

Florida 2020

2/5/20

The beginning of our 2020 trip to Florida was delayed by some of Wisconsin's seasonal weather. We left, one day later than planned, on Sunday, January 26, after several days of snow. The trip was uneventful and we arrived at Matt's late that afternoon. Having just had knee surgery two months before, I was looking forward to a relaxing time with Matt and Nicole. We spent a couple of days with them and then moved on to Tifton, GA. We spent one night in Tifton. After Ann went to purchase some pecans, we moved on to Florida on 1/30/20..

The Florida welcoming center is where I generally see my first Florida bird. I tried to keep my eyes from the sky on the way there in the hopes that it would be something unusual, or at least interesting. Ann reported seeing a house sparrow but I didn't see any birds at the center. I thought I might have heard boat-tailed grackles but I wasn't sure and did not mark them for the trip. Shortly later I saw a turkey vulture and recorded it as my first Florida bird for 2020. As we continued along Hy.75, boat-tailed grackles and great egrets were seen. When we got to Hy 52, there were three sandhill cranes long the road, but, other than that, the birding was poor, especially as compared to past years. In previous years I would see many of the long-legged waders along this highway but recent, extensive development in the area has eliminated most of the natural areas.

We arrived at the Kaczmarek's later that day and, as usual, spent a couple of days with them. Jerry's pond had both Muscovy ducks and mallards. I suspect that these were both hybrids with domestic fowl but I counted them anyway. A palm warbler was seen cleaning the screen of his Lanai and Eurasian collared doves were seen along the streets of New Port Richey.

On 1/31/20 Jerry took Ann and me on a tour of some of Port Richey's parks that were located on a map by one of the city officials. Red-breasted mergansers, white ibis, ring-billed gull, and wood storks as well as a cardinal were seen. It was high tide; we saw no shorebirds.

We arrived at the condo on 2/1/20. A loggerhead shrike was waiting on the wire along Newport Drive. Because of my recent surgery I could not pay homage to the Fakahatchee Strand in the usual way (a walk along the Big Cypress Bend boardwalk). Instead, I drove to along Janes Scenic Drive on the morning of 2/2/20. I recorded only 12 bird species along the drive, including some from Hy41 (in the Fakahatchee).

Ann beached at Marco's South Beach on both the mornings of 2/4/20 and 2/5/20. I took those opportunities to check out a few of Marco's natural areas. There was no sign of the eagles that nested in Marco Island's nature preserve last year; I could not even find the nest from last year. Mackle Park was pretty quiet on the first day (2/4/20). A couple of moorhens and Eurasian doves was all it offered. But on 2/5/20, I was happy to find a couple of magnificent frigate birds at the park. There was no sign of the purple martin house. I also found a gopher turtle along () road on the way to the beach on that day. It was very close to the road, digging in the grass; seemingly feeding on the grass and, perhaps, its roots. Several decent photos were taken.



2/8/20

On the morning of 2/6/20, I did the Turner River / Birdon loop. I only recorded 19 bird species for the morning but, given how early it was in the year's Florida trip, many of these were trip marks.

As of 2/7/20, 37 birds had been seen this year in Florida. This compares to 57 by the time of this checkpoint last year. This is especially bad given that last year was the worst year on record. But, because of my knee surgery, I did little birding at Kaczmarek's and the only birding I have done this year, so far, has been from the car or the condo. Hopefully, as the knee heals, I'll have opportunities to catch up with earlier years.

2/11/20

We followed our usual Sunday routine on 2/9/20 and I took the opportunity to record a couple common city birds in BD. Several others still remain as easy marks for the trip.



I drove into Everglades City on the morning of 2/10/20 to see if the Baron River was at low tide and I could possibly see some shore birds. The river was pretty high, though, so I turned around and drove to Janes Scenic Drive. Shortly along the prairie portion of the park I ran into Fred and Alyce Townsend and we discussed what each of us has seen thus far this year. They were looking for a king rail which was reported by Eric Bauer. When I continued along the road, I saw an interesting fern growing on a previously burned cabbage palm.

The fern had pinnate leaves, each with about 12 leaflets. The leaflets were toothed and left a small knob when separated from the rachis. The rachis was green. I thought the fern was one of the spleenworts but I was not able to positively identify the species.

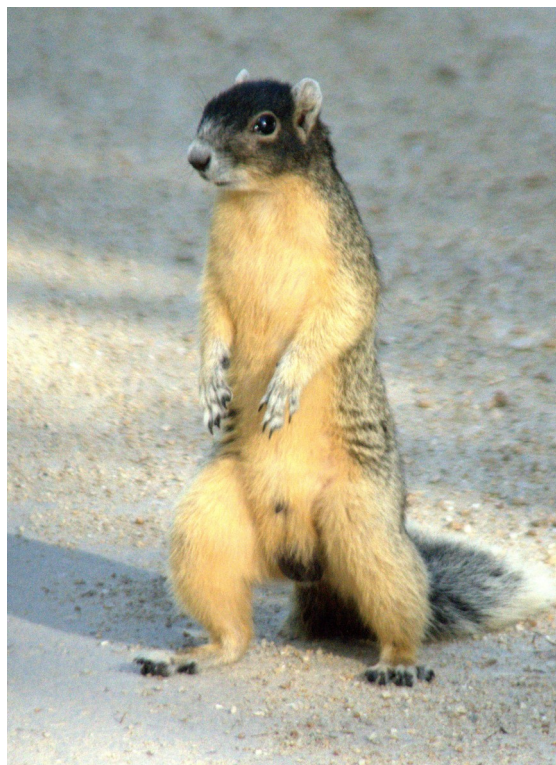
Only two species of spleenworts are shown for the Fakahatchee Strand by the IRC. One of these is the *Asplenium serratum* (the birdnest fern) and this was definitely not the species seen. The other, the eared spleenwort (*A. erosum*) was also unlikely. Judging by the photos in Nelson (2000), the most likely candidate is the toothed spleenwort (*A. trichomanes-dentatum*) but this species is not found in the Fakahatchee according to the IRC. Using the key to the species of *Asplenium* in Nelson (2000) did tentatively lead to this species. Possibly, I have the wrong genus but I will include the plant in the plant database as *A. trichomanes-dentatum* until further study suggests otherwise.

