

Florida 2015

2/2/15

Ann and I left Franklin at about 3:36AM for our 2015 Florida trip. Possible snow was predicted but the weather was fine. We broke fast in Mt. Vernon about 9:15 and then set out for our annual race between the thermometer and speedometer. By the time we reached Dalton (about 4:30PM, having lost an hour) the outside temperature had reached the speed limit of 70 mph. After a bit of overnight cooling we repeated the race until we finally reached Florida. When we arrived at the Florida welcoming center for my usual grapefruit sample I anticipated the recording of my first Florida bird species for the year. Usually this is a house sparrow at the wayside but this time I noticed a white bird in a small pond as I entered the parking area. Returning to the car for binoculars, I saw a snowy egret, a little blue heron and a pied-billed grebe in the pond; a great start for the year. Of course, then I saw the house sparrow. Dandelions were in bloom in the area. When we stopped at another wayside later in the day, both yellow-rumped and palm warblers were added to the list and along hy.52, on our way to the Kaczmarek's, several other birds were added.

I didn't go out on the morning of the 31st. But later in the day, we drove with Jerry and Mary Ann to a small pond in the parking area of Embassy Plaza (Hy.19 & Embassy Dr.) where large accumulations of birds had been seen in previous years. Many birds were seen in the trees of the pond area. Most of them were wood storks but a few great egrets were also present. It appeared that the site was actually a small rookery; the wood storks were bringing in nest materials and the egrets, especially one of them, was certainly exhibiting nesting behavior. Unfortunately photography was limited to a small clear area and the targeted egret was largely masked by the wood storks. As usual I continued to note a few other birds in New Port Richey and these were recorded in BD.



The next morning (2/1/15) I drove to Green Key and birded the Robert K. Rees Memorial Park and the Boy Scout Preserve. Some of the birds that I saw there were ones that I sometimes find difficult to find this early in the trip. Skimmers and royal terns were seen at the Rees site and a Towhee was heard at the Boy Scout Preserve (That should save me several trips to the Rookery Bay boardwalk this year). Several blanket flowers were in bloom at the park. Later, after a breakfast stop, we left for the Port of the Islands.

As is usual for my first day at POI, I visited the Big Cypress Bend boardwalk this morning. Twenty-six birds were recorded for the morning and this included a few trip marks that I was especially glad to this early in the trip. A fairly bold barred owl was seen shortly onto the boardwalk and several long-legged waders were found at the gator hole at the end. On the return walk along the boardwalk, it occurred to me that I hadn't seen or heard a red-shouldered hawk. When I got to the signage indicating the area of a red-shouldered hawk nest in previous years, I saw that a great horned owl was occupying the nest. That's the first great horned I've seen in the Fakahatchee. Later, along the walk back to the car I saw a young red-shouldered hawk bathing in the stream along the walk. It's apparent parent could be seen watching as I photographed the bird. Plants seen in bloom during this trip included one of the dogwoods, buttonbush, a smartweed, string lily and a bladderwort.

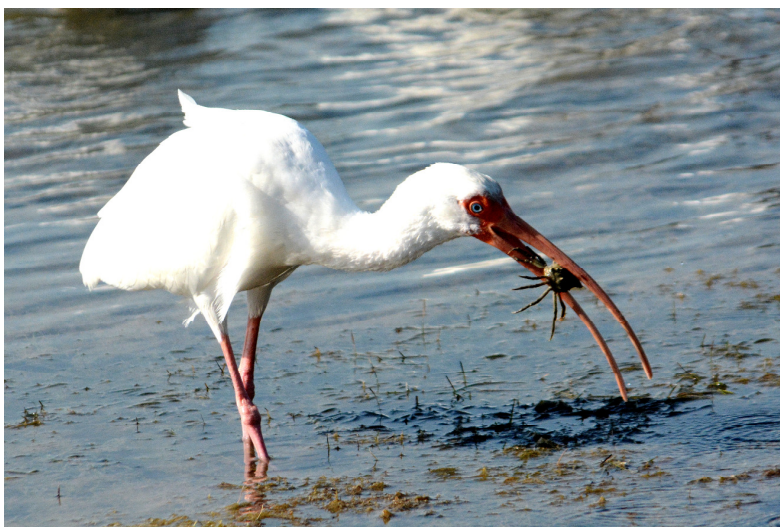
2/5/15

There has not been much activity around the condo thus far this year. Geckos were seen outside of the building on two occasions but few birds or alligators have been in the retention ponds. The alligators that have been seen have been on the small side. Possibly, this is because water is pretty abundant in the surrounding natural areas and the critters have yet to be driven by lowering water levels. The last couple of days have been spent visiting some of the usual local haunts and building upon the early trip list.

On the morning of 2/3/15 I visited TenK; the typical second morning stop each year. There I met up with the Townsends and we compared early birding records for the year. I also met a fellow who I think indicated that he was president of the Friends of the Panther Preserve (Tom Trotta) and discussed panther issues with him. A goldenrod was in bloom; possibly the *Solidago semper-*

virens identified there in the past. Most of the common waders were present although not in great numbers. One lonely spoonbill was seen flying over the area. It's possible that greater concentrations will be seen when the water levels begin to drop. Late in the afternoon, Ann and I went to Everglades City for some oysters and we noticed large concentrations of, mostly, snowy egrets gathering for the evening. Many of them were low among the marshy vegetation and I wondered if they were taking advantage of the heat radiating from the water during the yet cool nights.

Wednesday (2/4/15) we were back to the routine established in earlier years: Breakfast, market and beaches (south beach for Ann



and Tigertail for me). Several blue jays were heard as we were leaving the condo and burrowing owls were out at several locations on Marco Island. Much to my disappointment, no shorebirds were seen at Tigertail, not even one. To add to my disappointment both white and brown pelicans were seen on some branches in the lagoon but the white one took flight before I got a chance to photograph them. Neither did I see any frigate birds on that morning. I did get some fairly decent photos of a white ibis crabbing the shallows, though. I assumed, at first, that the crabs were small fiddler crabs that I commonly see along the exposed shoreline. By zooming to enlarge the photos, though, they appeared to be more like the common spider crab pictured in Alden et al (1998). Before picking Ann up from South beach I drove to Mackle Park and actually had more bird species there than at Tigertail.

This included a couple of trip marks including mottled ducks and a lonely female ring-necked duck hanging around with several coots. There were no signs of purple martins near the martin house and a trip to Everglades City this morning failed to find any there either. On the way back from Everglades City this morning, though, I did see a couple of roseate spoonbills in a marshy area along Hy41.

2/8/15

Today was a lazy Sunday, good for going to the Naples market and lounging around the condo. I watched a probable cooter, *Pseudemys floridana*, walk from one of the retention ponds to the other and, knowing what I do about the old tale, I think I'd still bet on the hare.

2/6/15

Ann and I went to Tigertail again on 2/6/15 and it looked for quite a while that it would be a second trip without seeing any shorebirds. No



shorebirds were on the east side of the lagoon. We crossed the lagoon and I walked a long way along sand dollar spit



before I found a bunch, really a bunch. Almost all of my usual Florida shorebird marks were there except the semipalmated plover, the sanderling and the red knot. I was especially glad to see both the piping and snowy plovers in such close proximity that the comparison was easy to make. I even got photos with both species in the field of view. Of the plovers, ironically, only the semipalmated was absent. I also saw a very cooperative dark morph reddish egret for fairly close pictures.

Along the sandbar between the gulf and the lagoon I found a plant that I thought, at first, was one of the purslanes. The plant was in bloom, though, and the flowers did not appear right for a purslane. Later, using Witherington & Witherington (2009), I id'd it as a samphire (*Blutaparon vermiculare*) of the Amaranthaceae family. The AFP confirmed the id and the plant was added to my database. A few shells, a sponge and coral were collected but nothing new

was added to the shell collection. Ann found several sand dollars but all of them had imperfections.

I met with a major disappointment on the morning of 2/7/15. I drove to the Fritchey drive area where several limpkins were seen last year. Also, there is a property that I believe belongs to Habitat for Humanity that has successfully produced hummingbirds in previous years. When I arrived, I found that the entire area had been bulldozed — the tree that I used to see hummingbirds in was gone. No limpkins were seen across the street nor have they yet been seen this year. Then I went to TenK and added the glossy ibis to the trip list and saw many tree swallows overhead, also added. While there, I noticed that southern bayberry and the red mangrove were in bloom.

2/12/15

Monday (2/9/15) was kids day at the Fakahatchee Strand. On that morning, as I entered the boardwalk, I saw both an adult and one baby great horned owl in the former hawk nest. Then a young eagle was seen in the eagle nest. On the way back an adult eagle was seen in the nest. The eagles are hard to see this year, though; it appears that the near side of the nest has been built up quite a bit.

Later in the day, when Ann and I were going to the Fort Meyers airport to pick up Matt & Nicole, we finally saw a limpkin along Hy.951. Matt joined us on that day and Nicole stayed with her dad for a couple days and then joined us on Wednesday (2/11/15). Usually, when there is company, the birding is put on hold. Matt was interested in trying out his new camera, though, so he and I went to several good birding areas. On 2/10/15 we went to the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. Earlier, I had received an email from Jack Bernenger informing me that the ghost orchid was in bloom at the sanctuary. Unfortunately, when I inquired at the Audubon center I was informed that the previous day's rain had knocked the bloom off of the plant and that it appeared to be done blooming for the year. It was still a pretty good day, though. We saw four yellow-crowned night herons; a trip mark that is not always easy to get. There were also three painted buntings at the feeder although they never provided good photo opportunities.

We went to Shark Valley on 2/11/15. I really should bird with Matt more often; another yellow-crowned night heron was seen there. That makes two consecutive mornings with yellow-crowned night herons. Not bad! On the way back to the condo we stopped at Kirby-Storter and added a bluebird to the trip list but no meadowlarks were seen. It was approaching noon when we got there; few birds and lots of people. While there, I did notice floating hearts (*Nymphoides aquatica*) in bloom. Then, as Matt was driving us back to the condo, I got my "best ever" look at a snail kite. The kite was seen along Hy.41 just northwest of the Hy.29 intersection and very near the road.

