

Florida 2010

1/31/10

We've been at the Port of the Islands for a week now. This year's trip to Florida was quite a contrast to last year's. The drive was nice. A little drizzle/rain and a little early fog was a welcome change from the black ice of last year. As it began to get light on the morning of the 23rd and we approached the Rend Lake area of Illinois, the appearance of sycamores and yellow birch betrayed the change of climate. Kentucky greeted us with temperatures in the low 50's and we were in the 70's by the time we over-knighted in Georgia.

After the obligatory stop for walnuts in Tifton, GA we entered Florida on the morning of the 24th. We made our usual stop at the Florida welcome center where I had my grapefruit juice and recorded my first Florida bird; the English sparrow. We arrived at the Port of the Islands in time to see Bret Favre throw a historical interception to lose the NFC championship for the Minnesota Vikings.



On the first morning of our visit (1/25/10) I visited the Fakahatchee Strand for a reunion with the alligators at the observation deck at the end of the Big Cypress Boardwalk. Willows and maples already showed signs of flowers and fruit. Since then, I've also checked out the new marsh trail for the 10,000 Islands National Wildlife refuge a couple of mornings and also returned several times to the Fakahatchee boardwalk as well as visited the Six Mile Cypress Slough. Thus far I have marked 60 birds for the trip. That number includes several trip marks seen this morning at the Eagle Lakes Park along hy41 north of hy951. I visited this area because a phone conversation with Dennis Gustafson before the trip suggested that both bronzed and shiny cow-

birds were in that area. Although I didn't see either of them yet, the Eagle Lakes area has a splendid concentration of birds and I will surely visit it again. Needless to say, the birding has been great.

Even the area around the condo is good. An osprey hangs out in the area as do a number of long-legged waders. As I write, a group of 16 white ibises are feeding along the channel in front of the condo. Huge flocks of robins and grackles fly over the areas each morning. I'm somewhat concerned that the number of black vultures in the area may be a good indication of the average age of the folks in the condos (me included). In addition to the birds, almost daily I see an alligator that frequents the pond across the street from the back of the condo.

Ann began to spot manatees during her morning walks; they're in the channel right in front of the condo. One morning (1/27/10) I saw 4 river otters near the end of the marsh trail of the 10K Is. Thus far those are the only mammals seen.

Few plants have been seen in bloom thus far. At the 10K Is. marsh trail I saw an apparent goldenrod in bloom. Using Taylor (1992), Taylor (1998) and Bell & Taylor (1982) I determined that the plant was most likely *Solidago sempervirens*, the seaside goldenrod. Along the boardwalk of the Big Cypress Bend I've seen bladderworts in bloom as well as

the grassy arrowhead (*Sagittaria graminea*) and the climbing aster, (*Symphyotrichum carolinianum*). Non-blooming alligator flag and pickerelweed have also been recognized.

The ferns of the area could be a real challenge if I'm up to the task. Leather ferns, strap ferns, swamp ferns, shoe-string ferns and others await serious study on this trip.

2/2/10

Over the last several days I've spent some time looking through available references to identify the species of arrowhead plants that I've seen in bloom. Yesterday (2/1/10), I saw a specimen in bloom at the 10K Is. marsh trail.

Using the web site for the Atlas of Florida Plants Online, I found that there are six species of *Sagittaria* recorded for Collier County. Of the six, *S. graminea* seems best to resemble the plant that I saw. The best picture of this plant was in Taylor (1992). It seems likely that the species I've seen growing as a submerged plant with emergent flower stalks at the Six Mile Cypress Swamp and the Fakahatchee boardwalk was *S. graminea* var. *chapmanii*. I also saw a raccoon at the 10K Is. Marsh trail.

Yesterday afternoon, Ann and I went to the Punta Gorda area where several species were added to the trip list. This included the spotted and western sandpiper and the greater scaup duck. We visited the Peace River Wildlife Center and saw many of Florida's birds at their rehabilitation facility. The close up's of the yellow-crowned night heron was taken there.

This morning I birded the Fakahatchee boardwalk and found a whisk fern I had missed in previous visits. Generally, the birding was quiet. Later, Ann and I went to Everglades City and Chokoloski. The kestrel and the red-dish egret recorded for this date were seen along the causeway between these two places. While in Everglades City, we visited the Museum of the Everglades and viewed the display of photography by Jeff Ripple (I really should put my camera away). We also went to a reciting of the poetry by Karla Lynn Merrifield. Her most recent (still unpublished) book of poems about the Everglades is on my want list. On our way back to the condo, we stopped at the Fakahatchee boardwalk and found a swamp lily (*Crinum americanum*) in bloom. This was confirmed with Taylor (1992).