A few plants were seen in bloom along the road. One of these was the cowpea (*Vigna luteola*) which had not been recorded for this site. I updated the database accordingly. Another plant was one of the asters which I recognized belonging to the genus, *Symphyotrichum*. The plants had white flower heads with, perhaps, a slight blue tinge. The ray flowers numbered about 25/head. The disc flowers changed from yellow to reddish-brown as they matured. The leaves were linear. The IRC lists # species of this genus for the Fakahatchee Strand. Comparing those species with the AFP clearly leads to *Symphyotrichum bahamense*. This species has not been identified before and will be added to the database. There is a chance that this species and the perennial marsh aster (*Symphyotrichum tenuifolium*) are being confused. I need to examine more specimens to confirm the identifications of both species. Although the pictures of the two on the AFP favor *S. Bahamense*.

I got an early start on the morning of 2/11/20 and drove out to the Loop Road. As I started the drive an apparent big cypress fox squirrel was in the road. I tried to maneuver the car so I could get a few photos of the critter but it quickly ran into the trees along the road. When I got to my turn around spot, another squirrel was found in the road. This one was much more cooperative; it actually walked toward the car and posed for several photos.

The birding along the loop road was not too good on that morning; only nine species being recorded. A few of the larger herons and egrets were seen in the culvert areas as well as several black-crowned night herons. No new trip marks!

Southeastern sneezeweed (*Helenium pinnatifidum*) was seen growing as an emergent plant and one of the more weedy plants of the pea family was seen in several patches along the road. This plant had compound leaves with three leaflets, each about 3cm long. There is one central vein in each leaflet and the



distal end of each leaflet is slightly notched. The leaflets showed a light tendency to fold bilaterally. The center leaflet was the largest, measuring about 2cm x 8mm. The stems of the plant were smooth. Yellow flowers were located in terminal racemes with 6 or 7 flowers/raceme. Each flower was about 15mm long x 12mm wide. This brownish lines converged at the center of the flower and ended well before the margin of the petals. This plant is yet to be identified.

Returning to the condo by way of hy41, I added a tri-colored heron and a cattle egret to the trip list.

2/12/20

After checking several of my Florida plant references, I finally decided that the small weedy legume found along the Loop Road on 2/11/20 was probably the low rattlebox (*Crotalaria pumila*). My delay was that the tips of the leaflets seemed to have a small notch and none of the references seemed to show this. Photos on the AFP did show the notches and the range map on the web site showed the species for Dade County. I added the species to the plant database. Contrary to my first impressions, the plant is not a weed (alien), but rather a native plant according to the AFP.

2/17/20

Ann and I went to Tigertail Beach on 2/12/20. Given my condition, I was not able to cross the lagoon or even search much of the beach. In the two hours that I was there I saw only a handful of common grackles and a single turkey vulture. No shorebirds were seen on the near side of the lagoon and even the osprey nest was unoccupied while I watched it. Ann walked the spit looking for sand dollars; She found a 4, but that was not enough to take to the bank. Actually, I even found one; it was sitting on a picnic table that I sat at. Ann did find a few nice shells including one of the rock snails, a cone, a small slipper and a small whelk.

Shortly after we got to the POI, we visited Jan and Al Hanner. Al had pulled a nice walker from one of the dumpsters and he loaned it to me to use for the duration of our stay. On 2/13/20, I used the walker to check out the birds at TenK. I only saw 21 species of birds but that wasn't too bad considering that I never got past the observation tower. Five of the birds were trip marks, bringing the count to 52 (only 25 behind last year). Given my condition this year, I'll probably need to get used to the lower counts.

I used the walker again on 2/14/20, this time on the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk. Ann and I met Doug and Gesela Drysdale there on Valentines day. We got there about 10:30AM. Doug met us at the car but Gesela had begun to bird the boardwalk. She joined us as we began our hike and it turned out that she was with Ann and PUL Heinz, a couple I had met several times last year and who shared the location of several orchids and bromeliads with me. I was able to walk about half way through the boardwalk before returning to the car. I didn't keep records of the birds seen but I did mark the American eagle because it was a trip mark. This, along with a barred owl heard earlier at the condo, brought the trip total to 54. Gesela heard several parulas along the way but I never saw or heard them in spite of the fact that she called them out on her phone.

The next morning (2/15/20) I drove Janes Scenic Drive again, this time to gate 7 before I turned back. I drove slowly on the left side of the road, looking for the king rail that Fred had told me about. No luck with that! Along the I saw a very small flowering plant that I immediately recognized as one of the morning glories (photos 2020_02_15_002-6). The flowers were a mere 1cm wide and 1&1/2cm long and the leaves were only 1cm broad. The plants were climbing along previous years stalks of emergent plants in the road-side ditch. Later, I saw other plants a, pparently the same species, which had larger (2 or 3x) flowers and leaves. I identified the plant using Hammer (2014) as little bell (*Ipomoea triloba*). The leave of the plant were not obviously three lobed but they may have been on some of the plants seen later which had larger flowers and leaves.



I also took the opportunity to examine the aster identified as *Symphyotrichum bahamense* on 2/10/20. The plants had terminal panicles of flower heads. There were small bracts along its branches. On each branch of the panicles, the terminal most flowers were in bloom. Each flower head measured approximately 3(+) cm in diameter and had about 21 ray flowers. The mass of disc flowers was about 3 (+) cm in diameter. The phyllaries of the flower heads solid green. The leaves were alternate, the largest measuring in excess of 10cm long with a width of 1&1/2cm. They were more or less lanceolate and toothed distally. They narrowed toward the stem and hugged it. There were widely spread, forward-pointing hairs along the margins of the leaves. The stem was smooth and slightly ribbed. The roots of the plants were fibrous and red in color. Some of these features can e seen in photos 2020_02_15_010-12. I admit confusion on the taxonomy of this plant but, until further study, I will continue to list it as *Symphyotrichum bahamense*.

Later in the day I sat in the lanai for a while. As I was getting settled, I saw a spotted sandpiper fly from one of the posts of the boat launch deck. Pyramidal caps have been placed on the posts to prevent the gulls and pelicans from perching there. Apparently the sandpipers aren't bothered by them.

