



Birding South Florida and the Keys

Day 1: Arrival in Florida

Participants should fly into Fort Lauderdale by early afternoon. We will meet the group at the airport and then proceed to Fort Myers, driving west along Alligator Alley, with birding stops on the way. The canal along the roadway is a great place to look for herons and Least Terns. Everyone should keep an eye on the skies looking for Swallow-tailed Kites.

(Note: Some clients may choose to fly into Fort Myers. If you choose this option, we will meet you at the hotel before the group goes to dinner in Fort Myers.)

Overnight Fort Myers

Day 2: Birding Babcock-Webb Wildlife Management Area, and parks to the north

We will make an early departure to Babcock-Webb Wildlife Management Area for Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Brown-headed Nuthatch and Bachman's Sparrow. For best opportunity to see the woodpeckers, we should be in the area of their nest holes close to sunrise. This pinewoods area is also excellent for Great Crested Flycatcher, Eastern Bluebird, Eastern Meadowlark and sometimes Red-headed Woodpecker. Wetlands and lakes may hold Mottled Duck and other waterfowl.

Before lunch, we will drive farther north to areas where Florida Scrub-Jays are present. We will finish the day at Harnes Marsh, a great place to see Snail Kites, Limpkin, Roseate Spoonbill, assorted waders and shorebirds.

Overnight Fort Myers



Day 3: Travel to Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary and Shark Valley in Everglades National Park

We will again make an early departure, going first to Corkscrew Swamp, a National Audubon Society sanctuary with a boardwalk through baldcypress and sawgrass marsh. Expect Wood Stork, Swallow-tailed Kite, Common Ground-Dove, Barred Owl, Painted Bunting and a variety of wading birds. We should see many migrating warblers, including Yellow-throated Warbler.

After a picnic lunch, we'll head for Shark Valley in the northern part of Everglades National Park, making one or two stops as time allows. At Shark Valley, we will ride the tram to enjoy a guided tour through the marshes and hammocks. While we will likely see Anhinga, Black-crowned Night-Heron, White Ibis, Red-shouldered Hawk and more, one interesting target here is the Great White Heron. This white form of Great Blue Heron is regularly seen in the park around this location.

Overnight Florida City

Day 4: Spend the morning birding Everglades National Park, including Anhinga Trail, then drive to Key West

We will start the day with a morning visit to Everglades National Park, first searching the grasslands for the Cape Sable race of the Seaside Sparrow, before spending an hour or two along the Anhinga Trail. Other possibilities in the Everglades include White-crowned Pigeon, Black-whiskered Vireo and a few migrating warblers.

Before noon, we will leave the Park and begin the 120-mile drive to Key West, arriving late in the afternoon. As we drive through the Keys, we will keep our eyes open for Gray Kingbirds and Common Mynas on the wires. Magnificent Frigatebirds should appear soaring from time to time. If Burrowing Owls have been reported, we will make a stop to look for them. If time allows, we will drive off the main road to look for Mangrove Cuckoo and Key Deer. If we don't have time today, we will certainly stop for these on the day of our return drive to Fort Lauderdale.

After dinner, we will do some birding on the island, likely at Fort Zachary Taylor, a good place for migrating songbirds, as well as a few gulls and terns.

Overnight Key West

Day 5: Boat trip to the Dry Tortugas and Fort Jefferson—Possibly the most exciting birding day of trip!

Today we will enjoy a boat trip to the Dry Tortugas, leaving Key West at 7:30 AM. During the two-hour trip to the islands, we can scan from the deck of the boat, hoping to see some pelagic species. While not too common, we have seen on previous trips Audubon's Shearwater, Sooty Shearwater, Pomarine Jaeger, Masked Booby – and possibly a (distant) White-tailed Tropicbird once!

As the boat nears the island, we will start to see Sooty Terns and Brown Noddies. Everyone should be on deck and scanning a small island that regularly has roosting Masked Booby and Brown Booby. Many times the boobies will fly past the boat, so be prepared for them. Many Magnificent Frigatebirds will be soaring over the fort.

We will have about four hours to watch the Sooty Tern and Brown Noddy colony and thoroughly search Fort Jefferson for migrants. Thrushes, buntings, orioles and a dozen or so species of warblers may be seen on a good day, and very close views are often possible. We will return to Key West in the late afternoon.

Overnight Key West



Day 6: Birding along the Keys looking for local specialties as we head towards Fort Lauderdale; Late afternoon search for established exotics in urban areas

Today we will make a leisurely drive along the Keys, looking for any species we may have missed, with a special effort to see Mangrove Cuckoo. We will stop at shorebird roosts and migrant traps, trying to find new species to add to our trip list.

After leaving the Keys, we will check out a nesting site of Cave Swallows. If there is time as we continue north towards Fort Lauderdale, we will stop to look for any established exotic species often found in the area, such as Red-whiskered Bulbul, Spot-breasted Oriole and White-winged Parakeet.

Overnight Fort Lauderdale

Day 7: Morning birding at Wakodahatchee Wetlands and Green Cay Wetlands; Return flights should be scheduled for after 2 PM from Fort Lauderdale

We will begin the day at the Wakodahatchee Wetlands, sure to be one of the favorite birding sites of the trip. From the parking lot we will view a Monk Parakeet nest. Then we will wander the boardwalk, getting close looks at Purple Gallinule, Sora, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Wood Stork, and maybe Gray-headed Swamphen and Egyptian Goose. Sometimes an American Bittern or a Least Bittern can be found among the vegetation.

If departing flights are late enough, and we can leave this site early enough, we will visit the nearby Green Cay Wetlands. Many of the same species are possible here, so we will have a second chance to look for any we may have missed earlier.

The tour concludes with flights home from Fort Lauderdale after 2:00 PM.