When Matt and I got back to the condo, I opened the door to take Cooch out and a southeastern five-lined skink (*Eumeces inexpectata*) fell from the door frame and into the condo. The id is as in Alden et al (1998). I called Matt and he grabbed it with his hand. It whipped back and forth, biting Matt several times. He survived the attack, though.



This morning (2/12/15) we went to TenK. Although there were not large concentrations of birds, Matt's good luck continued. He spotted an otter along the marsh trail. We also heard our first alligator roar for the year. Late in the afternoon, Ann spotted a raccoon back by the pool.

2/18/15

Matt & Nicole headed back north yesterday. We had great time while they were here and the birding was not very much interrupted. On several days of their visit, Matt and I left the women at the beach and continued on to several of my haunts. On 2/15/15 we went to the Briggs boardwalk at Rookery Bay and on 2/16/15 we went to the Bird Rookery Swamp. We arrived at both of these sites as noon was approaching so the birding wasn't anything special at either. I did add a pine warbler to the trip list at Bird Rookery Swamp, though, bringing the trip list to 93. We also saw a white morph of the great blue heron there, making me

wonder if they are more common than I thought.

Both Matt and I got some good close-up photos of a pileated woodpecker at the swamp. I stole his from his camera so I could compare the quality of our respective lenses. My initial impression is that I prefer his lens but the shots differed in so many variables (shutter speed, aperture, etc.) and they that could have affected the comparison. I guess I need him to bring the lens back in March so I can control some of the variables and get a better comparison. Matt also got a better angle than I did and his photos show the eye much better. One of his photos is shown here.



Late in the afternoon, I drove Hy.41 from POI to Hy.29 to get some pix of bird roosts but there were none. I did see another snail kite, though; or was it a northern harrier — here we go again!

2/19/15

It's been pretty cool here lately (not by Wisconsin standards, of course). Dressed for a Wisconsin fall, I left for Eagle Lakes Park this morning hoping to add a couple of birds to the trip list. On the way I saw a small group of limpkins along Hy.41 near the seemingly abandoned Big Cypress Market. Limpkins have been scarce this year; most of the places that I usually find them have been disturbed by construction. Eagle Lakes was dryer than I expected. Although I didn't see anything that could be added to the trip list, I did see a total of 43 bird species including a couple of spoonbills.

2/20/15:

Recent posts on Brdbrain suggest that the swallow-tailed kites are beginning to show up in a few places. Jack Bernenger must have anticipated that when he organized a hike to Bear Island: "Feb. 20 Bear island walk for Kites and Panther". Hoping for a sighting of each, I planned to join the group this morning at the site but the trip was cancelled because of the cold weather (temperatures were in the low 40's this morning) and will be rescheduled when the weather is nicer. Because of the cancellation, Ann and I went into Naples for breakfast and a bit of shopping. On the way in I again saw several limpkins along Hy.41, east of yesterday's sighting. They seem to be more common on the north side of the highway this year.

2/22/15

We saw the first swallow-tailed kite of the year along Hy.41 as we were returning from the flea market yesterday (2/21/15). BD records show that this is not the earliest we've seen it. In 2010 it was seen on February 18.

Over the last several days I've been reviewing my records and references regarding Florida ferns. This is in anticipation of the MSD festival next week and the fern walk I will be taking with Jack Bernenger. On the last trip to the Big Cypress Boardwalk I collected a few fern structures and have been viewing them with the Celestron digital microscope that I brought along this year. The photo nicely shows the sori and indusia of what is probably *N. exaltata* (wild Boston fern) or, possibly, *N. biserrata* (giant sword fern). Distinguishing between the various sword ferns is a point of interest for the walk.



Today Ann and I hit Tigertail Beach just as low tide was approaching. We crossed the lagoon and walked for quite a distance along Sand Dollar Spit and found quite a few interesting shells. Ann collected several nice sand dollars and I was able to collect a number of shells that will need identification at a later date. Perhaps one or two of them will be new to the collection although none were added at first examination. Some of the shells that I collected had a distinctly grey color. I found a possible explanation on the

internet: "Some seashells turn gray because all the calcium has drained out of them over the years. The reason it does that is because the creature that lives inside it provides the calcium and when it gets too big and moves out, the shell is lacking the calcium it needs in order to keep its form and color". Also, I was finally able to add the semipalmated plover and the sanderling to the trip list. The only one of the shorebirds seen in previous years that I am still missing is the red knot. The magnificent frigate bird is also yet to be seen but the trip list is approaching 100 (96).

2/26/15

Sabel Palms may be one of my favorite hiking areas; not for the birds, although I was told last year that red-cockaded woodpeckers could be found there, but for the wildflowers. I hiked there on the morning of 2/23/15 and found a number of interesting plants in bloom. I used the records for the morning to update the location entries of the plant database and was able to add two new entries, *Viola lanceolata*, the bog white violet, as identified with Hammer (2002) and the wild pennyroyal (*Piloblephis rigida*). I'm sure



I've seen the pennyroyal many times in the past but, for one reason or another, never added it to the database. I thought that *Gratiola ramosa* was another new entry but it turned out that the references regarding its family were confused and I had previously entered the species. This plant had small, upright to somewhat pendent flowers that were white and tubular. The bell-like flowers were separated into four sections distally and there were five sepals. The leaves were opposite, sessile and had several teeth near the tip. The flowers were on long petioles from the leaf axils. The entry for this plant was corrected to reflect the family Scrophulariaceae. Only the smaller species of yellow-eyed grass (probably *Xyris elliotii*) appeared to be in bloom on this visit.

Several plants were not identified to species although I know that I have id'd them in the past. I decided to use various references to write out short keys for use in the field for

some of these. For example, three or four St. Johnsworts were seen in bloom on this visit. According to the AFP, there are 12 species of *Hypericum* noted for Collier County, three of which I have tentatively id'd in the past. Unfortunately, inconsistencies between the AFP and my edition (2nd.) of Wunderlin & Hansen (2003) made it impossible to make such a short key for this genus. I was more successful with the genus, *Pluchea*, though, and a short key was developed for that genus. Last year, I had already gathered the information for the family, *Eriocaulaceae*. This is a bit more confusing because three genera are involved. Consequently, I made a key for the genera and then keys for the respective species.

Several other plants were seen in bloom but not positively identified. One looked like a fleabane that I likely saw before at this location. The plant had no basal leaves but had widely spaced, linear cauline leaves. There was a very slight suggestion of a light blue color to the flower head. The head had about 21 ligules and was approximately 5/8" wide including a 1/4" yellow central disc. Other than *E. quercifolius*, the only other *Erigeron* species listed by the AFP for Collier County is *E. vernus* but this is certainly neither of these species. I'm beginning to wonder if it may be one of the asters. Another aster-like plant that probably really is an aster was bluish in color with 28-30 ligules per head and a yellow disc. The leaves were linear and about 5 inches long but were only about 1/8 inch wide. I could not identify this plant with the available references.

Finally, another composite was found that could be the grassleaf goldenaster (*Pityopsis oligantha*). This plant was daisy-like with both yellow disc and ray flowers. The flower head was about 1 inch in diameter with an approximately 1/2" disc and had 15 rays/head. The leaves were cauline and linear with a grayish color, perhaps due to fine hairs. These hugged the stem and were concave when viewed from above. Only when I was attempting to identify the plant from the photos that I took did I notice that the upper leaves were scale-like. Unfortunately, the photos are not definitive. The plant was added to the database as an excluded species until the id can be confirmed.

A number of ferns were also noticed and the records for location correspondingly updated. Pinnae of some of the ferns were collected for observation with the digital microscope. Ironically, I saw one of the sword ferns, the group I've recently been reviewing, but I made no effort to identify it to species.

Relatively few birds were seen on this visit but a cooper's hawk was added to the trip list. Unfortunately, no red-cockaded woodpeckers were seen. As I was leaving the site I talked for a while with Martin Stavenhagen of K & M Bees and he gave me a jar of his organically produced honey.

On 2/24/15, I took a brief walk along the Fakahatchee boardwalk. I saw the young great horned owl and noticed that it was beginning to turn brown. I was not able to see the young eagle but was told that an adult had been sitting on the nest earlier. Later in the day I photographed several of the fern specimens collected yesterday with the digital microscope.

2/24/15 was the opening day of the 2015 Marjorie Stoneman Douglas Festival. Yesterday (2/25/15) I went on the fern walk that was part of that festival and was led by Jack and Elaine Bernenger. Fifteen people, including the Bernengers, hiked for about 1.9 miles along the east main gate, circumnavigating an alligator, to the Fakahatchee Hilton. Along the way we had a nice close up view of a cottonmouth. We had lunch there and then made the return trip. Throughout the walk, Jack and Elaine did a great job of pointing out the ferns as well as other plants of interest. We were able to identify 22 species of ferns including the goldenrod fern which we saw along Janes Scenic Drive on the way out of the park. I was actually encouraged by the fact that my previous identifications, especially regarding the genus *Thelypteris*, were confirmed by Jack. All four of the ferns of that group that I had identified along that path in the past were found, including the *T. dentata*. Jack pointed out how that species was readily identified because of its purple rachis and pinnales being very close together.

I was a little confused by Jack's use of the common names for the ferns of the *Nephrolepis* group, though. We identified three of the four species known to be in the park, excluding the Asian Sword fern, *N. multiflora*. Jack did indicate that that species could be seen in abundance in a field past the botanical garden. Jack was calling *N. cordifolia* the Boston fern and pointed out its smaller, closer pinnules with the ears of one touching the mid-vein of the adjacent pinnule.

Some of the ferns were pretty special. The hand fern was showing sporangia and, according to Jack, that as well as the halberd and goldenrod ferns were quite rare.