Today, 2/17/20, I drove down Sabal Palm Drive into the Picayune Strand. As I drove along the road I passed several trucks carrying helicopters. Later, I was to learn that they were part of a project to spray melaleuca trees with herbicides. I was cautioned to avoid those areas of the strand. The water levels were higher than what I usually see and the ditches along the road were generally flooded. I saw relatively few birds (8!) along the way.

Some of the areas, previously flooded but now drying, had bladderworts in bloom (photos 2020_02_17_001-8). These had naked stems. The flowers were yellow and each had a prominent spur. These have been seen in this area before and were identified as the horned bladderwort (*Ipomoea cornuta*). A few patches of the white flowered () were also seen.

On the way back to the condo I stopped at McDonald's and took a coffee back to the area where I was seeing the caracaras for the last several years. No caracara was seen in the area. Apparently they have moved on. Gone too are the limpkins that used to feed in the lawn along the road. This lawn has not been cut for a while and I seem to remember that the limpkins appeared last year only after the lawn was cut.

2/22/20

I went to Kirby Starter on the morning of 2/18/20. I used the walker along the boardwalk and actually got to end. I didn't see a huge number of birds but, given present conditions, several of them were trip marks—still trailing last year by about 20.

We have been at the condo for nearly 3 weeks, now, and we have made quite a few trips into Marco Island. But, we have yet to see an owl even though we have passed many of the areas where we had seen burrowing owls in the past. Until today (2/19/20), that is! This could be called "owl day". Ann pointed out one of the burrowing owls on our way to the beach. Later, with a little time to kill before picking her up, I went to the Marco Island Wildlife Area to see if I could find the eagle nest from last year. I found it pretty readily; mostly because several photographers had embarrassingly long lenses focused on it. But, it wasn't an eagle in the nest, it was a great horned owl who had apparently moved in. I tried to get a few photos but the nest was a little out of range for my lens.

Shark Valley was the destination for 2/20/20. We got an early start so that the photography would be good. What a disappointment! We saw almost no birds. A single little blue heron, a single snowy egret and several anhinga's—that was it. To make things worse, the park was loaded with school children and the trams were booked for several hours. We opted for breakfast at the Miccosukee restaurant across the street.

I learned in the past that the best place to get fairly good bird counts is Eagle Lakes. Ann and I had dinner with Doug and Gisela Drysdale on the evening of 2/20 and Gisela said that the birding had been great there a day or two ago. I pushed the walker around the north lake on the morning of 2/21/20 and managed a count of 32 species. I knew there were more species to be counted around the south lake but I was too exhausted to go any further; that would remain for another day.



I also found an interesting snake along the way (photos 2020_02_21_006-9). I was not able to identify the snake with certainty but it appeared to be one of the common ribbon snakes, perhaps of the genus *Thamnophis*. Further study may confirm the id.

On the way back to the condo, I finally saw a limpkin along the roadside of Hy41.

This was not in the usual location (the lawn still hasn't been cut there) but a bit further east of that location.

After breakfast on the morning of 2/22/20, Ann and I drove through Sugden Park. There I saw lesser black-backed gulls mingling with several ring-billed gulls.

2/6/20

Matt and Nicole joined us for a short stay on 2/22/20 and left today (2/26/20). Their stay was mostly social, but Matt has an uncanny way of finding interesting nature stuff. We went to Marco Island on 2/23/20. While eating at the Pink Flamingo, I noticed rock doves flying across some of the buildings. This means that there was no need to go to Tin City where I usually mark them. On our way back to the condo Matt spotted the first swallow-tailed Kite across from POI. This turned out to be only five days later than the earliest date in my records for sighting this species (2/18/2000). Then, on 2/24/20 Matt saw an American avocet as he and Nicole were walking the trail at TenK. He didn't bring his good camera on this trip but he did get a photo with his phone and it was clear enough to leave no doubt about the identification of the bird. I went looking for the avocet at TenK the next morning (2/25/20), but had no luck. People there were aware of the previous day's sighting. While I was there, I did get a few decent photos of a glossy ibis and listed 22 birds in BD.

I had one day before Shelly and Dan were expected to arrive, so I went to the Big Cypress Bend boardwalk on 2/27/20. This was the first "fix" of my fakahabit; I went all the way to the end of the boardwalk with the walker that Al loaned to me. The water levels appeared fairly high relative to other years at this time. I was able to locate the fuzzywuzzy air plant but not any of the orchids or the tailed strap fern seen last year. Few birds (12 species) were seen but I did add the parula to the trip list. At the alligator hole at the end I saw a great egret seemingly attempting to take a fish in flight (the egret was in flight, not the fish). I don't recall seeing that behavior before.

Near the end of the boardwalk, on a root end of a fallen tree, was a considerable growth of what appeared to be one of the climbing ferns (photos 2020_02_27_024-028). Only simple leaves appear in my photos and the photos in Nelson (2000) do not, in my mind, distinguish well between the Japanese climbing fern (*Lygodium japonicum*) and the small-leaved climbing fern (*Lygodium microphyllum*). I have previously listed the later in the Florida plant database and will include this plant there until closer examination suggests otherwise.

3/5/20

Shelly & Dan arrived on 2/27/20. Needless to say, I mentioned the American avocet that Matt and Nicole had seen. On the next day (2/28/20) they took a walk along the TenK Marsh Trail and they, too, reported seeing the bird. Their photo of the bird was not as definitive, but if your mindset was on avocet, it worked. Later that day, they found a pink striped oak moth (*Anisota virginiensis*) on the lanai screen. The id was done by way of a google search for Florida moths. A trip with them into Marco Island on 2/29/20 allowed me to include the fish crow on the trip list.

The grass along Hy41 at 6L's Farm Rd has finally been cut. As I had predicted, shortly after that limpkins began showing up. They were seen on 2/29/20 & 3/1/20 and are now seen regularly there. Still no sign of the caracaras, though.



We visited the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary on 3/2/20. We borrowed a curtesy wheel chair and Ann and Shelly pushed me along the boardwalk—much of the time I walked, using the chair as a walker. We listed 23 bird species, five of them trip marks. Among the trip marks were 2 purple gallinules, only the second time I had ever seen at the swamp. I don't recall ever seeing as many painted buntings at the feeders as on this trip. We counted at least 7 males and one female along with a pair of indigo buntings. People had been reporting a Hammond's flycatcher near Lettuce Lake but we did not see it even though Doug and Gisela reported seeing it on their trip to the sanctuary earlier. As we left the sanctuary, we did notice that someone had written it on the blackboard where people record what they've seen—typical of my luck. At the gift shop, I purchased a copy of A Floristic Inventory of Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary by George Wilder and Jean McCollom. It appears that that will be a useful reference.

