

Florida - 2008

2/10/08

The trip to Florida was, as usual, uneventful (good thing). I noted little about the vegetation changes as we traveled. We greeted the spring as we drove south; maples leafing out as we traveled through Florida. The first bird to greet us in Florida was the turkey vulture.

2/11/08

I went back to the Jay B. Starkey Wilderness area this morning. Some of the birds seen there in previous years were recorded for this year's trip. In the afternoon, Jerry Kaczmarek took us to the James E. Grey Preserve along the Pithlachascotee River. This location is included in the Great Florida Birding Trail, west Florida section. Apparently, there are a lot of gopher turtles at this location. We saw many turtle burrows but no turtles. People at the location did report that they are common there.

2/12/08

I went back to the Grey's location this morning and was happy to see three limpkins. I was able to see them picking up snails from the mudflat areas along the river. Yellow-rumped warblers were also seen along with most of the birds recorded for this date. I tentatively id'd the blue sky lupine at Grey's but I had seen it in bloom yesterday at Starkey's as well. Beggar ticks were also in bloom.

2/15/08

The last two mornings were spent at Grey's Preserve and the birds reported for these dates were largely from this location. I collected quite a few lichen specimens from the area on the 13th. These were bagged for future id. Also on the 13th I saw a coyote in the field just as I got to the park. A deer was also seen as I drove to the parking area. Jerry accompanied me yesterday morning and we were again able to see the limpkin.

Ann and I traveled down to Largo for lunch with Helen and Lisa and a few birds were added in this area as well as at the Sponge Docks in Tarpon Springs which we visited on our return to the Kaczmarek's.

We arrived at our rental yesterday afternoon and this morning's walk was back to the Rotary Park. So far this year, there seems to be an absence of large wading birds. I am seeing much fewer herons and egrets than I recall from previous trips. Rotary Park was also very quiet this morning.



On our way to breakfast this morning, Ann and I went to see Hoot & Annie; our owls near last year's condo. Although the burrows were still there, the owls were not to be seen. The perch near last year's main hole was lying on the ground and we wondered if the owls were still around. We did see one owl near Annie's restaurant, though – this was our first burrowing owl for the year.

As I sit in the lanai writing these notes, I am seeing several of the small anole lizards so typical of Florida. As the temperature heads up in to low eighties, they are very actively displaying their dewlaps at each other. I actually wondered if the adults protect their young. I saw a large lizard near the door to the lanai. A bit later, a very small one was in the same general area. When I went to investigate the small one, a large one (presumably the same one I had seen) ran up the screen of the lanai, dropped to the ground, squeaked and ran up the lanai again as if to warn the younger one. The small one responded (to that or to me or to something else) by running under a large stone in

the lanai.

2/16/08

Today was the day of the sixth annual Burrowing Owl Festival at Rotary Park. I went to the park this morning for my usual bird walk. While I was there, I met a woman, Beverly Saltonstall, from the Calusa Bird Club and she invited me to come along on one of the club's bird walks later. She explained that the area has been very dry and that the ponds where the egrets and herons had been last year has just now finally gotten water from the recent



storm that went through the area. She also told me of a woman who knew where the gopher turtles could be found. Ann and I went back to the park about 10AM for the festival. We looked at the various exhibits and I found the woman who knew about the turtles. She directed me to an area around NW5th place near Santa Barbara Blvd. When Ann and I left the festival, we drove to this area and, sure enough, saw quite a few of the gopher turtles. I was able to get some nice pictures of them; at least as seen on the camera's screen.

2/18/08

Ann and I took a walk through the Six Mile Cypress Slough this morning and early afternoon. By the time we got there, the bird activity had diminished quite a bit for the day but I was able to record a few trip marks

including the little blue heron and the common moorhen. We also saw our first alligator for the trip. There were a lot of turtles in the various ponds of the slough; some quite large. Ann and I noticed a lot of flattened areas in the muddy portions of the slough. Ann wondered if these might be from the wild pigs which we had heard as common in the area. A guide that we talked to later confirmed Ann's suspicions.