Jack also described other interesting fact about the ferns. For example, he mentioned how in the primitive ferns, such as the royal fern, all of the spores mature at the same time but that during evolution they developed mechanisms to scatter the time of spore development. He also pointed out the trichomes of the resurrection fern which open and close to conserve water. He indicated that the giant leather fern has the largest leaf of all plants and that the bracken fern was the plant of greatest global distribution, being found on all continents except Antarctica.

Five species of bromeliads and one orchid were also indentified along the route and described by Elaine. Two of these, the West Indian Tufted Airplant, *Guzmania monostrachia*, and the Giant Wild Pine, *Tillandsia utriculata*, were new to me and were added to the plant database. Jack also pointed out one of the orchids, the Rigid Orchid (*Epidendrum rigidum*) which was not in bloom at the time.

Few birds or other wildlife (other than the alligator and snake previously mentioned) were seen but several ruddy daggerwings (*Marpesia petreus*) and zebra longwings (*Heliconius charitonius*) were noted along the tram. As we were walking out, Jack mentioned to me that several other ferns (including bird-nest ferns) could be found along tram 9. This may be a point for a future hike for me.

Ferns		
Giant Leather Fern		Acrostichum danaeifolium
Eastern Mosquito Fern		Azolla caroliniana
Swamp Fern		Blechnum serrulatum
Long Strap fern		Campyloneurum phyllitidis
Hand Fern		Cheiroglossa palmata
Giant Sword Fern		Nephrolepis biserrata
Tuberous Sword Fern		Nephrolepis cordifolia
Wild Boston Fern		Nephrolepis exaltata
Royal Fern		Osmunda regalis
Goldfoot Fern		Phlebodium aureum
Goldenrod Fern		Pityrogramma trifolia
Ressurrection Fern		Pleopeltis polypodioides
Wisk Fern		Psilotun nudum
Bracken Fern		Pteridium aquilinum
Chinese Ladder Brake Fern		Pteris vittata
Water Spangles		Salvinia minima
Broad Halbred Fern		Tectaria heracleifolia
Downy Maiden Fern		Thelypteris dentata
Hottentot Fern		Thelypteris interrupta
Southern Shield Fern		Thelypteris kunthii
Marsh Fern		Thelypteris palustris
Shoestring Fern		Vittaria lineata
Bromeliads		
West Indian Tufted Airplant		Guzmania monostrachia
Northern Needleleaf		Tillandsia balbisiana
Cardinal Air Plant		Tillandsia fasciculata
Southern Needleleaf		Tillandsia setaceae
Giant Wild Pine		Tillandsia utriculata
Orchid		
Rigid Orchid		Epidendrum rigidum
<u>Plants Identified on the Fern Walk</u>		



2/28/15

Last year I was able to get the trip count over 100 (actually 105) before the end of February but I am yet shy of that mark by one bird. It seems a bad year for seeing some of the smaller songbirds. Warblers, as well as other common birds like cowbirds and flickers, have been difficult to find. Ann and I drove into Goodland earlier this week (2/26/15) and finally saw a group of cowbirds foraging in one of the yards there. Then today I saw a brown thrasher as Ann and I were checking out the local garage sales and then I saw a couple of purple martins over the retention ponds at the condo. Later we drove to Serenity Walk Park targeting a possible red-headed woodpecker or brown-headed nuthatch but had no luck with either. I did get over the 100 count by the end of February but then, who's counting?

While at Serenity Walk Park I did see several interesting plants. One was a large sedge, probably one of the larger flatsedges (*Cyperus*), but it was not positively id'd. I also saw a relatively small-flowered species of primrosewillow. Wunderlin and Hansen (2003) show 29 species of *Ludwigia* for Florida and 12 of these are shown by the AFP for Collier County. Using the "compare species" feature of this web site, I determined that this plant was most likely *Ludwigia octovalvis* (Mexican primrosewillow). Especially obvious was that the sepals were not as long as the petals. Checking my photos against those of the AFP seemed to confirm the id and those in Taylor (2013) seem to agree. Other plants seen were checked against their locations in the database and the file was updated as needed.

3/4/15

I met with a small contingent of the Bernenger group at Bear Island on 3/2/15. I got there early and scared up a limpkin along the channel north of the gate. Then on the south side of the gate I found a large number of apple snails as well as a few other fresh water snails. When the group came, one of the people, who appeared knowledgeable, indicated that the apple snails were of the invasive type because the spire was not flat enough. I collected a bunch of the snails for later identification.

Several of the plants seen were noted. Later, I used the notes to update the locations for the species in the plant database. One of the plants seen was recognized as a possible large rattlebox of the genus *Crotalaria*. The plant was about waist height with simple leaves. The leaves seemed to drop from the bottom up so that most of them were clustered near the top of the stems. The pea-like flowers were all yellow and the fruit was about 1 and 1/2" long. The AFP shows six species of *Crotalaria* for Collier County. According to Wunderlin and Hansen (2003), three of these can be eliminated because they have three-parted leaves. Of those remaining, *C. spectabilis* seems most likely. One of the cowpeas, probably *Vigna luteola*, was also seen. An aster was seen in bloom but none in the group could identify it.

A lot of ferns were seen during the walk. One I believed to possibly be the Asian sword fern and Jack concurred. The feature that called my attention to the plant was how the pinnae were turned at right angles to the rachis, forming an almost ladder-like effect. Jack thought that the hairs on the rachis were diagnostic but wasn't sure of the condition for the Asian sword fern. We were also clearly seeing two varieties of the bracken fern. The smaller variety had pinnules that were closer together and were a softer, lighter green.



BD shows the birds seen for the day. Interestingly, this was the first time I ever saw a swallow-tailed kite perched; unfortunately not close enough for a photograph. I also added a turkey to the trip list. The main target for the day was the panther, which the group had seen here in previous years but none was seen on this trip. Jack did see a deer and an otter.

As we were going back to the car, I found a large beetle on my shoulder. One woman in the group indicated that it was one of the boring beetles and I later searched the internet for a possible match. The beetle was likely the sculptured pine borer, *Chalcophora virginiensis* of the family Buprestidae according to what I was able to find. Several butterfly species were also seen including the white peacock, zebra longwing, one of the skippers with two white wing marks and

one resembling the pearly crescent from home, possibly the phaon crescent.

I had never gone beyond Hy.951 on Hy.75. So, on the morning of 3/3/15, Ann and I (with Cooch) got on Hy.75 from Hy.29 and drove to the Hy.27 exit. Then we followed Hy27 to Hy.9331 to the Everglades National Park. The drive was a bit disappointing, with nothing of particular interest to see. When we got to Homestead we visited the Fruit & Spice Park. Ann had seen it promoted on TV over the last year and was curious to see a jackfruit. Because we had Cooch with us we did the self tour instead of the guided tram tour so we probably missed a lot of what was interesting but Ann did get to see the jackfruit. Also, while we were there I heard and then saw white wing doves.

When we got to the Everglades National Park we drove straight through to Flamingo. The tide was high so shorebirds were out of the question and out of sight. We did get a good look (although not a good photo-op) at the crocodile behind the marine store. We also saw a couple of manatees and a long, thin and peculiar looking fish in the water. I looked in Alden et al (1998) and the closest thing I could find was a trumpetfish (*Aulostomus* sp.). Internet searches suggested that it may have been an immature one. A white butterfly was particularly active on the common beggar-ticks around the parking area. Some of the ones I saw had strange red marks on their wings although most of them lacked these marks. I thought that it was possibly a sex difference. Searching my references as well as the internet, I was not able to find any photos or descriptions of these marks. The butterfly appears to be great southern white butterfly, probably *Ascia monuste*, but I cannot be certain.



On the way back, I took a quick walk along the Anhinga Trail. It was a warm day (low 80's) and the cormorants were exhibiting their peculiar ventilating behavior. Only the commonest of the wading birds were seen.

Today, 3/4/15, after dropping Ann at Marco's South Beach, I went to Tigertail Beach with three targets in mind: red knots, prairie warblers and magnificent frigatebirds. When I got to the beach, one of the volunteers reported that three red knots could be seen in a group of willets along the near side of the lagoon. They were not knots! The birds had very long, somewhat downturned bills and a distinct brow line. I identified them as short-billed dowitchers. Neither did I see the other birds on the target list.

I then went to Mackle Park. Since I had seen purple martins at the condo, I hoped that the martin house was now busy with the birds; strike two. I then went to the library and reviewed some of the grasses in Nelson's Florida grass book. I decided that several of the grasses that I've been seeing are not yet in the plant database.

The following genera need some attention:

Andropogon: I'm quite sure that grasses of this genus are being seen at the beach as well as in several of the natural areas.

Phragmites: This genus has been pointed out by Jack Bernenger as well as Mike Owens. They seem to distinguish between a native and invasive species.

Dichanthelium: a small, few-leaved grass belonging to this genus (or possible Panicum) is often seen along the trails and roadsides in the Fakahatchee Strand.

Echinochloa: A large conspicuous grass, possibly of this genus, is seen near the end of the Big Cypress Bend boardwalk.

Setaria: A possible Setaria with short flower heads has been seen in a number of locations.

2/5/15

The recent rains have kept the water levels at TenK pretty high. When I went there this morning, although the bird diversity was good (31 species), the concentration of birds was not. Few birds were close enough for quality photographs. So, of course, the natural thing to do was concentrate on some of the plants, especially those in bloom or showing fruit. I took a number of photos of several vines including the passion flower, *Passiflora suberosa*. Both myrsine and marlberry were identified, the marlberry being in fruit at this time. Several other vines remain unidentified. When I was paging through Nelson (1996), though, I came across one of the shrubs I saw and photographed at Serenity Walk Park on 2/28/15. The photos that I took are very close to those in the reference and the plant was id'd as the yellow alder, *Turnera ulmifolia*, of the family Turneraceae; the same family as the piriqueta. Butterflies have been pretty active on recent outings. This morning I saw the gulf fritillary as well as the zebra longwing. I examined the leaves and stems of the passion vine, the supposed host plant for the longwing, but was unable to find anything.