3/3/20 started out with a sighting of a spotted sandpiper in the channel at the condo. Shelly and Ann were going shopping that morning so Dan and I went to TenK to look, once again, for the avocet. Just past the observation tower, Dan spotted the bird that he and Shelly had seen earlier. It was

not an avocet; it was a black-necked stilt. Although I was disappointed that I had still not seen an avocet in Florida, the stilt was a trip mark and it was closer than I recall seeing them in the past. I took several photos. Then I saw a woman with a very long lens also photographing the bird. I said to Dan, apparently not very quietly, that I wondered if she would like to exchange lenses. As we approached her, she suggested just that. So, I put her 201-507mm f/5.7-5.7 lens on my camera and took several shots. She actually had a combination of lenses and attachments that gave her the equivalence of a 750mm lens. WOW! What a difference - especially when cropping photos. The photo included here was with her lens.



We went to Clam Pass in the afternoon. There were very few birds. I walked the sand, with my cane, far enough to see that there were no accumulations of gulls, terns, shorebirds and skimmers on the beach. The only trip mark was a laughing gull. Dan did photograph what appeared to be sanderlings as he walked the shore. I did see a misguided gopher turtle walking on the beach. It apparently had become unafraid of people who, obviously, had been feeding it.

Shelly, Dan and Ann went to Marco's South Beach on 3/4/20 and the kids left for Lisa and Jim's on 3/5/20.

3/11/20

A drive along the Turner River / Birdon loop on 3/7/20 produced even fewer birds than that on 2/6/20. Only 14 species were listed in BD for the trip. The target bird, eastern meadowlark, was not identified although I might have seen one fly across the road as I drove Wagon wheel rd. I did see eastern bluebirds; this time along Birdon road as opposed to seeing them along Turner River rd. in the past.



As I turned onto Wagon Wheel Rd from the Turner River Rd, I saw several patches of a small yellow-flowering plant along the south side of the road. These plants were somewhat greyish with small needle-like leaves whorled around the stem. The leaves continued, although reduced in number, along the flower stalks. The flowers had 5 petals about 1.5cm long. The sepals were 1cm long and alternated with the petals. There were 5 stamens and a single style ending in 5 stigmas arranged in a circle. I suspected that the plant was Small's flax (*Linum carteri*) and a review of Hammer (2014) and my earlier notes on this species seemed to confirm the identification. This plant is shown for Collier County in the AFP and the IRC shows it for the Big Cypress Swamp Preserve.

On 3/9/20 I returned to Eagle Lakes. As I approached the fenced in baseball areas I saw three cowbirds; 1 male and 2 females. They were so badly backlit that I couldn't determine which of the cowbird species they were. I didn't see a distinct brown head or red eye, so I thought they might be the shiny cowbirds. As I continued to shift my position for better looks, I spooked the birds and they flew off. I chose not to mark the birds. Many bird species (most of the wading birds) were seen from the shelter where one enters the lakes. After making my observations there, I walked around the south lake of Eagle Lakes. Again I used the walker. I only walked about 1/3 of the way around the lake; to the area where the black-bellied whistling ducks have been seen recently. That species was my target for the morning. Patience payed off; while I was sitting and observing a cleared area of the lake, they flew into view. I recorded 26 species in BD for the morning.



That afternoon, Ann and I drove in to the Naples Botanical Gardens. The gardens were truly beautiful. I especially appreciated the orchid garden. I was surprised by the extent of the natural areas included on the premises. As we walked along one of the boardwalks on the natural area, I noticed a fuzzywuzzy airplant (*Tillandsia pruinsae*) growing on one of the trees. This was the first of the species that I identified on my own and the photo op was much better than at the Fakahatchee boardwalk. Later, when I looked at the photos that I took (photos 2020_03_09_010-12), I noticed that the plants (there were two of them) were fixed to the tree with tie wraps. Apparently, the plants were collected from some other area and transplanted at this location.

I drove Janes Scenic Drive again on the morning of 3/10/20. There weren't many birds to see along the way; only 15 species were recorded. A few plants were seen in bloom along the way and the plant database was updated accordingly.

3/17/20

I went looking for the eastern towhee along the Shell Island Road on 3/12/20. I wasn't able to see or hear one in the area of the Briggs Nature Center, where I have seen them in the past. At the end of the road, in the parking area for the boat launches, I saw three common ground doves, a trip mark. Then I drove back to the Briggs boardwalk and walked a short distance with the cane. No towhees were seen or heard. One of the volunteers indicated that they have not been very common so far this year. As I left the boardwalk, on the way back to my car, I noticed a lot of bird activity along the side of the path. As I got closer, I noticed that a steady stream of apparent flying ants were coming from the ground and the birds were having a feast. Cardinal, catbird, and several warblers all joined in the festivities. In a few minutes the ants stopped coming from the ground and the birds dissipated. Fifteen bird species were recorded in BD.

Ann crossed the lagoon at Tigertail Beach on 3/13/20 while I stayed on the near side. I did manage to walk with my cane to the edge of the water, though, to see if any shorebirds were visible. Not one shorebird had the courtesy of showing up — not one!

As of 3/14/20, my bird species list for this year was 82 species. That is 14 species below last year and 27 species below the average for this period. I guess, given my limitations, that's not too bad, especially because I've seen almost no shorebirds. There are many, fairly common birds that could still catch me up to last year, especially with migrations going on.

Over the weekend I purchased a folding chair to take birding with me. My intent was to go to an area along Janes Scenic Drive, sit in my chair and wait for nature to come to me. I put the plan into action on 3/17/20. I drove along Janes Scenic Drive to the west main gate. Along the way I saw a black squirrel that might have been one of the big cypress fox squirrels, but it didn't wait around for me to confirm the identification (The same thing happened on my last drive along Janes.). I also stopped at one of the culverts where a little blue heron and a white ibis were feeding. I took several photos of the heron; none of them great. When I arrived at gate 7 I got my chair and sat for a while. Two young raccoons soon joined me and then a large truck, hauling heavy earth moving equipment stopped. I was told that they would be making a lot of noise and would probably scare most of the wildlife away; so much for my plan. I packed up and turned around for the return trip. I found another (possibly the same) little blue heron in the company of a black crowned night heron at another flooded area and took quite a few more photos of each of them. The little blue

heron was definitely catching small fish from the water but none of my photos showed the fish very well. Sixteen bird species were seen along the way; a common yellowthroat being a trip mark.