2/5/10

I've been birding the 10K Island Marsh trail for the last two days (2/3 & 2/4). Yesterday morning I was able to add a cardinal to the trip list. I also added the tree swallow and northern rough-wing swallow. I had seen what I believed to be tree swallows on Wednesday morning and then again yesterday. As I saw many of the swallows fly over, I finally realized that I was seeing the Northern Rough-winged and began to doubt that I had seen the tree swallows the previous morning. Finally, though, both were apparent. It's a shame that, at this point, I can still be confused by swallows. According to Peterson (2008) these are the only swallows likely to winter in the area. I had also thought that I had seen an American bittern in flight on Tuesday morning (2/3/10). When I saw another the next day, I realized that I was seeing an immature black-crowned night heron. Its bright yellow legs compared with those of the adult it was flying with and it clearly did not show distinct black on the wings as described in Peterson (2008).

As many as five manatees were seen in the channel by the condo today.

A species of rosegentian is being seen in bloom near the parking lot for the marsh trail of the 10K islands. It is possibly the one seen at Rotary Park pictured earlier in this document.

2/10/10

The Kaczmarek's joined us for a few days. While they were here, we broke fast at the POI resort and Janet Ricci told us that some young owls were being seen in a dead palm tree on the north side of Hy41. Jerry and I went to look on the morning of the 7th and we were easily able to find the owls. They were great horned owls and an adult (presumably the female) was seen in a tree nearby. I was also able to add a flicker to the trip list on that morning.

On Saturday (2/6/10) we went to the Everglades City Seafood festival. WOW! That alone might convince Ann to return to this place another year. While at the festival I saw some wildlife prints by a couple of really good photographers. One was William R. Cox (BilysNaturePhotos.com) who had some fantastic pictures of an alligator covered with plants. The other, Jose A. Fernandez (www.jafphotography.com), had a brilliant photo of a green heron that I really liked. It was printed on canvas and sold, at the festival for \$150. Both of these photographers were

doing HDR photography with phenomenal results.



Jerry joined me for a walk at the Big Cypress Boardwalk on Sunday morning (2/7/10). Things were generally quiet we did see a rather large bright yellow fungus growing near the boardwalk.

On the 8th, we took Jerry and Marianne to Shark Valley. The water levels have been much higher this year than in recent previous years and there seemed to be many more birds. I shot a lot of picture and got a few really nice ones including one of a limpkin and quite a few of the herons and egrets. The roseate spoonbill, purple gallinule and yellowlegs were trip marks seen here. I

heard the distinct three note call of the greater yellowlegs and could see that there were birds of several sizes. Our guide called out that both of the yellowlegs were there. Among the plants seen in bloom was the horrible thistle, bladderworts and a plant that reminded me very much of the water hemlock seen back in Franklin. Several type species are listed in my Florida references. Bell and Taylor (1982) show *Cicuta maculata* for this area and Taylor (1992) show *Cicuta mexicana*. Wunderlin and Hansen (2003) suggests that these are synonymous species. My ob-



servations being from a moving tram, I would need to examine the plants more carefully to know if this is what I saw since. We also saw cattails that were not in bloom. The guide indicated that these don't form the cattails here. This does not seem to be consistent with the references I've checked.



Today was a good day. Because it was cool, Ann and I decided to simply use the day for a bit of shopping and to explore the Marco Island area. Going west on Hy41 from our condo I saw a snail kite on the north side of the highway. On Marco Island I saw both a burrowing owl and gopher turtle in just a few blocks from the Tigertail Beach area. The kite and owl were trip marks.

02/12/10

I birded the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk again this morning. While I was there I saw a huge fungus growing high in a tree. It was visible from the observation platform at the end of the boardwalk. It looked like a bracket-type fungus which hung from the tree. The fresh growth of the fungus appeared to be white but the older portions were varying shades of yellow to burnt brown. Although I was seeing it through binoculars at quite a distance, it appeared that the spore structures had a honeycomb-like structure. I also saw a raccoon in the tree just below the fungus. It was strange to see a raccoon so high.