After cleaning and rinsing the snails collected at Bear Island on 3/4/15, I spent some time today attempting to identify them. My only references were a couple of pdf files that I collected from the internet but it soon became very apparent that the material that I collected was not adequate for accurate identification using the taxonomic keys provided and even the two sources were inconsistent in the names of the species. Using the photos from the sources only, it appears that all of the apple snails that I collected are from the same species, probably *Pomacea diffusa*, the spike-topped applesnail. The largest of them was greater than 6 cm. high and the spire was quite elevated with fairly deep grooves. Another snail collected is probably the giant ramshorn snail, *Marisa cornuarietis*. A third species collected was a damaged specimen. It could be of the genus *Elimia* but I cannot be sure.

On 2/6/15 I met the Bernenger group at Hidden Cypress in Lee County. The group was led by a fellow by the name of Lee. He turned out to be a good leader if, perhaps, not guide. The group was somewhat uncoordinated and little of interest was pointed out. I noticed lots of graminoids during the walk; the site would be a good place to attempt their taxonomy. I checked the plant list for Hidden Cypress later and I'm sure that there are many species there than are on their list. Among those seen was likely the swamp flatsedge (*Cyperus ligularis*) which I've also seen at Serenity Walk Park. The location of this and a few other flowering plants was updated in the plant database. One of the plants seen was likely a species of St. Johnswort that I had not seen before. The plant list for Hidden Cypress has five species of this genus. When I compared the records of these five species in the AFP (filtered for Lee County), the plant was determined to be *Hypericum cistifolium*, the roundpod St. Johnswort. This species is also shown in Nelson (1996). Checking my database I found that I had previously id'd this plant at Sabel Palms but had mistakenly added it as *H. cristifolium*. This entry was corrected accordingly.

Seventeen bird species were seen along the road as I approached the Hidden Cypress site. Another eleven species were seen in the park. I was able to add the eastern meadowlark and northern parula to the trip list, although I only heard the parula. Diane Johnson offered the id.

3/8/15

It's a birdnest fern, Really! For several years, now, I've been puzzling over a fern that I've seen and photographed along the Big Cypress Bend boardwalk. It's on a log with a lot of resurrection fern and several smaller strap ferns and there is a sign on the boardwalk calling attention to the resurrection ferns. Once, I thought it might be one of the smaller species of strap ferns but, unlike them, it has serrated edges. I've noticed that it has grown very little, if at all, over recent years. I described the fern to Jack Bernenger a while ago and he indicated that a wild birdnest fern was in that same location. When I visited the boardwalk this morning



I took extra effort to see and photograph the fern — sure enough: wild birdnest fern (*Asplenium serratum*) of the family Aspleniaceae. The fern was added to the plant database bringing my list to 29 identified fern species.

I also spent some time this morning examining the species of *Crotalaria* growing along the road across from the boardwalk and collected some fruit from the plant to examine later. Using the key in Wunderlin & Hansen (2003) the plant keyed out as follows [p.441: 1, 8, 9, 10 — *C. pallida*]. Also, I found a publication at floridainvasives.org entitled: Rattlebox (*Crotalaria*) Species at JDSP which had a nice pictorial identification key. This seemed to confirm the id as *C. pallida*. I updated the

plant database entry with this identification.

3/10/15

Ann and I went to Tigertail Beach yesterday (3/9/15). We arrived just before low tide and were anticipating good birding and shelling. Such was not the case, though; none of the target birds were seen and very few good shells were found. I did find an interesting fighting conch shell, though. It had two slipper shells piled on top of each other on it. According to what I learned last year, the top shell should have been a male while the bottom one a female. I was going to collect the shell to bring back and photograph but I thought the slippers might still be alive so I returned it to the water. The only decent sand dollar that Ann found was more a quarter than a dollar and had a slight notch in it. We did see our first sea hare of the year, though. It was washed up on the beach.



3/15/15

The Kaczmareks joined us late in the afternoon on 3/11/15. Before their arrival Ann and I followed our usual Wednesday routine. My visit to Tigertail was pretty brief but I finally heard a prairie warbler while I was there. I then went to Mackle Park to find that the purple martins had finally arrived. We all went to Tin City on 3/13/15 and I watched the channel carefully for least terns. None were seen and when I later I checked the BD records for this bird I found that the earliest I had seen them in previous years was April 10th.

We went to the shell show on the morning of 3/13/15. I bought a few fossil shells as well as others to fill my \$3.00 bag. I focused primarily on gastropods, hoping to get new species for the collection. These will be examined later to see if I was successful.

On 3/14/15 Jerry and I took Mary Ann for her dialysis treatment. Having a few hours to kill before we were to pick her up, we drove to Lover's Key State Park but, since we had limited time, we decided not to pay the entrance fee (\$8.00) and drove, instead, to the dog beach to check out the area. While we were there we saw some shorebirds but they were too distant for confident identification. I did identify a few of the woody plants in the area including both red and black mangrove, buttonwood, sea grape and coinvine. Among the herbaceous plants was one of the glassworts. Across the road several Ipomoea vines were in bloom and I found a butterfly, later id'd as the mangrove skipper (*Phocides pigalion*), apparently pollinating them (Alden et al, 1998).

Across the road from the dog beach I found a small gastropod later id'd with Witherington & Witherington (2009) as the button snail (*Modulus modulus*) of the family Modulidae. This was a new shell for the collection and it was added to the FloCritters database. I also collected a large horse conch shell at the shoreline. In fact, I found two of them but the second one, in much better condition, had to be returned because it was being occupied by a large crab later id'd with the same reference as the giant red hermit crab (*Potrochirus diogenes*). There were also a couple of other smaller critters which quickly moved to the inside and were never positively id'd. Later I thought that they were another crab species or, possibly, one of the smooth brittle stars (*Ophioderma* sp.). Later, when I was cleaning the collected shell, I found both halves of several jingle shells on it. I also found that it had several limpet-like gastropods on it that were apparently still alive as were possible barnacles, as well. In fact, the shell was almost like an entire ecosystem all to itself. I guess, I inadvertently broke the rule about live shelling. Later I soaked the shell in bleach so it wouldn't begin to smell.



Later that day we went to Wooten's for a safari ride. It was very disappointing. We saw almost nothing and paid \$24 each for only a half hour ride.

3/17/15

Kaczmareks left on 3/16/15. Part of the rest of that day was spent looking at the shells bought at the shell show earlier (3/13/15). Several of those id'd were found to be additions to the shell collection and were added to the FloCritters database.

This morning, 3/17/15, I decided to go to Kirby Storter Park and get back into the B&B habit. At the end of the boardwalk I watched a wood stork as it engaged in its feeding behavior. As it employed its touch feeding with its bill, it also used its feet to stir up food and shaded the area with its wing. I took several photos of the behavior. Perhaps sensitized by the earlier fern walk with the Bernengers, I noticed several giant air plants (*Tillandsia utriculata*) growing at the end of the boardwalk. One of them had a flower stalk at least 6 feet long but, unfortunately, it wound through the surrounding trees and was lost to the camera. Elaine Bernenger had pointed out this species during the fern walk. Other bromeliads seen included the cardinal air plant (*T. fasciculata*), northern needleleaf (*T. balbisiana*) and the Spanish moss (*T. usneoides*). As I walked back along the boardwalk I saw three wild turkeys in the drying cypress swamp area and a house wren was seen in the more open area near the outhouses.



From the parking lot I began to walk south along the path leading between a small pine upland to the left and a cypress head to the right. In the open field I recognized several plants in bloom including the Small's flax (*Linum carteri*), showy milkwort (*Polygala grandiflora*), marsh fleabane (*Pluchia rosea*), coastal plain yellowtops (*Flaveria linearis*), oakleaf fleabane (*Erigeron quercifolius*) and the horrible thistle (*Cirsium horridulum*). I also recognized one of the grasses believed to be one of the setaria species. Many dragonflies were active at this time and several halloween pennants (*Celithemis eponina*) were recognized among them. Before I got to the pine area Jay Zimmerman called and indicated that he and Anna were going to stop for a brief visit so I returned to the car. On the way back to the condo, along Hy41, there were several black-necked stilts in one of the flooded areas. A good start back to the B&B; bird count 110.

3/20/15

I visited Tigertail Beach several hours after low tide on 3/18/15. I didn't cross the lagoon but did get several photos of a reddish egret and some willets. While walking in ankle high water on the near side of the lagoon I noticed lots of crown conchs moving about. One other small gastrodod was found but it remains unid'd at this point.

While Ann was at Marco's South Beach she found three shells of an interesting gastropod under some trees near the parking area. At first, I assumed that they were from the gulf and probably one of the snails of the Naticidae family. After a bit of study, though and some internet searches, I decided that they were likely land snails; possibly the Cuban brown snail (*Zachrysia provisoria*). This will be added to the FloCrittters database. Later in the day I checked out some of the shells found on earlier trips to Tigertail. Two of these were additional entries to the database.

On 3/19/15 I decided to drive the Turner River / Birdon loop. I started at the H.P. Williams wayside and drove all of the way to Bear Island, stopping at various locations to see birds or plants along the way. I went past Fire Prairie and wanted to hike a bit there but there were 100 or more black vultures at the entrance to the trail and I feared the damage they might do to the car. While in Bear Island I found Boykin's milkwort (*Polygala boykinii*). The plant consisted of several stems about 1-2 ft. tall, each ending with a spike of small white flowers. The leaves were very small and I noticed that the lower ones were in whorls of up to 7 but the upper ones individually spiraled around the stem. I initially id'd the plant with Hammer (2002) and confirmed it with Taylor (2013). The grammar in the Hammer reference could be interpreted to suggest that it is the upper leaves in whorls but I believe the id is correct. The AFP seems to confirm it also. The plant was added to the plant database. Exiting the Bear Island area I saw several small willow domes which I photographed.



