓	
Peninsula Cooter	<i>Pseudemys peninsularis</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓	
Florida Softshell Turtle - E	<i>Apalone ferox</i>		✓	✓	✓				
Eastern Racer	<i>Coluber constrictor</i>						1		
Florida Green Watersnake	<i>Nerodia floridana</i>			1	1				
Eastern Rat Snake	<i>Pantherophis alleghaniensis</i>					1			
Green Iguana - I	<i>Iguana iguana</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Red-headed Agama	<i>Agama agama</i>								10+
Brown Basilisk - I	<i>Basiliscus vittatus</i>			2	2				
Green Anole	<i>Anolis carolinensis</i>								✓
Cuban Brown Anole - I	<i>Anolis sagrei</i>		3	2	4				10+
Eastern Fence Lizard	<i>Sceloporus undulatus</i>				2				
Pig Frog	<i>Lithobates grylio</i>			H					
<b>Butterflies</b>									
Gulf Fritillary	<i>Agraulis vanillae</i>			5			1		
White Peacock	<i>Anartia jatrophae</i>			4	4				
Monarch	<i>Danaus plexippus</i>	1						4	4
Julia Heliconian	<i>Dryas iulia</i>			2			1	10+	
Zebra Heliconian	<i>Heliconius charithonia</i>			10+					
Viceroy	<i>Limenitis archippus</i>		1					10	
Clouded Sulphur	<i>Colias philodice</i>		1						
Black Swallowtail	<i>Papilio polyxenes</i>		1						
Long-tailed Skipper	<i>Urbanus proteus</i>						1		

E=Endemic		February 2023							
Common name	Scientific name	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
<b>Dragonflies</b>									
Halloween Penant	<i>Celithemis eponina</i>			2					20+
Greater Pondhawk	<i>Erythemis vesiculosa</i>								1
Roseate Skimmer	<i>Orthemis ferruginea</i>						1		
Carolina Saddlebags	<i>Tramea carolina</i>								3
Blue Dasher	<i>Pachydiplax longipennis</i>				4				
Portuguese Man O' War	<i>Physalia physalis</i>			20+					



From top left clockwise – Burrowing Owl, Florida Scrub Jay, Painted Bunting, Red-shouldered Hawk, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Roseate Spoonbill, Reddish Egret, Least Bittern