3/21/20

As things seem to be drying up a bit, I decided to return to the Loop Road on 3/19/29. I drove further along the road than usual before turning around; 13.4 mi into Miami County. I only recorded 13 species in BD, but I did see more species of herons than usual, including the snowy egret, little blue heron and tri-colored heron.



I updated the database for the location with a few plants including the northern needle-leaf (*Tillandsia balbisiana*). I also saw and identified, once again, the low rattlebox (*Crotalaria pumila*). I also found a yellow-flowering shrub that I had not recalled seeing before. My photos (2020_03_19-007-12) suggest alternate, compound leaves with oppositely arranged, pinnate leaflets. There appears to be a single pistil, somewhat hooked, and stamens of two lengths, the longer ones also hooked. Nelson (1996) has a photo which suggests this plant. It is called the privet senna (*Senna ligustrina*). Photos on the AFP show the flower as in my description. I added this plant to the database. I also saw one of the bladderworts (photos 2020_03_19_020-21) in bloom but my reference material does not clearly identify the species.

I stopped at Pace's Dike along the way and found several plants of the showy rattlebox (*Crotalaria spectabilis*). Pace's Dike was added to the locations table in the plant database, but I doubt that I will ever explore it very much.

That afternoon, Ann and I took a ride Everglades City. Purple martins were seen at the martin houses along the river and these were added to the trip list.

Since my local caracaras seem to have abandoned me this year, I convinced Ann to take a long ride to see if we could find any. On the morning of 3/20/20 we drove a loop beginning on Hy41 to Hy29. We proceeded north on Hy29 to Oil Well Road and then west to Immokalee Road. We took Immokalee road back to Hy951 and then back to the condo. All for naught—no caracaras!

Saturday morning (3/21/20) turned out to be fairly good for birding., not for numbers, but for species. I went out to Burns Lake to look at some of the wildflowers. On the way, along Hy41, there were several areas that were still flooded. I stopped to see what birds were there and found both greater and lesser yellowlegs, both trip marks. When I got to Burns Lake I took a short walk with the cane and added several other birds to the morning's list. Among them was a pine warbler, another trip mark.

I remember that last year I saw ladies-tresses near the parking area of the access to the back country. When I reviewed the list of species for the area I noticed that they were not listed; probably because I was not sure of the species. I had hoped to find them again and identify them, but they seemed to be gone. The area where I had seen them had obviously been disturbed, seemingly by mechanical means. I did find an apparent species of St. John's-wort, though, that was not include in the plant database (photos 2020_03_21_001-5). It appeared to be the marsh St. John's-wort (*Hypericum fascicularis*) as shown in Hammer (2014). In the past, I have identified four other species of St. John's-wort but would have a hard time identifying them again without the references. This plant had the typical bushy arrangement of stamens, 5 yellow petals and five stamens. What distinguished it mostly was the cluster-like arrangement of the leaves (fascicles) which accounts for its specific epithet. The species was added to the plant database. I also photographed plants of *Pluchea baccharis* (rosy camphorweed) growing along the path (photos 2020_03_21_006-10).

3/28/20

I'll likely wear out the Turner River / Birdon Loop this year. Not only does that allow me access to some of the birds while driving (thus allowing my knee to heal) but now the corona virus pandemic is resulting in closures of county, state and federal parks and other public areas. I did the loop again on 3/23/20. This time the eastern meadowlark, a trip mark, was among the 21 birds seen.

I paid special attention to the plants along the way. I noted a lead tree (*Leucaena leucocephala*) shortly beyond the H.P. Williams rest area. I also noted one of the primrosewillows growing in one of the areas created by the attempt to restore sheet flow to the Everglades. I recorded this plant as *Ludwigia peruviana* but I must admit confusion on the taxonomy of this genus, there being several in the area. Herbaceous plants were also updated on the list.

I noticed that along the Turner River road, small trees at the edge of the road were topped, leaving bare trunks of about 10 feet. I have no idea what the purpose of this is and I couldn't ask at the visitor center because it was closed due to the corona virus.

Efforts to curtail the corona virus has added to my B&B problems this year; as if the knee issue wasn't enough. Many of my favorite haunts are being closed in order to mitigate the virus infection:

Collier-Seminole Park—closed due to Corona Virus
Big Cypress Swamp Visitor Center—closed due to Corona Virus
Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk—closed due to Corona Virus
Janes Scenic Drive—closed due to Corona Virus
East River canoe Launch—closed due to Corona Virus
Marco Island Beaches (Tigertail) — closed due to Corona Virus

I Started out for Janes scenic Drive on 3/25/20. When I got there, there was a state trooper parked near the entrance. I asked him if I was allowed to drive further on the road and he indicated that it would be ok. What he didn't tell me was that there was a locked gate across the road a few hundred yards further on. So, I turned around and drove to Everglades City and Chokoloskee. The Barron River tide was just starting to recede. Finally! Shorebirds! Several of them were in the muddy area near the boat launching area

(near the Cuban Café). Ruddy turnstones, dunlins, and both semipalmated and Wilsons plovers were the trip marks for the morning among the 20 species recorded in BD.



As I drove along the causeway back toward Everglades City, I stopped at the bridge and walked the path to the area under it. I was hoping too see American oystercatchers. There was a young fellow fishing there who, because of the corona virus, was temporarily on furlough from his job at one of the parks. He indicated that the area was a good place to see oystercatchers as the tide went down further, but there were none to be seen at this time. He also indicated another area along the causeway where he sees both yellow-crowned and black-crowned night herons at low tide. I drove back to that area but nothing was seen. I will check the tide chart for the Barron River and try again.