3/2/15

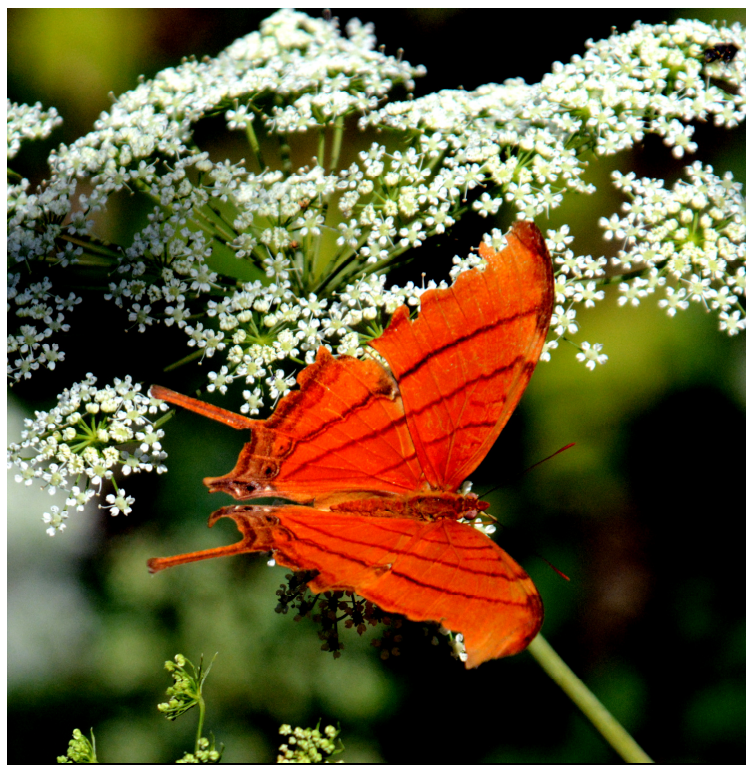
Things have been pretty quiet around the condo so far this year, biologically speaking, of course. Relatively few birds have been seen in the area, although both the purple martin and flicker have been seen several times and a barred owl is being heard quite close at night. Alligators have been seen only on occasion and, even then, just relatively small ones.

I've been following the Townsend's lead otherwise and they've put me

onto several good experiences. A couple of days ago they reported that they went to the Seminole Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum in Clewiston and that, on the way, they saw several crested caracaras. So Ann and I headed out there yesterday and, sure enough, on Snake Rd., as we approached the museum, two of them were sitting on fence posts across the roadside canal. The museum, itself was pretty neat and the signage along their boardwalk (about 1&1/2 mi. long) was exemplary. Much of the native flora and fauna was featured along with interesting notes about how the Seminoles used various plants and animals.

One of their stations identified the soft-leaved air plant (*Tillandsia variabilis*). This is one of the bromeliads that I had not seen in the past. The plant was too distant for close observation, though, so I did not add it to my list of identified plants. There were some huge water hemlocks (*Cicuta maculata*) at various locations along the walk and, on one of them, I saw a somewhat battered specimen of the ruddy daggerwing (*Marpesia petreus*). As we were leaving the museum an enactment of a cattle drive passed by. Apparently this is a once a year commemoration of past events in Seminole life. Unfortunately, we became part of the slow procession as we tried to leave the area.

When I later thanked the Townsends for the caracara tip, Fred mentioned that he had heard a Chuck-wills-widow the previous night in the Big Cypress swamp. Last night I sat in the lanai for a while and could hear one of them in the distance. That brings the trip total, as of yesterday (3/21/15), to 112. Ann has been asking how this year's count compares to last year's so I did a bit of checking in BD. That count for that date is two birds more than last year's. There is some question, though, about my identification of the prairie warbler at Tigertail. The bird songs of this species played from the iPod seem to be very different from what I remember hearing. I may possibly have to remove this from the trip list for this year if I do not confirm this species.



3/23/15

A special program on mud flat fauna was given for the Bernenger group by Marge Tunnell at Tigertail beach on 3/23/15. I joined the group just as Marge was showing spiral tube worms (possibly *Spirorbis corrugatus*) on the seagrass. Later, when she got a microscope from her car, we were able to see the organism close up. The group spread out and probed the lagoon with hands and nets and collected several very interesting organisms. Horseshoe crabs from the size of a fingernail to several inches long were abundant. Also, many of the true crustaceans were seen including spider crabs, a possible young blue crab and several varieties of shrimp including one Jack referred to as the broke-back shrimp and a very active green variety. We looked for sea horses without success but we did locate one of the pipe fish. Another fish was later id'd by Jack as the Anglefin whiff (*Citharichthys gymnorhinus*). Sea squirts were also found as were a number of mollusks including augers, ceriths, king conchs (and their egg cases), coffee melampus, button snails and bubble snails and their eggs. Diane Johnson found a huge, very active true tulip and I found a 5-6 inch lightning whelk.

Jack later emailed that he had identified one of the grasses on the sand dunes as the salt joint grass (*Paspalum vaginatum*). There was much discussion by the group of an organisms resembling a possible worm, a young sea hare or possibly a slug. Jack's email suggested that it was possibly the netted flatworm (*Pseudoceros texarus*) but the id is not certain.



3/27/15

When I was on the Tigertail Beach trip with the Bernenger group (see notes for 3/23/15), Richard Johnson told me about a location in the Picayune Strand where red-cockaded woodpeckers have been released and could be seen. I drove to that area on the morning of 3/24/15. I drove east from Hy.951 to the end of Beck Blvd. and then walked along the very sandy trail for, perhaps, about a half mile but was not able to locate the specific site. I later emailed Richard and he elaborated on the directions so that I can try again at a later time.

On the return to the condo I again stopped at the Serenity Walk Park in the hopes of finding red-headed woodpeckers and, possibly, brown-headed nuthatches. I was unsuccessful with both, even after playing the brown-headed nuthatch song from my iTouch several times. I did record in BD for the trip, though, because bluebirds were seen in the park. One of the vines was seen in bloom while I was there. It had alternate leaves that were broadest at the base and very sparse, small thorns. It could have been one of the Smilax species. I also looked carefully at the Cyperus species I saw there on the last visit. It had many basal leaves that were about 1/2"—5/8" wide and a leafless culm. Below the inflorescence was a group of eight bracts of various sizes.

Shelly and Dan joined us on Tuesday (3/24/15) and Matt and Nicole came the next day. Much of the time since then has been used for the usual touring and entertaining that comes along with such visits. There were several trips to the beaches, both Marco's South Beach and Tigertail Beach. While we were at the south beach, a beach that I normally spend little time at, I noticed many striped false limpets, presumably *Siphonaria pectinata*, attached to the rocks. All of those that I saw were alive and thus not collectable. I also found several apparent parchment tube worm tubes (*Chaetopterus variopedatus*) along the beach. Thursday was starfish day at Tigertail. Ann and I almost never see starfish there but on that day several of the thorny starfish (*Echinaster spinulosus*) were found. Unfortunately all of them were alive and needed to be released. Another sun bather found a nice lined sea star (*Luidia clathrata*) that we were able to see. In the past only the nine-armed sea star (*Luidia senegalensis*) had been seen at this beach. The starfish id's were done with Witherington and Witherington (2009). All this while Shelly sought seashells along the sea shore.

All but Nicole went to the Big Cypress Bend boardwalk on the morning of 3/26/15 and, except for Ann, to the TenK marsh trail this morning. Both areas had dried up considerably since my last visit. Nothing of particular interest was seen along the boardwalk but we did compile a list of 26 bird species at TenK. Interestingly, the bird list included two reddish egrets, one an immature and the other an adult of the dark morph. We also saw night herons. One was an obvious mature black-crowned and the other sure seemed to be an immature yellow-crowned. The white streaking was very subtle and its posture was much more erect than the immature black-crowned that I have often seen there. I did mark it as the yellow-crowned in the BD records. The kids also got what has been the best look so far this year of roseate spoonbills. While we were at TenK we ran into Jack and Elaine Bernenger. They were presumably looking for a mangrove cuckoo which the Johnson's had reported seeing there recently. No luck with that! Wild allamanda (*Pentalinon luteum*) and sleepy morning (*Walrtheria indica*) were seen in bloom along the trail.

3/31/15

We all went up to St. Petersburg for Bill Deegan's wedding on the 28th. Ann and I stayed at the Kaczmarek's for two nights; they being kind enough to dog sit for us on the night of the wedding. I visited Green Key late in the morning of 3/29/15. By the time I got there the beach area had quite a few day users already there and next to no birds were seen. As I left Green Key I hiked the loop at Boy Scout Preserve. Quite a few familiar plants were seen at these locations, both of the sweet clovers among them. At the entrance to the Boy Scout Preserve there was an interesting plantain-like plant. The plant had very fuzzy stems. All of the leaves were basal and they were widely toothed and hairy. The plant was likely *Plantago virginica*; listed for Pasco County by the AFP. Coral bean, one of the glassworts, goldenrod, spiny sow thistle, tasselflower and both of the previously identified saltbushes were seen at the preserve. Although seen several times, the spiny sow thistle has never been added to the species list. Either have the sweet clovers. It appears that the yellow sweet clover found in Pasco County is *Melilotus indicus*. All of these plants were added to the database.

On the morning of 3/30/15 I visited the Jay B. Starkey Wilderness Park and did some birding around the bike path and birding trail. Nothing worthy of note was seen among the birds although, interestingly, both the American and the fish crows were there. Several bold sand hill cranes were also there. This would be a great park for studying



oak; several species were seen, although unidentified. I did recognize a few plants that I've identified in the past, blackroot (*Pterocaulon pycnostachyum*) among them.

Two sedges were collected at Starkey. It appeared that both of them were *Carex* species. The first was pretty abundant in the open areas of the pine/oak woods. It formed large clumps with culms about 10" tall. The culms were sometimes red at the base and had several (2-3) leaves, the larger of which were about 7mm wide and were rounded on the ventral surface of the sheath. The culm was distinctly triangular (4mm/side) and sharply angled; reminding me of the all edge sedge back home. The inflorescences (at least the bottom ones, were on long, flat peduncles (3-4cm long). Long bracts exceeded the flowers. Each inflorescence seemed to have a few female flowers with several males flowers below them. The scale of the female flower exceeded the peryginia and was long and pointed; somewhat seemingly obscured by the bracts. I never located the stigmas, making me wonder if I actually had something other than a *Carex* sedge. The second sedge appeared like a very thin version of the 1st. It was slightly brownish red at the base of the culm. The culm was again sharply angled but only about 1mm per side. The leaves were 2mm wide. Several photos, both with the camera and the digital microscope, were taken.