I enjoyed seeing the nice variety of ferns at the slough. Several I had seen in the past (marsh fern, strap fern, resurrection fern, etc). I was especially happy, though, to see my first whisk fern (*Psilotum nudum*) growing in the wild. I asked one of the park guides about the plant and she said that they commonly are found on the sable palm. In fact, she cautioned about walking past a sable palm (which I know as the cabbage palm) without close inspection for a wide variety of ferns, club mosses and such. Later, I looked in Nelson (2000) to confirm the id of the whisk fern.

Very few flowering plants were blooming at this time. I did see a plant closely resembling the common garden *Ageratum* in bloom, though. Of the references available

at this time, the plant most closely resembled the *Eupatorium incarnatum* of Bell & Taylor (1982). There was a butterfly on one of the plants and I photographed it for later id. A woman at the slough id'd it as the white peacock (*Anartia jatrophae*) using Alden et.al (1998). A laminated handout (Florida Wildflowers & Butterflies) from the burrowing owl festival seems to confirm the id. Probable Coreopsis and beggar-ticks were also in bloom as well as the plant id'd last year as the grassy arrowhead (*S. gramineae*).

A woman we talked to while we were in the slough suggested that a late afternoon walk would be more rewarding. She mentioned that otters could commonly be seen as well as many more birds as they came in to roost.

2/20/08

I visited Rotary Park again this morning. As was the case yesterday, I recorded both the mallard and the mottled duck. I have been thinking, though, that the ducks I have been calling mallards might be hybrids between the two. Sibley (2000) indicates that such hybrids between mallards and black ducks are common but that those between mallards and mottled ducks are rarely reported. Yesterday's records for the park included the first trip kestrel and today's included robins. I also saw a white phase little blue heron yesterday.

I took a few photos of plants at the park this morning. These were mainly to help id a couple of the plants I have been seeing in bloom. One of these has tentatively been id'd as the wild Comfrey (*Cynoglossum virginianum*) based on a photo in Taylor (1998). As my photos show, though, the plant I have been seeing had very reddish veins in the leaves and there is a distinct pinkish tinge to the flower. The description in Wunderlin and Hansen (2003) is of little help in this matter. I will need to check this out in other references.

Another plant that was photographed appears to be a species of rosegentian (*Sabatia sp.*). I base this on photos in Alden et al. (1998) and Bell & Taylor (1982). These two references both show the large-flowered sabatia (*Sabatia grandiflora*) but the photos appear very different. The photo that I took most resembles that of the former reference but the flower center is distinctly green rather than the yellow shown in the references. More information about the plant needs to be collected before it can be suitably keyed out.

Ann and I went to the Fred C. Babcock / Cecil M. Webb Wildlife Management Area this morning. I was most interested in seeing the red-cockaded woodpeckers that are reported in the area. We arrived there about mid-late morning and things were pretty quiet. We did see limpkins and other water birds and we located the supposedly active clusters of the woodpeckers but we did not see the endangered birds. Pranty (2005) suggested that the best time to see the birds was in the evening so we went on to some shopping in Punta Gorda and returned later. After spending about 2 & ½ hours in the park, much of that time parked by one of the clusters, one bird returned to its tree hole at about 5:45PM. Unfortunately, it entered the hole so quickly that I never got my binoculars on it for a certain id (to mark or not to mark).

I saw one of the pawpaw's in bloom at the management area. I have been seeing them on this trip and I recall seeing them last year but I haven't id'd the plant to species as yet.

2/23/08

The birds recorded for 2/21/08 are mostly from the Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge. I visited there after dropping Ann off at one of the beaches on Sanibel Is. While I was there, I went on a guided walk with one of the volunteer naturalists for the park. Although the walk was supposed to be about the plants of the island, she was very knowledgeable about the wildlife in general and responsive to the questions of the three of us on the tour. As she identified a number of the plants along the walk, she made three points about the wildlife that I found especially interesting. The first was about the effects of even minor changes in elevation. The entire island has only about 6 to 8 feet of total relief and many of the plants distribute because of very slight environmental differences caused by very small changes in elevation above sea level. She pointed out the appearance black mangroves as we went to slightly lower areas within the park and how the appearance of white, black and red mangroves showed the increased tolerance for salt water. The next morning (at Rotary Park) I noticed the changes in vegetation that accompanied the elevation changes. Secondly, she indicated that the flowering of many of the plants were somewhat unpredictable and often dependent on temperature and moisture variations locally and seasonally. Again, I noticed at Rotary Park the next morning that Christmas-berry was in some areas flowering, in other areas in fruit and purely vegetation in the higher ground. Her final point was about the convergence of the plants to the climate of the area and how it made identification of many of the woody plants difficult. I have certainly noticed this and experienced the problem. Many of the woody plants have small, somewhat succulent, glossy leaves.