The next morning (3/26/20) I checked the chart of tides for the Barron River and left for Everglades City with a plan to arrive before low tide. I arrived at the boat launch area at 10:00AM, about 2 hours before the anticipated low tide. Judging by the exposed shoreline, I was closer to the low tide than when I arrived the previous day. There were no shorebirds to be seen at the boat launch area, but when I went to the area where the fellow had suggested I look for night herons, there

was a young yellow-crowned night heron walking the shoreline. This was a trip mark. I also checked for American oystercatchers under the bridge. There were none. A couple of fishermen were wading in the area; possibly they kept any shorebirds from coming in.

I repeated the procedure the next day, 3/27/20. This time I went back and forth between the boat launch area and the bridge several times. Each time I also checked the break in the mangroves where the night heron had been seen the previous day. There were no shorebirds at the boat launch area the first time I visited it, but I added short-billed dowitchers and a reddish egret to the trip list the second time. On none of the visits was there any bird activity at the bridge (except for an eagle flying over) or the break where the night heron had been seen previously.

4/6/20

On 3/29/20, I drove along Hy41, past the New River Strand to the mile 61 marker and then turned around. I stopped at several locations along the road to take landscape photos of some of the typical Everglades formations, mostly the tree islands and strands.

Kirby-Storter was the destination for 4/2/20. I had noticed on the previous drive along Hy41 that this was still open. The birding was exceptionally quiet. I had hoped to pick up a waterthrush but none of the warblers showed up. I recorded only 6 species in BD. I photographed a few of the plants that were in bloom and took a few landscape shots. Tellow top (*Flavaria linearis*), wood sage (*Teucrium canadense*), musky mint (*Hyptis alata*) and the more common rosegentian (*Sabatia srellaris*) were noticeably abundant. I noticed several of the giant air (*Tillandia utriculata*) plants at the end of the boardwalk. These were not in bloom at this time but

the flower stalks were developing.

On the way back to the condo I stopped at Burns Lake and took a short hike along the off-road vehicle trail. As I left my car, I noticed several tree swallows flying over the lake. This was, surprisingly, a trip mark. That and a great-crested flycatcher were added to the morning's list.

During much of my "condo time" I have been organizing many of my flower photos into a Power Point presentation to be used to refresh my memory about the identity of many of the flowers. In the process of gathering photos for the project I have had occasion to identify some of the plants in my photograph which had not been identified before. As a result, Several plants can now be added to the plant database:

Photos 2016_03_22_067-69 have now been identified as fairy footprints (*Houstonia procumbens*) also known as innocence [(Hammer (2014) & Taylor (1992)]. This plant was found in the C.R.E.W. marsh trail in 2016.

The plant in photos 2018_04_05_005-12 has been identified as the wild lettuce (*Lactuca graminifolia*) with Taylor (1992). It appears similar to *L. floridana* of Hammer (2014) but the AFP suggests that to have a more northern distribution. This was also photographed at the C.R.E.W. marsh trail in 2016.

Photo 2018_04_05_023 was tentatively id'd as the blue twinflower (*Dyschoriste oblonifolia*) with Taylor (1992). The photo in that reference, though, hasn't nearly the extent of blue mottling of the petals as shown in my photo. This was also found at the C.R.E.W. marsh trail in 2016.

The dotted smartweed (*Polygonum punctatum*) has been seen at several locations but was added to the database on the basis of photographs taken along the Big Cypress Bend boardwalk. The id is based solely on the photograph in Taylor (1992) and needs confirmation.

One of the photos was identified as hardy rock-rose (*Helianthemum nashi*). It could well be the pinebarren frostweed (*Crocianthemum corymbosum*) of Hammer (2014).

The plants seen on the Loop Road on 3/18/16 and identified as cheesytoes (*Stylosanthes hamata*) is probably the low rattlebox (*Crotalaria pumila Ortega*) based on the photos in Hammer (2014). The photos of cheesytoes in this reference show much more pointed leaves. I have one more reference about cheesytoas at skillet Strand. Unfortunately, I have no photos for that reference. It is possible that all of my sightings of cheezytoes could, similarly, be confused.

We have been under a "stay at home" advisory because of the corona virus . But, when I saw that the golf courses were still open, I decided that birding would be an acceptable activity at this time. The problem was: Where to bird? Most of my favorite haunts were closed! I decided to do the Turner River/Birdon loop again on 4/6/20. Things were pretty quiet there; only one great Blue heron was seen whereas, in the past, they had been numerous. I recorded 17 bird species along the loop and checked that several of the plants seen along the way were recorded in the plant database. Three deer crossed the Turner River road as I drove along.

I walked a short distance along the Concho Billie trail and noted a few of the plants in bloom. One of them appeared to be a new species for the trail (photos 2020_04_06_013-15). It reminded me somewhat of one of the mints or, perhaps, drumheads in its flower arrangement; The flowers being arranged in a terminal head. It appeared that they bloomed sequentially from the bottom up. At this time, only a single flower was in bloom, it being at the top. No sepals were noted. There were five petals arranged in a tube but free at the end. The flower measured somewhat <1/2" in diameter at this free end. To this point, I have not been able to identify the plant.

4/10/20

On the morning of 4/8/20 I decided to drive to Shell Island Road to get my towhee mark for the year. Unfortunately, when I got there I found that the road was closed due to the corona virus. So, I decided to go to the Picayune Strand instead. As I drove Sabal Palm road, I found that the trailhead to Sabal Palm was also closed; another victim of the virus mitigation:

Shell Island Road—closed due to Corona Virus
Sabal Palm Trailhead—closed due to Corona Virus

I was not up to hiking the trail anyhow, so I continued my drive along the road to my usual turning point. I then drove 4 miles into the strand looking for interesting birds and plants. The birds were almost totally lacking but a few interesting plants were noted,

some being added to the plant database for this location:

A goldenrod was added as *Solidago leavenworthii*. This was one of the four goldenrod species listed for the Picayune Strand State Forest by the IRC. Another plant added was the chocolate plant (*Melochia spicata*). Caesarweed (*Urena lobata*), another plant of the Malvaceae family was also added. Also, I found an abundant growth of one of the yellow-eyed grasses (*Xyris* sp.). I have seen plants of this genus growing along the Sabal Palm Trail in the past and had tentatively identified them as *X. elliotii* and *X. smalliana*, but the IRC shows seven species of *Xyris* identified in the Picayune and I have never made serious attempts at their taxonomy. I listed this as *X. smalliana* because its flower stalks were quite tall (2-3'), but this is a very tentative identification.