As I was leaving the boardwalk several tour groups were entering. As I stopped to look for warblers, I heard a splashing sound approaching. Soon, a deer came running; apparently scared by the people in the group.

In the afternoon, Ann and I went to the Naples Zoo. The zoo wasn't all that great. We Milwaukee area people seem to be "zoo-spoiled." While we were there, though, I saw a bush in bloom that was like one Jerry and I saw across Hy41 near the POI resort. Conveniently,

the plant was labeled for me. The plant was *Calliandra haematocephala* of the Fabaceae family. This plant is not vouchered for Collier County according to AFP but I added it to my list of id'd plants.

This morning I went back to the 10K Is. marsh trail. I was hoping to see more of the area's warblers but they continue to elude me. A couple of raccoons walked along the trail until they spotted me. As I got near the end of the trail, where it expands into a cleared area, something apparently scared up a bunch of wading birds including wood storks and roseate spoonbills. In the hopes of seeing the spoonbills, I crossed the clearing and came upon a small pond with a wide mudflat area. There I found a greater yellowlegs, two killdeer and about 10 small peeps.

The yellowlegs was easy; it had a very long, slightly upturned bill. I studied the peeps very carefully, though. Shorebirds are not among my bird watching strengths. I deliberately walked around the pond so that the sun was behind me and could clearly see that the legs were not black but rather yellow to orange. I determined that they were least sandpipers rather than western sandpipers on that basis. There were also very buff across the breast area. The addition of the green-winged teal and the least sandpipers brings the trip list to 81.

This afternoon Ann and I went to get some fruit at a citrus grower along Sabal Palm Road. The north side of the road had huge numbers of *Melaleuca quinquenervia*, the punk tree) I had on



an earlier date found this tree growing across the street from the condo and added it to the plant list). Some of these trees were in bloom at this time. Then we continued along the road to the Picayune Strand State Forest. We had been in the area once before; trying to find the Sabal Palm Hiking Trail. We did find a drive with a fallen sign indicating a hiking trail but it was disappointing to say the least. I have been trying to find a higher area to hike in the hopes of finding some of the birds less likely to be found in the low, swampy areas. As we were leaving the area, though, we did find the entrance to the hiking trail. It had a kiosk with maps of the hiking trail and other literature about Picayune. I scouted out the hiking trail for a short distance and found that the trails were well groomed and marked. A bird list available at the kiosk showed several of the birds I have been interested in seeing. I will definitely have to go back to that area.

During my very short hike along the trail I did see several plants in bloom. One of these was an apparent white violet, possibly the long-leaf violet (*Viola lanceolata*) as pictured in Taylor (1992). Another could well have been the pineland daisy (*Chaptalia tomentosa*) found in Schmelz & Stacell (2009). A third plant was clearly a species of St. Johnswort. Several, closely similar species are represented in my references and this species, as well as the others, will need closer scrutiny.

While looking through the references to id the previously mentioned plants, I came across a picture of Brazilian Pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolius*) in Bell & Taylor (1982). This aggressive invasive in Florida is clearly what I have been seeing along the 10K Is. marsh trail and waste places in the area (such as across the road from the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk). According to this reference, the plant has toxic properties similar to poison ivy. I added this to the plant list.



There is a need to revisit the id of the rosegentian seen at the 10K Is. marsh trail and that seen in previous years at the Rotary Park in Cape Coral. According to the entry for 7/24/08, the plant found and photographed was determined to be *S. grandiflora* largely on the basis of what the AFP showed as vouchered for Lee County. There is no way to go back and double check that id at this point. Both *S. grandiflora* and *S. stellaris* are shown for Collier County and both of these show the yellow center with the red margin as seen in the specimens at the 10K Is. marsh trail. These two species look very much alike according to the photos available on the AFP. According to Wunderlin and Hansen (2003), the distinguishing feature relates to the uppermost leaves of the plants. In *S. stellaris*, these are equal to or wider than the stem, thin and smooth with prominent venation. In *S. grandiflora*, on the other hand, the upper leaves are not as wide as the stem and are thick and rugose with obscure venation. I will need to observe the plants again to make the distinction.

2/13/10

I birded 10K again this morning. Primarily, I wanted to check out the rosegentian I have been seeing in bloom. The leaves of the plant seemed like *S. stellaris* in that they were about as wide as the stem and were not rough. I didn't check venation, however. The same grouping of shorebirds was present at the end of the clearing. One greater yellowlegs, two killdeer and, this time, fourteen peeps were present. The lighting this morning made the yellowish legs of the peeps more evident than yesterday and their id as least sandpipers was supported. I also looked carefully at their bills and they did not seem as thickened at the base as described for western sandpipers by Peterson (2008).