Later, after I picked Ann up, we drove through the park and I was able to get my annual view of, probably, the only reddish egret on my life list. Several other trip marks were made along this drive including the willet, roseate

spoon bill and white pelican. The eagle seen on this date was at the entrance of Captiva Island.

On 2/22/08 I again took my morning walk at Rotary park. It was interesting to see a white pelican on one of the ponds there. I also found a glasswort growing among the black mangroves in the low areas. Later in the day, I visited the library to use some of their plants references and their internet connection to visit the Atlas of Florida Plants Online (AFP). Taylor, (1992) showed *Salicornia virginica* but the only glasswort listed for Lee County is the annual or small glasswort (*Salicornia bigelovii*). I added this species to the plant list.

I also spent some time looking for the id of the rosegentian found at Rotary Park on 2/20/08. Viewing all of the pictures of the *Sebatia* species on the AFP, I eliminated all of the species except *S. angularis*, *S. campanulata* and *S. grandiflora*.



Of these, only the *S. grandiflora* is on the list for Lee County and this species was added to the trip list. The other plant photographed on 2/20/08 was id'd on that date as a possible wild comfrey. Available references at the library clearly ruled out that id. It was id'd as the water pimpernel (*Samolus ebracteatus*) using Taylor (1992). The only other species of *Samolus* listed in the AFP for Lee County id *S. valerandi* and that is clearly not the plant seen. Interestingly, the water pimpernel was seen as a possibility when I first saw and photographed the plant.

Today I misread the morning news and we visited the Birdfest at Lakes Park. Unfortunately, when we got there we found out that it doesn't take place until next week. While we were there, though, we took a short walk and were able to see a few of the birds. I also saw what I believe was a Southeastern five-lined skink (*Eumeces inexpectatus*); id'd with Alden et.al (1998). Another white peacock butterfly was also seen at the Park.

2/24/08

I went to Rotary Park again this morning. I again saw the little blue heron in both the white and blue phases and I finally saw the first green heron of the trip. I also saw a common buckeye butterfly (*Junonia coenia*). This was first

identified with the Florida Wildflowers & Butterflies card that I got at the Burrowing Owl Festival and then confirmed with Alden et.al (1998). While I was there, I photographed the glasswort and the berries of the Christmas-berry as well as a few other plants. Also, I took a few pictures of the ant-lion pits I have been seeing near the observation platform of the park. One morning I was even able to observe the ant-lion as it captured an ant in its trap.

This afternoon Ann and I went back to the six mile cypress slough in the hopes of seeing some of the otters and birds that were described present at dusk. We stayed till about 6PM but had no luck. I was able to add the swallow-tailed kite to the trip list, though. One of the ponds in the slough is named the pop ash pond. Definite ash trees were seen at the pond so I added the pop ash to the plant list. I also added the Boston fern to the list. According to the AFP for Lee County, three species of *Nephrolepis* are found in the county. The photos of the sori in Nelson (2000) suggest that the species being seen is *N. exaltata*.

2/26/08

According to yesterday's NEWS-PRESS, this is the second year in a row that the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary has



been so dry that the wood storks aren't breeding. We went there yesterday and it is, indeed dry. The lettuce lake has only inches of rain and the usual concentration of birds is minimal. I did see the barred owl, parula warbler and the yellowthroat for trip marks and one of the guides confirmed my id of the Florida red belly turtle. I also saw a green anole and got a photograph of it. Butterflies included the giant swallowtail and the zebra longwing. Little was in bloom but a blue iris, water pickerel, large arrowhead, beggar-ticks and a few others were exceptions. I also saw the alligator flag in bloom. At first I thought the flower looked like that of an orchid. A couple that we met there said that there was much more water at Shark Valley and that is where we are heading today.

2/27/08

On our way to Shark Valley, we made the obligatory stop at the boardwalk of the Fakahatchee Strand along Big Cypress Bend. Again, both Ann and I noticed the relatively few birds compared to past visits. I was able to add the great crested flycatcher there and we got a good look at an American Bald Eagle and its nest. I was hearing warblers along the path but I wasn't able to see them for the id.