It has been a long time since I have driven the full length of the Loop Road, so, on 4/9/20, I drove Hy41 past ?? Junction and entered the Loop Road at its east end. As I drove west, it occurred to me that I had forgotten the beauty of the eastern sections of this road. I was particularly taken by the pond apple trees whose multi-divided roots embraced the limestone bedrock. It was a morning for green herons. They were found feeding at several of the culverts across the road. I also saw a very photogenically cooperative red-shouldered hawk at one of these culverts. It didn't seem the least bit concerned by my presence.



On the way back, I stopped at Gator Hook and took a brief hike to the opening of the more prairie-like area of the trail. Along the way I saw sleepy morning (*Waltheria indica*), the prairie milkweed (*Asclepias lanceolata*), wild petunia (*Ruellia caroliniensis*), pineland heliotrope (*Heliotropium polyphyllum*) and the showy milkwort (*Polygala grandiflora*) among the flowers in bloom. I also found a white-flowered plant which I later identified as the Virginia scalystem (*Elytraria caroliniensis*). My records suggest that the only other time I had seen that species was in 2012 on the small pine island at Kirby-Storter. I also recognized the pitted stripesees (*Piroqueta cistoides*) which had not been marked for the site in the past.

A goldenrod was seen in bloom near the road. When compared to those recorded by the IRC for the Big Cypress Swamp, it appeared most likely to be either *Solidago stricta* or *S. sempervirens*. Because the cauline leaves are abruptly reduced upwards, the key in Wunderlin & Hansen (2011) would suggest *S. stricta*. Both of these species are listed in my records for the TenK Marsh Trail. It is likely that only one of them has actually been seen. By this account, it is probably *S. stricta*.

4/14/20

I've noticed a lot of cars in the TenK parking lot each time I pass it lately. So, on the morning of 4/13/20, I decided to visit it again. I used the walker to hike as far as the first bench beyond the observation deck and back. It was pretty much dried up, except for a few spots. I asked a guy with a huge camera who was exiting as I entered if he had gotten any good photos. His reply was that he only got alligator tracks in the mud. The good news, though, was that the receding of the water had produced several mud banks and that had attracted lots of shorebirds. These were mostly least sandpipers (a trip mark) and a lonely killdeer (also a trip mark). It's hard to imagine that these two trip marks waited so long to be seen this year. I also saw a group of dowitchers probing a shal-

low area. I marked them as short-billed dowitchers, but I really can't be sure of the species. Most of the alligators seem to have left the area, but a huge one was still in one of the more flooded areas. I recorded 22 species of birds for the morning; not bad since it included the two trip marks. I even saw a roseate spoonbill as it flew overhead. There were still several folks visiting the area, all observing their social distancing.

This morning (4/14/20) I went to Kirby Storter. It was pretty quiet there; I was the only one there. I noticed that the rest rooms were closed, probably another result of the corona virus. I used the walker to hike along the boardwalk. Yellowtops (*Flaveria linearis*) was in quite a pretty display, as it seems to be everywhere lately. The giant air plant (*Tillandsia utriculata*) at the end of the boardwalk was still not in bloom. The twelve species added to BD for the morning included a yellow-billed cuckoo which was clearly visible as it landed in a small tree right near where I was standing. The is was the 99th trip mark for the year; will I possibly break 100? We have had an unusually hot period for this time if the year. An American crow which approached me as I was leaving was clearly ventilating from the heat.



After I left Kirby Storter I stopped at the Burns Lake campground. It too was gated off, probably another measure of the virus. I drove to the end of the road which skirts the camping area. It appears to end at another entrance to the off-road trail, but a sign there indicates that the entrance in the camp area should be used instead; this entrance was gated. Yellowtops was again in display, especially in the more open areas along the road.

4/15/20

There aren't too many places still open for B&B. So, again on 4/15/20, I headed out to the Turner River / Birdon loop. The birds seem also to be keeping their social distances; only 15 species being recorded for the morning. The herons were especially conspicuous by their absence. As I drove down Turner River Road, I came to an area where a number of trees, later identified as bottle

brush trees (*Meleleuca viminalis*), were growing. This is apparently a close relative of the invasive melaleuca tree. It is primarily a cultivated tree which has not become a problem. A red-bellied woodpecker was feeding from one of the bright red flowers. This seemed to me to be a good place to hold up and wait for possible hummers, but only a palm warbler showed up in the short time that I waited.



I updated the location field of several plants for this area. Some new plants were seen along the Turner River Road in the areas filled in for wetland recovery. Others, prairie milkweed (*Asclepias lanceolata*), and batchelor's button (*Polygala baldwinii*), were seen in the open areas of Birdon Road which were scrutinized more carefully.

I decided to exercise my leg with a short walk along the Concho Billie trail. No new plants were added for that location.

4/16/20

This morning I updated the BirdsEye app on my phone and noticed that long-billed dowitchers were reported for the TenK marsh trail Birding tower 15 days ago and along the Oil Pad Road 12 days ago. This makes me wonder if the dowitchers that I saw on 4/13/20 were actually long-billed. I marked long-billed once before in this region. They were in a small flooded fresh water hole along Hy41. I can never be certain about these two confusing species.

Bird 100 for this year turned out to be a grey kingbird. I saw it from the Publix parking lot while I was waiting for Ann to do some shopping. It was sitting on a utility wire along Barfield Road. This leaves me only 13 birds behind last year's worst year, not bad for all of the difficulties presented by my knee surgery and the issues regarding the corona virus.

4/27/20

I went to the TenK Marsh Trail again on 4/17/20. It had rained overnight and many of the areas that had been totally dry on my last

visit were again flooded. I again hiked with the walker to the first bench past the observation tower. There were many dying fish gasping for air at that location. A few black vultures appeared to be feasting on them. I got better looks at the peeps this time. The rain filled most of the areas on the east side of the trail but left much exposed areas on the west side. The birds, therefore, were not backlit and the light legs of the least sandpipers were clearly visible. Several semipalmated plovers were also seen as were a couple of back-necked stilts. Lesser yellowlegs were among the 20 species listed for the morning. I didn't see any dowitchers, although a woman that I met there said they flew into the area after I had passed. Quite a few birders were seen, several of them getting there earlier than I.