This afternoon, we went to the Jammin' at the Hammock Bluegrass Festival at Collier Seminole State Park. Jose Fernandez (see entry for 2/10/10) again had his prints for sale and I purchased an 11 x 17 print of the green heron I had seen at Everglades. A regular print cost only \$15. He was asking \$150 for a canvas print.

Quite a storm went through this area last evening; high winds and pouring rain. Both Ann and I were concerned for the young great-horned owls across Hy41 from our condo. On our way back from the bluegrass festival we checked and found them both in the nest and, seemingly, to be ok. Mama was not to be found. In recent days, I have been seeing both of the ospreys on the platform visible from my computer desk. I've also seen one of them carrying apparent nest material to the platform. Spring must be in the air but we certainly can't tell. The weather here has been unusually cool for this time of the year.

2/14/10

It was a pretty chilly day again in sunny Florida. I skipped birding this morning because Ann and I were going to the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. We had a pretty good day there. I was able to add six birds to the trip list includ-

ing painted bunting, blue-headed vireo, ovenbird, pine warbler, downy woodpecker and the yellow-crowned night heron. I had been surprised that the latter has been so illusive on this trip. My recollection of other years is that it was much more common. The swamp has much more water than we've seen in recent years. According to one of the guides, that and the unusually cold weather have made for an unpredictable year thus far. Actually, there were fewer wading birds that I remember; perhaps because of the water level. Few plants were in bloom. A large species of arrowhead was seen.

On Hy41, on the way back to the condo, we saw another snail kite along Hy41. We also saw glossy ibis and a limpkin along the way. Later, at the condo, I saw a shrike in the yard.

There is still some confusion on the species of *Sagittaria*. A large flowering species (seen at Corkscrew) with huge leaves seen growing as an emergent appears to be *S. lancifolia*. Schmelz & Stacell (2009) and Taylor (1992) both show this species. I took a photo of this plant today for documentation and added it to the plant list.

2/16/10

I purchased a hat from the FOF exhibit at the bluegrass festival Saturday so I had to bird Fakahatchee (the boardwalk) yesterday

(2/15/10) morning

with my new hat on.

While I was there, I saw a pine warbler. I

couldn't help wondering if I would have

id'd it if I hadn't seen them at Corkscrew the

previous day. I also photographed the leaf

and bark of a tree I had been seeing

across Hy41 from the boardwalk. I had seen

this tree in bloom at the Naples Zoo the

other day but still hadn't id'd it. I paged

through Nelson (1994) this morning and de-

termined that it is most likely the orchid

tree (*Bauhinia variegata*) or its close rela-

tive, *B. purpurea*, (which is not pictured in the reference). I remember noting at the time I saw the flower of the

tree at the zoo that it resembled an orchid. The AFP does little to distinguish between these two species. An online

reference (www.fleppc.org/ID_book/bauhinia%20variegata.pdf) indicates that it: "may be confused with another

naturalized exotic *Bauhinia purpurea* L., which flowers in the fall with leaves on the tree, and has many-flowered

clusters, 3 (rarely 4) stamens, and petals not overlapping." I, of course, cannot be sure if the plant seen blooming at

the zoo is the same as that seen in Fakahatchee; that plant was not in bloom. I will record it as *B. variegata* pending

further study.



After breakfast this morning, Ann and I drove through the western part of the Big Cypress Swamp area described by Pranty (2005). We took Hy41 east to Birdon Rd and looped through Turner Rd back to Hy41. We saw the usual assortment of wading birds and a lot of alligators. There were hundreds of tree swallows along the north part of Birdon Rd. There were also several immature hawks in the area. The only bird I can mark with confidence is the red-shouldered hawk typical of the area. I really was trying to see a short tailed hawk but Peterson (2008) and Sibley (2000) denied me. After studying these two references, I think I might well have seen a broad-winged hawk in addition to the red-shouldered but retroactive identification can be dangerous. Hawks are difficult; especially when they are immature. BTW: I did see a red-tailed hawk yesterday and marked it for the trip. Actually, I could have marked them sooner.