The AFP shows 10 species of *Carex* for Pasco County. Several of these can be dismissed quickly as possible id's. The first of the sedges could be *C. nigromarginata* var. *floridana* judging by the photos found on the internet but a clear description has yet to be found. The second species is possibly the *C. godfreyi* judging by the photos on the AFP. Both species will be added to the plant list but the id's are somewhat tentative.

We returned to the condo on 3/30/15. Today (3/31/15) I went to TenK to see if I could locate the mangrove cuckoo that had been reported earlier. I had no luck with that but a fellow on the observation deck (Tom Trotta) reported that he had just seen two soras. I waited for quite a while but only got a fleeting glimpse of the bird as it jumped between clumps of vegetation. A thirty bird count for the morning, included a cooperative catbird.



4/4/15

I went to TenK on 4/2/15 hoping to get a much better look at both the sora and the prairie warbler which was pointed out on the previous morning. I was successful on both counts. Drying of the area is evident but the birds don't seem to be congregating; perhaps because of breeding activity. I did see a total of 32 birds for the morning, though, including another reddish egret. The prairie warbler seemed to be eating the fruit from the gumbo limbo tree as was the catbird on the previous morning. I also saw otters and

a marsh rabbit. The rabbits don't seem as abundant as last year. Gary and Kathy Stresman joined us for a couple of days and I took them back to TenK again on the morning of 4/3/15. We had 22 bird species for the morning. Gary and Kathy had good looks at the spoonbills, stilts and reddish egrets among the other birds. That's three times, this year, that I've seen reddish egrets at TenK. We also saw marsh rabbits again and an otter along the path. The Stresmans also had the pleasure of hearing an alligator roar.

4/5/15



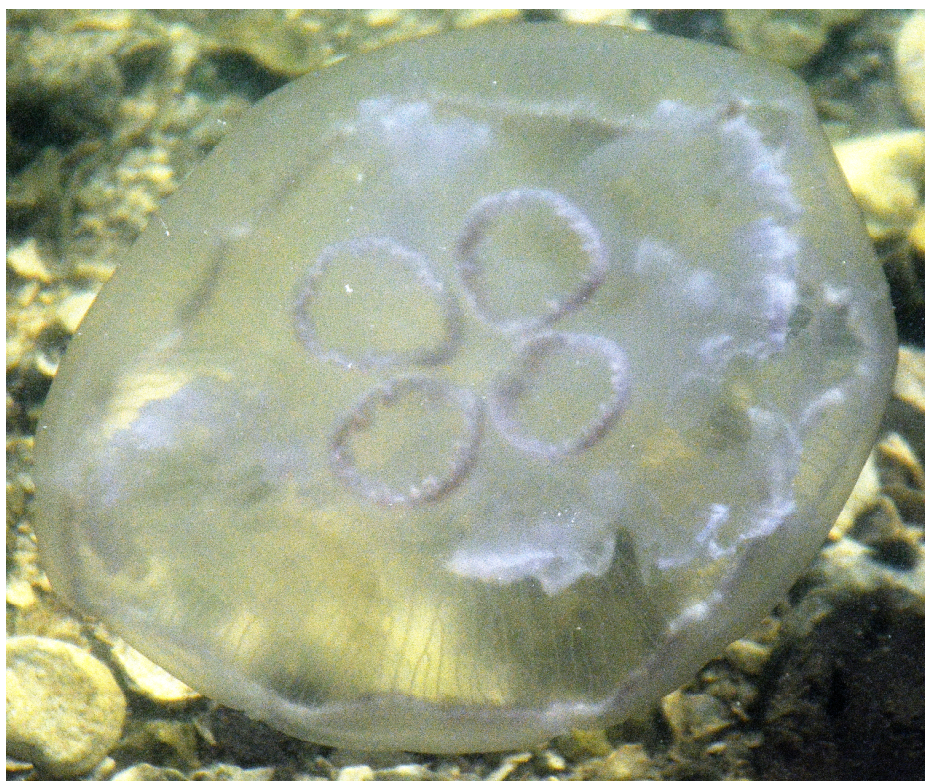
On Easter Sunday (4/5/15) I drove to the end of Shell Island road at the Rookery Bay Reserve. I walked the path through the mangroves hoping to see or hear a mangrove cuckoo. When I visited their education center on the previous day, one of the staff people indicated that they had been seen there recently. In spite of the fact that I played the mangrove cuckoo song through my iPod at several locations, no such bird volunteered for the morning list. In fact few birds at all were seen and there was no morning list. It was a great morning, though. Several interesting woody plants were seen and a number of very interesting sea creature were also seen.

One of the woody plants that I saw was in bloom and the flower reminded me immediately of those of the saltbushes (*Baccharis* Sp.). The leaves seemed to be simple and opposite at first but when I looked through Nelson (1994) and Taylor (2013) it appeared that I had misinterpreted them and that they were, in fact, compound. The bark was grey and lacked spines or thorns. The references suggested the Florida keys blackbead (*Pithecellobium keyense*). The AFP doesn't show this species for Collier County but

does list the catclaw blackbean (*Pithecellobium unguis-cati*). That is probably the plant that I saw and it will be added to the plant list. From the various photos in the AFP and the references, it appears that the fruit is probably even more diagnostic. I'll go back another time to check it out. The grey nicker or nickerbean (*Caesalpinia bonduc*) was also seen as it has been in the past. This plant was in fruit and I remember seeing it at the dog beach along Estero Blvd when I was there with Jerry Kaczmarek. Another plant seen along the path was a small shrub, seemingly without thorns, that had relatively well separated white berries about 1/2—5/8" in diameter. The leaves were somewhat waxy and were small; the widest part being toward the tip. The leaf shape and scarcity of the berries seemed to eliminate the snowberry. Decent photos were taken but the plant is, as yet, unidentified.

The interesting sea creatures were invertebrates; sea squirts and the nine-armed sea star among them. I also saw a very active jellyfish moving through the water. According to Witherington & Witherington (2009) it was the moon jelly (*Aurelia aurita*). The four visible lobe-shaped gonads were slightly violet, making this a probable male according to the reference.

I am still uncertain of the identification of probably the most interesting of the invertebrates seen. It appeared to be a soft-bodied, possibly colonial form of some type. Somewhat grayish in color, it had one to several openings which were closed when the animal was disturbed. My unfamiliarity with sea creatures was apparent as I tried to even put it in a phylum. It is probably, though, one of the tunicates. Internet searches suggest possibly *Styela plicata* or a relative. I'll continue to attempt to identify it.



On my way back to the car I stopped and took a few photos of a couple of small anole-type lizards who did not seem to be getting along well together. I think that they were the brown anoles but the identification of all of these small lizards is still pretty confusing. By the car I saw some interesting ant nests that looked like miniature grand canyons and then I found what were probably ant lions. To confirm that they were ant lions and not just another type of ant, I pinched a bit of sand into the hole and, sure as heck, they threw it right back at me.

The Spanish bayonet or aloe yucca (*Yucca aloifolia*) was seen and photographed as I exited the reserve. It was found just beyond the entrance to the Briggs boardwalk on the opposite side of the road. I believe I've seen this plant in the past, particularly in the restricted area along Hy.92 going into Marco Island, but it has never been added to the plant database, Done!

4/14/5

The girls joined us on 4/6/15 and spent the first couple of days settling in and trying out the pool. After several failed attempts to wake Madison for a requested birding morning I went to TenK alone on 5/8/15. The area continues to dry considerably but most of the wading birds can still be seen. It appears to me that most of the great blue herons that I see are not mature birds. In fact, at one spot there were ten immature great blues' relatively close together. I wondered if these were the birds that were not successful in mating this year while most of the mature birds were breeding in the rookeries. While I was there I met Tom Trotta again and he told me that he had seen and heard a mangrove cuckoo just a bit down the path yesterday—today he was toting a camera hoping to see it again. He also told me about areas within Picayune Strand State Park where I could see several of the woodpeckers including the red-headed as well as the hairy. Also, according to him, there are several clusters of red-cockaded woodpecker to be found in the area of the Picayune beyond the Sable Palm trailhead.

After I left him and continued back toward the observation deck I heard the distinct call of the mangrove cuckoo. As I was listening to it I reported to another fellow coming along what I was hearing. He quickly agreed and then showed me several pictures of the bird that he had just taken. I waited at the observation deck until the bird stopped calling. I never saw the bird but the identification is certain and it was recorded in the BD list for the morning.



That afternoon Ann and I took the girls to the Bird Rookery Swamp hoping to see one of my favorite alligators lying across the path. It wasn't there but we did see a few turtles and wading birds in the area. We also saw several of the apparent Florida green anoles. Some of these showed hope for the future.

We took the girls for a Mangrove Wilderness Tour out of Everglades National Park in Everglades City on 4/9/15. The trip was certainly worth the \$40 fee but the captain didn't seem to know a lot about the mangroves and gave little narration to the tour. We crossed Chokoloskee Bay and went up the Turner River. I was surprised at how few the airplants were compared to what we saw on the canoe trip Ann and I took a couple of years ago in which we came from the fresh water side and saw an abundance of them. Although the captain said little, it was interesting to see where different mangroves dominated in different areas. Little other vegetation was recognized other than some of

giant leather ferns (*Acrostichum danaeifolium*). Birds were not abundant and, try as I did, I couldn't see or hear a mangrove cuckoo. We saw several (4 or 5) of what our guide called the Florida king snakes (*Lampropeltis getula*) but my references suggest it was the Florida water snake (*Nerodia fasciata*). Allen et al (1998) suggests that it was the mangrove race of the species but Bartlett & Bartlett (2003) makes no mention of a mangrove race. We also saw quite a few mangrove tree crabs (probably *Aratus pisonii*). Our guide also showed us one of the Colusa Indian mounds in the mangroves.