The low tide of the Barron River was not so low when I visited it on 4/20/20. Only 12 species were recorded in BD, only a few shorebirds and nothing new. Still no oystercatchers at the bridge! A lonely spotted sandpiper and several ruddy turnstones came reasonably close for photo opps nothing great, though

I did the Turner River / Birdon Loop again on 4/22/20. Birding, there, has become pretty quiet; the only long-legged waders that I saw were little blue herons and only a total of 16 species were recorded for the loop. In the absence of birds, my attention was mostly on the plants seen in the fields along the road. Yellowtops (*Flaveria linearis*) was dominant, but musky mint (*Hyptis alata*), water pimpernel (*Samolus ebracteatus*), fog bit (*Phyla nodiflora*), and Batcheler buttons (*Polygala baldunii*) were seen among the other plants. I updated the location field for this location.

Serenity Walk Park has remained open throughout the corona virus mitigation. I went there on the morning of 2/24/20 hoping that the walker would help me along the path. I had two targets in mind, a red-headed woodpecker and a brown-headed nuthatch. I headed off to the left trail, but it didn't take long for me to realize that the trail was too sandy for the walker. So, I pulled up in a shady spot, sat on the walker's seat and waited for the birds to come to me. While I sat I played the song of the brown-headed nuthatch from my Sibley phone app. After a while several brown-headed nuthatches appeared. Whether they were attracted by the app or just following their usual morning routine, I will never know. But, this broke the 100 mark for this year's trip. I now train the worst year ever by just 12 birds. I never did see the red-headed woodpeckers but, then, I never got close to the areas where I had seen them in the past years. I recorded just 7 birds for the morning but was happy to include a trip mark.

As I was returning to the car, I saw a plant with small pea-like flowers. I remember them as being blue, but photos that took suggest a more violet color. The leaves were alternate and compound with three leaflets each. The green color of the leaves lightened to almost white near the central vein. The fruit (loment) immediately suggested that the plant was one of the tick trefoils on the genus *Desmodium*. Hammer (2014) and Taylor (1992) both suggested *Desmodium incanum*. I had previously identified this plant at the end of the TenK Marsh Trail. I updated the location field of the plant database.

I took my last trip to the Picayune on 4/27/20. As I drove along Sabal Palm road just west of the Flying "K" Farm I saw a bobwhite walking along the edge of the road. This was the first bobwhite that I saw since 2015 and it was quite a distance from where I saw them then. It flew across the road and walked into the higher vegetation before I was able to get a decent photo. I attempted to call it back by playing its call with one of my birding apps (Sibley) but it didn't seem interested. Although I only saw 10 species of birds for the morning, I never expect high numbers in the Picayune. The bobwhite was trip mark number 102.

Never expecting to see the bobwhite, my actual purpose was to re-examine the Xyris plants that I had seen on my last trip. These plants were located again and examined for possible taxonomic characters. The plants were about knee high with leaves in an whorl at the base. The leaves were about 6" long but only measured 3mm in width. They were reddish at the base. The flowers were 7-8mm tall (including the bulb-like base). 3-4 bracts with apparent smooth edges made up the height of the base. The AFP

lists 10 species of *Xyris* for Collier County; the IRB showing seven of them for the Picayune Strand. I still did not collect enough information to identify the species with Wunderlin & Hansen (2011).

I also observed an apparent St. John's-wort with flowers in a terminal flat inflorescence (photos 2020_04_27_001-8). There were five petals per flower. The leaves were opposite, the larger being about 27mm long and 5mm in width. Each leaf had 1 prominent vein. The axils of these leaves had whorls of smaller leaves in their axils. Taylor (1972) and Schmelz & Stacell (2009) had photographs that strongly resembled what I was seeing. They both identified the plant as the sand weed (*Hypericum cistifolium*). The plant database suggests that I have seen this plant in the past at several locations. I added this location to the records.

One of the graminoids was also examined (photo 2020_04_28_009). It was about waist high with a terminal inflorescence consisting of several round flower heads. At this time, only one leaf was present but it appeared that other leaves were present as the plant grew, each of these leaving a reddish band on the stem as they dropped. The remaining leaf was 8-10 inches long and somewhat flattened. A prominent ligule was found in the leaf axil. Other than a few species of *Carex*, I recognize almost none of the graminoids by sight, even to their major taxonomic groups. I also have few references that can be helpful in identifying them. Tiner (1993) has a diagram on the needle-pod rush (*Juncus scirpoides*) that is close to what I saw but it has leafy bracts at the base of the inflorescence and externally visible internal chambers. The reference describes a similar species (*J. megacephalus*) in which the internal chambers are not externally visible. Both of these species are shown for Collier County by the AFP but, of the two, only *J. megacephalus* is listed for the Picayune Strand by the IRC. Based on this information, this species was added to the plant database.

4/29/20

I took my last trip to the Loop Road on 4/28/20. I did the entire road again, as I did last time. Several plants seen along the way were used to update the location field of the plant database. 18 bird species were recorded in BD, including a photo-cooperative barred owl and a red-shouldered hawk.



Summary:

After spending two night with the Flanagan's in Parrish, FL and another two nights at Matt and Nicole's new home in Murfreesboro, TN, we arrived back home on May 4th. This year's trip to Florida began with a knee, recovering from replacement surgery, preventing me from getting into many of my favorite B&B haunts. Thanks to Al Hanner, who loaned a walker to me, I was still able to get to those areas that were decently paved or had boardwalks, but most of the off-road areas were beyond my ability to navigate. Then the covid19 pandemic resulted in most areas being closed altogether. As a result, I spent much more of my time in the condo than I would have liked. Some of that time was spent going through photographs from previous trips. I used many of the photographs to put together a PowerPoint presentation on the plants I had seen and identified over the years and to continue to work on a presentation on the birds of southwest Florida that I will present to the Metro Audubon Society next November. The Birding was the worst year ever, although, including the least tern seen at the Flanagan's, I ended up with a total of 103 species. That was only 10 birds shy of the previous worst year (2019), but the trend in recent years has not been encouraging. Although only one truly new plant was added to the database, several species were identified as I went through previous photos and these were added as well. Oh well, the weather was much better than in Wisconsin!