Blue-eyed grass, the horrible thistle and coreopsis were seen in bloom along the road. Actually, the coreopsis has

been seen in bloom in several locations including Picayune Strand. I notice now that neither the coreopsis nor the blue-eyed grass has been recorded on the plant list. I should check the species and add them. I also saw a species of Agave growing in a clearing along Birdon Rd.

2/17/10

I found a web site for identifying ferns specific to the Fakahatchee Strand and the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. It is titled, Identifying Southwest Florida's Ferns and can be found in appendix IV. Used this key for one of the ferns I've been seeing and trying to id, I ended up with *Thelypteris interrupta* (Shiny Thelypteris, Swamp Shield Fern, Hottentot Fern). The key indicates that this species could be confused with *T. palustris* but the veins on this species are divided. A hand lens was used to examine the veins on a pinna that I collected showed that they veins were not so divided in this fern. The key described the vein structure as follows: the "lowest veins of neighboring pinnules



touch, forming a triangle, with another vein going from the triangle to the cut between the pinnules" Only *T. dentata* is said to be similarly veined and this fern is not hairy. I have yet to see the plant with sori. I added *T. interrupta* to the plant list. All three of these species are found on a list of the plants for Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park given to me several years ago at the ranger station on Janes Scenic Drive.

That list shows only one species of Coreopsis for the Fakahatchee Strand; Coreopsis leavenworthii. This is also the only species shown by the AFP for Collier County. The photos on the AFP site

suggest that this is the species I have been seeing in waste areas at several locations. The species was added to the list.

2/19/10

Yesterday (2/18/10) I birded Fakahatchee Strand. I stopped first at the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk and was able to add the northern parula warbler to the trip list. I also checked many of the ferns again and took a few photos of fronds for later help with id. I was able to find one of the hottentot ferns with sori which supported my earlier id. I also examined and photographed another fern which may be a sport of the hottentot or, possibly, a different species. Examining it later, I found that the venation was like the hottentot but some of the lobes of the pinnae (especially near the middle) were longer and began to show toothing. Also, the lobes of the pinnae seemed more deeply cut to the costa (midrib of the pinna). At this point, there seems to be several species or varieties that I am looping together as the hottentot fern (*Thelypteris interrupta*) but I am not yet able to specifically identify them.

After I left the boardwalk, I drove to the Janes Scenic Drive area and entered the park from the east. Along the drive I found an area with an abundance of bracken ferns *Pteridium aqualinum*. This species, according to Nelson (2000), is not without some controversy regarding its taxonomy. I noticed that the plant list for the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park lists the species without a subspecies designation. The new booklet, described below, indicates that both subspecies *caudatum* and *pseudocaudatum* are present at the preserve. Not having observed the

qualities necessary for the distinction, I will simply add the species to the list without a variety designation. I also saw some of the swamp lilies in bloom along the drive.

I finally ended up at gate 7 (west main) where I parked the car and walked in along the tram. It was along this path that I finally saw a couple of white-eyed vireos which brought the trip bird list to 90. Cabbage palms along this tram were loaded with shoestring ferns as well as goldfoot ferns. I heard what I believed to be an alligator roar as I was returning along the tram. On my way back out of the park I met and talked for a while with a photographer from New York, Barry Rosenthal, (www.barryrosenthal.com) who indicated that the 40 mile loop road was open and passable (I had heard earlier that it was not passable). As I approached the ranger station I encountered a turkey vulture and hawk (probably red-shouldered) in an apparent struggle on the ground; the hawk seemingly the aggressor. The hawk flew off as I approached. I stopped at the ranger station and talked with one of the rangers for a while. He kindly gave me a map of the scenic drive with various locations marked for me. He also gave me a booklet by Daniel F. Austin (Vascular Plant List of Fakahatchee Strand State Park) which he indicated was quite old but might help me in identifying the plants I found. The computer printout that I received a couple of years ago is probably more recent. I also mentioned the large fungus I had seen on 2/12/10. He indicated that it actually a bee hive but that the bees have not been active because of the unusually cold weather.



I've had a more relaxed attitude about recording bird records for this trip. I only seem to be recording for those days that I go to some special place or see something that is unusual or new to the species list for the year. Many incidental sightings are going unrecorded. For example, I have been seeing limpkins on a fairly regular basis this year. The records show sightings at 10K, Shark Valley and the Corkscrew Swamp. In fact, though, I have been seeing one commonly along the south side of Hy41 just east of the Market Square and these sightings don't make it into the records. A reddish egret was seen again today along the causeway to Chokoloski but no birding records were kept for today. Also, snail kites have been seen along the north side of Hy41 without being recorded. Cattle egrets as well. Some of these have been seen regularly along Hy41; even with cattle. The only sightings recorded are those which represent a significant trip to a new area or a new species for the trip.