In the afternoon of that day we went to Tigertail Beach. The girls walked the beach and sun bathed with Ann while I searched for shells as usual. A nice specimen of the cayenne keyhole limpet (*Diodora catenensis*) was collected as well as several of the bubble-snails, augers and jujubes. I also collected several of the smaller arc shells hoping that later examination may reveal some that are not yet in the collection.

On 5/9/15 we went to Marco's South Beach. Red as they already were, the girls wanted to do more sunning on the beach and I wanted an opportunity to photograph the striped false limpets (*Siphonaria pectinata*) that I had seen there in the past. I noticed



that although Witherington & Witherington (2009) show this species for Florida, the distribution that they indicate is limited to the Atlantic coast through the keys but excludes the Gulf coast. The web site of the Smithsonian Marine Station at Fort Pierce (http://www.sms.si.edu/IRLSpec/Siphonaria_pectinata.htm) agrees with this distribution. Comparing my photos with the pictures in the references, though, leaves little doubt about the id. Several sponges were also collected from the beach along with a few shells.

Before taking the girls to the beach for the third straight day, I went birding at TenK on 2/11/15. Just after crossing the bridge I noticed a strong odor of nectar from a flowering gumbo limbo tree and the humming of the bees was almost as loud as the more distant traffic. The area was drying pretty much now and large mud flats were exposed. Both the greater and lesser yellowlegs were present along with black-necked stilts. Having both yellowlegs in the same frame gave me a nice opportunity to see the differences

between them. Besides the obvious size difference, it appeared that the lesser yellowlegs had a more distinct eye stripe while the greater species had more extensive bars on its flanks. The differences didn't seem to match exactly with the drawing in Sibley (2000) but I cannot be sure that the birds being compared were at the same stage of development. Again it appeared that most of the great blue herons were younger birds and that was true of the roseate spoonbills as well. Unfortunately, no cuckoos were seen or heard. I noticed again, as I have in the past, how similar the feeding behavior of the tri-colored heron is to that of the reddish egret. Both seem to prance in the water and frequently shade the water from the sun by spreading their wings. According to Pranty (2005) only one of the 28 bird species listed for this morning is not a breeding bird for Florida and that one is listed as an irregular breeder (blue-winged teal). I'm not seeing the migrants! As I was returning toward the observation platform a small mammal ran across the path and back again. It could have been the marsh rice rat shown in Allen et al (1998) but I didn't get a good enough look to be sure. I also noticed a marsh rabbit on one of the red mangrove islands; apparently they do swim (or at least wade).

We drove to Largo on 4/13/15 to take the girls to the Tampa airport. We stayed the night with the Flanagan's and left for the return trip the next morning (4/14/15). On the way back we decided to take the scenic route and visit the Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park (33104 NW 192 Ave., Okeechobee, FL). As is often the case with such trips, we arrived at the preserve with noon approaching, probably the worst time of the day for wildlife watching. The park is known for its sparrows, especially the Florida subspecies of the grasshopper sparrow. But to see them, we were told, one has to be ready to hike into possibly wet areas. The day was very hot and we were not prepared for such a hike. Needless to say, we didn't see them. We did see a few birds, though, including the wild turkey, common yellowthroat and white ibis but no records were kept for the day. Along the highways we also saw sandhill cranes, many eastern meadowlarks and several of the herons and egrets.

4/17/15

I went into the Picayune strand well beyond the Sabel Palm trail head on the morning of 4/15/15. My idea was to seek the woodpeckers that Tom Trotta told me were there. Unfortunately, though, I got cowardly with my car and some of the huge sand traps in the road so I simply pulled into one of the more accessible roads and hiked a bit from the car. Judging from Google Maps, I was on Lazy Day H, just west of Irgang Rd. Almost immediately I heard several bobwhite quail and finally saw one of them on a stump close to the ground. I took successive photos as I approached the bird and got, at least, definitive pictures of the bird. This was not only a trip count but a Florida count. A few other birds were also recorded in BD for the morning but, unfortunately none of the woodpeckers other than the red-bellied.

A number of plants were also examined and recorded



for the site in the plant database. Of special interest was the starrush whitetop (*Rhynchospora colorata*). This is a plant that I've seen many times in the past but have never identified it to species. According to Taylor (1992) *R. colorata* usually has fewer than 7 bracts subtending the flowers. Those that I examined had six. A similar star rush (*R. latifolia*) has seven or more bracts. I finally decided to record this in the database as *R. colorata*. I also saw probable false foxglove (*Agalinis fasciculata*), identified with Hammer (2002). This plant had needle-like cauline leaves with tubular flowers opening into five sections. The flowers were often seen to be in pairs. This was also added to the database.

While walking along one of the sandy trails I saw definite cat prints along with deer prints. After checking with several online references I am quite confident that the tracks were from a panther; They appear much too large for a bobcat. Also seen was a yellow rat snake about four feet long and a black racer somewhat shorter.



The Big Bend Boardwalk in Fakahatchee Strand offered a possible trip mark so I went there on the morning of 4/16/15. I was fortunate to find a northern water-thrush in the wet area just before the observation deck. The strand is really drying up as is most of the area. Perhaps as a consequence, there were several more of the larger alligators along the boardwalk. There were two in the gator hole at the end as well as

another two in the deeper area near the beginning of the boardwalk. Another was seen in a somewhat enlarged, deeper section of the creek leading to the boardwalk. I'm wondering if the general drying of the area is causing the gators to seek out deeper water. Although the alligator activity around the condo has been relatively quiet so far this year, we did see two larger ones in the retention pond yesterday afternoon. Perhaps they too have come in from surrounding drying areas. There seemed to be a little interaction between the two of them. Perhaps we'll see a repeat of the alligator fights of last year.

Terns seen at Lover's Key State Park on 4/17/15 brought the trip list for the year over the 120 mark. When Ann and I went there I saw four species of terns, among other birds, and three of them were new for the year. In fact, the sandwich tern was not only a trip mark, it was also a Florida mark and a life mark as well. I got a few fairly decent photos of these birds as well as others. Also, gopher turtles were pretty abundant. I didn't record plant species for the trip but nickerbean (*Caesalpinia bonduc*), sea grape (*Coccoloba uvifera*), scorpiontail (*Heliotropium curassavicum*), coinvine (*Dalbergia ecastaphyllum*) and others previously identified were seen. The shelling was not particularly good but I did pick up a few small arcs for possible later id.



4/20/15

I went to Tigertail on 4/18/15. For the first time this year shorebirds were on the near side of the lagoon although there were only a few in number and variety. I did get a few good photos of some of the plovers and sandpipers that were still around. Also many fiddler crabs were cooperative photographic models; a 6-lined racerunner not so much. I decided to birdwatch in style this day. I went to the refreshment stand and ordered a Boddington. Then I sat and drank my beer, watching the sky for a possible magnificent frigatebird. The beer was good but the bird never showed.

Ann and I took a short walk to the observation deck at TenK about mid day on 4/19/15. The area is almost totally dried up and, except for the possibility of a mangrove cuckoo, might not warrant a return this year. Next to no birds were seen except cormorants and vultures. The most notable things seen were large adult lubber grasshoppers. When disturbed they did not fly but another unidentified flying species was also present.

I remember that last year I saw goldfinch taking thistle seed from the horrible thistle along Janes Scenic Drive in the Fakahatchee Strand. I went there on the morning of 4/20/15 but was not able to repeat the observation for this year. A few birds were recorded in BD for the morning but there were no new marks for the year. I did spend some time cataloguing the plants that I saw, especially those in bloom, and the location information of the plant database was updated accordingly. A couple of the plant observations were especially notable.

The strand was very dry at the time of this visit. In fact, even the areas around the culverts were mostly dry. In one of the areas that is usually flooded, but dry at this time, I saw a plant in bloom that immediately reminded me of one of the *Sabatias*. Although the flower was not totally open, I did take a few photos to assist in the identification of the plant. The photos show that, unlike with the other *Sabatias* I've seen, the flowers of this plant were subtended by a series of six leaves or bracts. The AFP shows five species of *Sabatia* for Collier County and the only one with such bracts showing in the photos on the web site was *S. calycina*. This species is listed on the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park Plants list that Mike Owens gave me several years ago. This species is already listed in the plant database.



In Wisconsin the Madder family confuses me with the bedstraws. In Florida the family does the same with the buttonweeds, false buttonweeds and other related species. Growing very close to the *Sabatias* was a plant of this family identified as the poor Joe (*Diodia teres*). The photos in Taylor (1992) show that this species is very similar to the buttonweed (*Diodia virginiana*) but, according to the description, has four stamens instead of only two as in *D. virginiana*. My photo of the plant clearly shows the four stamens and the species was added to the plant database. The other plants of the Madder family, especially those in the genera *Hedyotis* and *Spermacoce* were problematic and need to be studied more carefully as they are found again. Until then, they will be added to the plant list as excluded species:

One of these, by the photos in Taylor (1992), could well have been *Hedyotis corymbosa* (also known as *Oldenlandia corymbosa*), although the species is not shown in the aforementioned list of Fakahatchee plants. It is listed by the AFP for Collier County. Its leaves were small (1-1½x1/2-3/8"), lanceolate and widely spaced on the stem. Small flower heads in the leaf axils had just one or two flowers in bloom at a time. Each flower had four white petals.

Another could have been *Spermacoce assurgens* (*Spermacoce remota*), a species that is listed for the strand. In this plant the leaves were still opposite but closer together. The flower heads were somewhat larger with two or three white flowers in bloom at a time.

A third species could have been one of the plants commonly called false buttonweeds. Although the terminal leaves were in paired, the lower leaves were in whorls of four to six. The flowers were in round, terminal heads subtended by two leaves. The flowers were white and again four-parted but not as open as in the previous species. The leaves measured about 1/4x1/2-3/8". This plant could have been *S. verticillata*.