From there we drove to Shark Valley. Although there was much more water than at Corkscrew, it was really dry compared to the other times we have been there. The tram guide said that it was the second year of an extended drought. Consequently there was nowhere near the concentration or diversity of birds we have seen on previous visits.

I saw my purple gallinule at the Micosakee restaurant before we entered the park and got an especially close look near the tram station in the park. That and a yellow-crowned night heron were added to the trip list. We also got a good look at what the tour guide pointed out as a water moccasin. Many horrible thistles were in bloom with relatively few other flowering plants. Again (as was the case at Ding Darling), the guide pointed out the importance of elevation in the everglades and how the plant communities distributed as a result of it. Slightly elevated areas had willow communities surrounding gator holes and then other plant communities eventually leading to the hardwood hammocks were seen at successively higher levels. These differences in elevation, though, were measured in inches rather than feet.

After we left the park we drove the 26 mile Loop Road through a part of the Big Cypress National Preserve. This was a pretty neat drive. Many Breaks in the shrub edge, mostly at culverts where the water passed under the road

had great views of wading birds and alligators. We also saw an otter cross the road along the way. Among the plants in bloom were the cow pea and what I believed to be one of the blue-eyed grasses. Probably the most sensational views were the stands of stunted cypress trees with their phenomenal growth of epiphytes; mostly bromeliads.

3/1/08

On 2/29/08, Ann and I visited the Hickey's Creek Mitigation Park. We had been there last year and had searched in vain for gopher turtles and Florida Scrub Jays. Search in vain we did again! We did see some interesting plants, though, and I have since added them to the list of identified plants for Florida. One of these was the coral bean (*Erythrina herbacea*). I remember having seen it last year but I, apparently, never added it to the list. Not only are its flowers distinctive but it's exploded seed pod is as well. I also saw what I believed to be a form of grape vine. Nelson (1996) suggested this to be the muscadine or billace



(*Vitis rotundifolia*). A species of pawpaw was also in bloom. I remembered seeing this last year and I have been seeing in a variety of places this year as well. I did not attempt to id it to species but I did add it to the list as *Asimina* sp. I photographed the plant for possible later id. It is interesting to note that, although it was in bloom, there



was little leafing out of the plant at this time. Shoestring fern (*Vittaria lineata*) was found growing on Florida's cabbage palm. It was photographed. As is often the case on these trips, we got to the park late in the morning and were there at perhaps the worst time for wildlife viewing. The park

was extremely dry during this visit; absolutely no water was present at the upper marsh overlook.

This morning, we went to the 6th annual Birdfest at the Lakes Regional Park. There were a few displays and a number of speakers and field trips within the park. I attended a talk on bird photography given by Frank Moore. He handed out a three page handout on Bird Photography Tips. After the “fest” we went to Bunche Beech. This was, again, high noon, and only a laughing gull (among many sun bathers) was there to greet us (fittingly). Apparently, during low tide, this is quite the place for shorebirds. to greet us (fittingly). Apparently, during low tide, this is quite the place for shorebirds.



3/4/08

Yesterday (3/3/08), we went to Fort Meyer's Beach with the Kaczmarek's. Spring break had begun and there were not many places for birds to land but we did see the usual accumulation of grackles and gulls. I was able to add a royal tern to the trip list. Some of the brown pelicans were very tame and remained still as people got very close to them for pictures.

Some of the plants that I have been seeing in a variety of places have been added to the plant list. Included was a species of kalanchoe that is growing in the garden of our rental property. Bell and Taylor (1982) suggests *K. tubiflora*. This same reference suggests that one of the plants I have been seeing as a common lawn weed (especially along the walks of Rotary Park) is innocence (*Hedyotis procumbens*). Probable Pennyroyal (*Piloblephis rigida*) has been seen throughout the trip and tasselflower, probably *Emilia fosbergii* is another “weed” growing in the lawn and garden of the rental house.



3/7/08

We left Florida this morning with torrential downpours in north Florida. As we drove through Georgia, Tennessee and Kentucky, we saw the same signs of spring observed last year. Unfortunately, we arrived in Paducah as a predicted 2-4 inch snow fall was beginning. No frogs were singing in the hotel lot on this trip.