2/21/10

Yesterday, when we were coming home from the Naples area, I saw 6 limpkins along Hy41 where we have been seeing one quite regularly.

I birded Fakahatchee Strand this morning. I drove into the park quite early and drove along Janes Scenic Drive. I noticed arrowhead, pickerel weed and Bidens in bloom along the way. The Bidens was especially tall where it grew in soaked wood or fallen logs in the wet areas. I also scared up a yellow-crowned night heron along the way. When I got to gate 12 (about 6.5 mi from the ranger station), I walked along the tram for quite a while. The whole path was loaded with a variety of ferns. Lots of ferns! It's pretty clear that I have been clumping several species together as sword ferns. These probably include Brake Ladder ferns and Boston ferns as described in the FOF publication: Fern Fun for Everyone by Jack Berninger. I may also have found *Thelypteris dentata* (downy maiden fern; downy shield fern) along the tram. The plant was id'd with the web site, Identifying Southwest Florida's Ferns, and the pictures on the AFP seem consistent. The web site lists this as a rare species, although Nelson (2000) makes no mention of this and shows the fern for this area. Perhaps it is rare at the Corkscrew Swamp but apparently not here. Austin (1990) does list the species for the strand. The vein pattern is as in what I have id'd as *T. interrupta*. I scared up another yellow-crowned night heron along the tram (These have been hard to find this year.). White violets and poison ivy were in bloom along the tram. I heard alligators growling distantly as I walked along.

This afternoon there was a picnic for the condo community. While I was there, I noticed a whisk fern growing in one of the cabbage palms where we had gathered. Also, one of the condo residents said that he saw dolphins in the channel this morning.

2/22/10

It was a crummy day by Florida standards. It rained overnight and/or early this morning and the winds were high. Ann and I went to Shark Valley as planned but the weather was such that few birds were photogenic. We came back through the Big Cypress 40 mile loop road. The road conditions were horrendous, with potholes large enough for the alligators. I did stop at one point and found some lawn orchids (*Zeuxine strateumatica*) in bloom along roadside. Taylor (1992) indicates that these are not Florida natives. Although I saw them in the Big Cypress area, they are listed as non native in the plant list for the Fakahatchee Strand. It's too bad that my first orchid to add to my Florida plant list is an exotic species.

As we were driving through the puddles and potholes, Ann noticed an all black squirrel along the road. It seemed much larger than the eastern grey squirrel. Initially, I assumed that this was a melanistic variation of the eastern grey squirrel but reading Humphrey (1992) suggests that it was possibly the black color phase of the Big Cypress Fox Squirrel (*Sciurus niger avicennia*). I did attempt to photograph the squirrel (see left) but it made a quick retreat and the photos are of limited value. A web site for the Big Cypress Fox Squirrel (http://www.dickbrewer.org/fox_squirrel.html) does show photos of exactly what I recall seeing, though. This is an animal that I had targeted for this trip; the only target species seen thus far.

On our way back to the condo, we checked the owls across Hy41. Just one owl was left in the nest. Neighbors had indicated this in the last couple of days.

2/28/10

We finally got a nice Florida winter day on 2/23/10. Ann and I celebrated by going to Tigertail beach on Marco Island; Ann to enjoy the beach and me to work on shorebirds. Unfortunately, we got there during high tide and, at first, few birds were to be seen. I did see a reddish egret and one tern which I didn't id. One of the guides suggested that I walk to the gulf shore to see skimmers and terns but I had no luck there either. I did pick up a bunch of nice shells while I was there and Ann went there later to find more. Later, some of the shorebirds did start to come in and a few were recognized but it was far from the shorebird experience I had anticipated.

This year's stay in Florida has given a new meaning to channel surfing. While sitting in the lanai and looking over the channel, I have seen a lot of interesting things. On the afternoon of the 28th, I saw at least one dolphin jumping about. As mentioned earlier, one of the neighbors reported seeing several on a previous day.