A particular shrub was found growing abundantly along the west main tram. It was about three feet tall with opposite, toothed leaves. I couldn't find an open flower but some that appeared ready to open were somewhat orange-yellow in color. These fell

quickly at the least disturbance. The fruit was a peculiar five-parted one which turned dark brown to black as it matured. The bark was grey to light brown. The plant is as yet unid'd.

While examining the plants I also found a snail which I believe is the native apple snail (*Pomacea paludosa*). I remember Mike Owens saying that the invasive varieties have not yet been seen in the park. This snail is slightly different from the others that I collected earlier at Bear Island but the differences are not very convincing. The most obvious difference is that the spire of the native species seems to be more condensed (if, indeed, what I have is the native species). This seems to be confirmed by AN IDENTIFICATION MANUAL FOR THE FRESHWATER SNAILS OF FLORIDA by Fred G. Thompson downloaded earlier.

4/24/15

Ann and I went to Tigertail Beach on 4/22/15. we were perhaps a bit crazy since the sky was threatening rain and there was little sunshine (actually a few drops did fall). Ann did her usual sand dollar thing, finding only three, while I probed through piles of shells looking for new species to the collection or nice specimens of those already collected. I collected quite a few shells and at least three of them did turn out to be new. These were added to the FloCritters database. I may find others when I look through them more carefully. Among those collected were a lot of the smaller arcs which may turn out to be species new to the collection.

On Monday, 4/21/15 I was on my way to the Loop Road when I drove into a torrential downpour. The sky was dark as far as I could see so I turned around and returned to the condo. I tried again on Thursday (4/23/15) with much better luck but even the culverts alongside the road were pretty dry. I drove my usual route east to the turn around and then back to Hy41. Only one alligator was seen and that was at the Sweetwater Strand. I did add one plant to the database, though. A firebush (*Hamelia patens*) of the family Rubiaceae was found along the side of the road at one of the culvert areas. On the way back I stopped at Gator Hook and catalogued a few of the plants in bloom. Nothing new was seen there.

Later that day I dropped Ann at the Immokalee casino and drove on to the C.R.E.W Marsh Trail. I walked the pine flatwoods area and it was clearly the best wildflower area I've found (although the Sabel Palm trail is close). I thought I had found a new species of shrub for the database but it turned out to be the chocolate plant (*Bretonica peluda*). I'm used to seeing this as a small herbivorous plant and had no idea it grew to a shrub form. I also noticed that the pineland heliotrope that I was seeing differed from those I saw earlier at Gator Hook. Those at Gator Hook were distinctly yellow while these were white. I also saw what appeared to me to be one of the phloxes. Both its white flowers and its leaves resembled a phlox but no phlox species are listed by the AFP for Collier County and none of my plant references seemed to show the species. I did take photos of the plant. Plants of the Ericaulaceae were abundant along the trails but I was too lazy to examine them enough to even distinguish the genera.

There were quite a few plants of the family Fabaceae in bloom. These were of various colors including white, yellow and purple. The white ones had compound leaves with seven leaflets and appeared to be *Galactea elliotii* by the AFP. The purple ones had three leaflets and may also have been of this genus. The AFP shows three purple species of this genus for Collier County (*G. striata*, *G. volubilis* and *G. regularis*) but I needed information about the fruit in order to distinguish between them and I didn't collect that information.

Several other plants were seen, some later identified and others not. Those that were identified had their location updated in the plant database. A number of those identified were new species for me and were added to the plant database:

- Drumheads (*Polygala cruciata*) — family Polygalaceae
- Bachelor's Button (*Polygala baldwinii*) — family Polygalaceae
- Grass-Pink (*Calopogon tuberosus*) — family Orchidaceae
- [listed earlier as excluded—see notes]
- Pine-Hyacinth (*Clamatis baldwinii*) — family Ranunculaceae
- Hawkweed (*Hieracium megacephalon*) — family Asteraceae
- Galactea elliotii* — family Fabaceae (discussed earlier)

The only vertebrate seen along the flatwoods trail was the gopher turtle. A dragonfly seen along the trail was id'd as the eastern pondhawk (*Erythemis simplicicollis*).





4/27/15

Lately I seem to have the birding areas all to myself. Most of the snowbirds (of the human type) have returned to the north along with many of the real birds. Local birds seem to be either nesting or have sought out areas where the water may be deeper. And I'm still trying to match last year's count.

On 4/25/15 I made another attempt to see the mangrove cuckoo at the TenK marsh trail. I walked all of the way to the end and played the iPod recording of the bird several times but it never responded and I neither heard nor saw it. I did notice, though, that the drying mud flats along the trail which used to attract the long-legged waders have become inundated with shorebirds. I was able to record both yellowlegs, dunlin, killdeer, semipalmated plover and least sandpiper for the morning. I also saw one of the dowitchers but it was too distant for confident identification (if there is such a thing for dowitchers). Had I been wise enough to bring the scope along I probably would have been able to identify other shorebirds as well. I also got good looks at an otter and a marsh rabbit. Adult lubber grasshoppers have been seen along the trail lately and I photo'd one on this date. Perhaps I should have apologized for all of its relatives that I've dissected in my professional career.

The very showy glades morning-glory was in bloom as was the yellow alamanda. The alamanda was not only seen twisting around some of the mangroves but it was also growing straight up in the clearing at the end of the trail. I was also fooled by the sleepy morning which was growing along the ground in several places. Ground cherries and southern beeblossom were also in bloom.

The Big Cypress Bend boardwalk did produce the 122nd bird on 4/26/15. After a quiet morning with a count of only 15 birds, I did see a yellow-bellied sapsucker for the first time this trip. Little else was notable for the morning.

Monday (4/27/15) was a five woodpecker morning at the Sabel Palm trail. A six woodpecker morning might have included a red-cockaded woodpecker but such was not to be the case. The red-headed woodpecker and common nighthawk did push the trip count above last year's, though; 124 and counting. I also saw a cottontail rabbit along the path.

A species of *Pluchea* with distinctly petioled leaves was seen along the trail. This was probably *Pluchea odorata* which has been identified before at this location. I also examined another plant seen earlier at this location. I've been undecided about the identification of this plant but believe it is probably an aster. The plant was about knee high and was somewhat wiry in stature. Its leaves were sparse and alternate, were very narrow and linear. The flower head was 1/2—5/16" in diameter with about 23 white ligules that had a very slight tinge of pink. The 1/8" disc was yellow. The phyllaries were narrowly triangular and occurred in at least three rows with one or two occurring lower on the receptacle. These had green centers. I have yet to find an aster appearing like this in any in my references.



When I left the Sabel Palm trail I drove further into the Picayune Strand to see the bobwhites that I saw there earlier and record them for the morning.

5/4/15

We left POI and travelled to the Kascmarek's on 4/30/15. The next morning I visited Grey's Preserve Park, a place I hadn't visited for several years. I had forgotten how nice the park was and enjoyed the visit. The location fields in the plant database were updated

for several of the plants seen in bloom. Among those in bloom was one of the wild coffees. Those seen were of the less shiny species, probably *Psychotria sulzneri*. I noticed that neither of the species of wild coffee listed for Pasco County in the AFP had ever been added to the plant database although I'm sure that both have been seen. These were added at this time. I also found a plant of the pea family in bloom. It was a climbing vine with large purple flowers measuring about 1&1/2" long. Its leaves measured about 4" long. They were three parted with the middle leaflet having a longer stalk than the other two. The largest leaflet was about 3&2 x 1&1/2". The leaflets were widest near their bases. I took several photos of the plant but was not able to id it. I also photo'd a plant probably in the Smilax group that had very large leaves. As well as an interesting sedge most likely of the *Carex* genus.

The ferns at Grey's could use further study. I did find and photograph one that seemed like it would be easily distinguished. The plant reminded me of the sensitive fern. Its rachis was winged but the pinnules originated in an alternate fashion. An online search for "ferns of Florida" resulted in photos of *Woodwardia areolata*, the netted chain fern, from the Center of Invasive and Aquatic Plants of the University of Florida (<http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/node/473>). Photos in Nelson (2000) were less helpful. Although Nelson suggests that the fern is distributed throughout the state, the range map on the AFP shows it to be restricted to the north and central counties. The plant was added to the database. I also found climbing ferns at several locations. My photos suggest *Lygodium japonicum* although *L. microphyllum* is also listed for the county by the AFP. The photos in Nelson (2000) also suggest the former species.



We left New Port Richey for home at 3:30AM on 5/2/15. After terrible traffic delays between Macon and Atlanta and again in Nashville we got to Paducah at 6:16 PM. We left Paducah at 7:50A.M. with ETA for home just after 2PM. As we drove north we passed up the spring. The landscape in Kentucky was fully leafed out but by the time we got to Chicago, only a few trees were leafed out. In spite of several construction zones and a few pit stops we arrived home pretty much on schedule to see only the shrub layer fully in leaf.

Summary

This was an exceptionally hot winter in Florida. Most of April was in the upper 80's and the low 90's were not unknown. The TV weather folks reported that the high morning temperatures for April were record breaking. As a result, the sites that I normally visit (TenK, Fakahatchee Strand, and the Loop road) dried up considerably and the birding in those areas got pretty disappointing as the month of April progressed. In spite of this I did manage to surpass last year's count thanks to adding several new species to the Florida list (northern bobwhite, common nighthawk and the mangrove cuckoo even though it was never seen). But the count was still below the record count of 2013. I did, indeed, have "Fun with Ferns", thanks to Jack Bernenger. I now feel reasonably confident with the identification of 30 species (although a little bit more practice with the sword ferns would be in order). I also seem now to recognize some of the bromeliads I had previously confused. There were additions to the shell collection; some of them bought and others collected. A few new species of plants were id'd and much time was spent updating the location entrees of the plant database. I saw more otters this year than in the past and both the marsh and cottontail rabbits were identified. Unfortunately, no bears, panthers or bobcats were seen, much less photographed.