On the morning of 2/24/10 I birded TenK. During our stay in the area, they have been building an observation tower near the beginning of the marsh trail. Since this would be my last visit for the year and although the tower was not yet finished, I did go to the top and take a few pictures from it. Actually, on my way out of the trail, one of the workmen did invite me to go up on the tower. I finally saw a common yellowthroat along the trail on this morning. This common bird had been very illusive to me on this trip and this was the first sighting for the trip. I also saw a white-eyed vireo. I found another shorebird at the small flooded area at the end of the trail and photographed it for later id.

This was a two alligator day at the pond across the street from the condo. We saw both of them as we left to go to the Eagle Lakes Park later in the morning. Ann spotted a snipe at the park and I was able to add a northern waterthrush to bring the trip mark to 100 birds.

On 2/25/20 I attended several talks at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Festival at the Museum of the Everglades in Everglades City. The first talk was about the Big Cedar Wildlife Preserve. It was given by Lisa Williams and was clearly the best event of the day. After that, Otter John brought in several wild animals for "up close and personal" observations. I was disappointed that his Florida panther was ill due to a brown recluse spider bite and, consequently, did not make the show. There was a later talk on invasive species in the area. It was a good presentation including information about several of the species I have noted earlier in these notes. Australian pine, Melaleuca and Brazilian pepper were all



discussed along with other species of interest. The final talk of the day was by Marya who talked about the early history of the Fakahatchee Strand.

We left the 10,000 Islands area on 2/26/10 in order to join the Kaczmarek's for Julie's wedding on the Carnival Queen on 2/27/10. For the next several days there was no real birding or botanizing (B&B) although some cruising data were recorded. A northern gannet was added to the trip list (and my life list) on the day of the wedding. I saw the bird from the ship so it was, literally, cruising data. On the next day, Ann and I visited the Kennedy Space Center. While on the tour of the center, we saw both wild pigs and armadillos. After we left the space center and drove to the Kaczmarek home, we saw several wild turkeys and a lot more armadillos along Hy528. I regretted that there was not more time to spend in the area. Merrit Island National Park is supposed to have a large population of Florida scrub jays but I had not the time to check it out.

3/1/10

Staying at the Kaczmarek's allowed me to bird Green Key again this morning. It was a good morning; resulting in several more trip marks (red-breasted merganser, common loon, white-winged dove, black skimmer and royal tern). Later in the morning Ann and I went to Honeymoon Island and then to the sponge dock at Tarpon Springs. As before, ospreys were abundant at Honeymoon Island. Yellow-rumped warblers were also numerous. Nesting bald eagles had produced two young and these were visible at the nest, one of them especially exercising its wings. There were a lot of rock doves at the sponge docks and I finally added them to the trip list. I'm sure that I had seen them in the past but I never marked them. Then, when I tried to remember exactly when I had seen them, I couldn't remember with certainty so I didn't put them on the list until now.



At the Honeymoon Island nature center, I purchased a copy of Florida's Living Beaches (Witherington (2009)). Looking through the book this evening, I found the description of two grasses which may be ones, or close relatives of ones I have been seeing regularly during the trip. One of these has a very spiny fruit which I have pulled out of my clothing on more than one occasion. This could be the coastal sandbur (*Cenchrus spinifex*) or

one of its relatives. The other holds its seeds in a curious umbrella-like fashion and may be the crowfoot grass (*Dactyloctenium aegyptium*). Currently I have no access to the internet and all of my references are packed in the car so I will have to pursue the final id of these at a later time.

3/2/10

This was our last day in Florida and I really wanted to reach a bird count of 110. After breakfast, Ann and I went to Starkey's and the eastern bluebird became #109. Then we went to Gray's Park and saw virtually nothing. Ann did see a downy woodpecker and an armadillo was photogenically cooperative but there was no 110.

Later I went to Green Key. The tide was the highest I'd seen it; over the roadway along the causeway. Number 110 (ruddy turnstone) was waiting at the shoreline along with a willet, some dunlins, lots of black skimmer and royal terns.

This was one of the best years that we had in Florida. The weather was cool. Those who live in the area indicated that the length of the cool weather was the longest in memory. That may account for the fact that few herps or flying insects such as butterflies and dragonflies were seen. It was also an exceptionally wet period for this the dry time of the year. The birding was excellent; the first year that I've recorded over 100 species. Although this is the most species that I have ever recorded, many of the easiest species were missed. It is apparent that I still need to work on shorebirds and no sparrows were seen. There is a lot of Florida wildlife waiting for our return.

