

2/5/21

Driving through northern and central Illinois has never been one of the more pleasurable parts of our Florida trip. Luckily, we have usually been spared the boredom because we usually travelled that part of the trip early in the morning, before sunrise. More recently, though, we have departed for our Florida vacation later in the morning and travelled less each day so we have had to endure the monotony of these areas. Not so in 2021. Apparent freezing rain or fog preceded us and left a beautiful trail of ice sculpture for us to enjoy. Every tree and bush, as well the grasses glistened in the early morning sunlight, giving the landscape a delightful character.

We spent a couple of days with Matt and Nicole in Murfreesboro and then moved on Florida. It was dark by the time we got there so I didn't see my first Florida bird until the next day. My first Florida bird was a red-shouldered hawk over the Kaczmarek pond on 1/31/21. I didn't do any significant birding in New Port Richey; I didn't visit Green Key, Starkey's or Grey Park. A few birds were recorded in BD. As we visited the new St. Petersburg Pier and drove around the area.

We arrived at the new condo mid-afternoon on 2/1/21 with the sound of a Eurasian collared dove welcoming us. The next morning I went for a fix for my Faka-habit. I went to the Big Cypress Bend boardwalk just as daylight was breaking. Since last year, I had had my second knee surgery and was having a difficult time walking, even with a cane. I walked to the eagle nest area but was unable to see any signs of the birds. Then I went a bit further, to the first sharp turn along the boardwalk where I sat on the bench and waited for the birds to come to me. That was a disappointment; I only recorded four species. That was not a sufficient fix for my Faka-habit so I visited Janes Scenic Drive the next morning. Having installed a gate across the drive to close the park last year when the Covid-19 pandemic hit, they now, even though the park is now open, only open the gate slightly before 8 o'clock. A ranger was at the gate to prevent me from entering early. Then a workman told me that I could only go as far as gate 7 because of road repair. Shortly after that, I was asked to find a wide area in the road so a cement truck could pass me. Needless to say, birding and botanizing suffered from all of the distractions. I did record a few birds and photographed some floating bladderwort (*Utricularia inflata*). On my way back I got a text from Doug Drysdale telling me that he was on the way to the Fakahatchee Strand. I met with him and Gisela across from the office area where we compared notes and made some tentative plans. They had seen the eagles by the nest along the boardwalk, but they visited the area later in the day.

Later in the day I picked up a walker from Jan and Al Hanner for use during our stay. I used the walker the next morning (2/4/21) to visit the TenK Marsh Trail and took it as far as the observation deck. I spent most of my time on the first level of the deck where I saw many of birds usually seen there. Birding at this point in the trip is kind of fun because it produces many trip marks. I photographed several birds that were feeding just below the observation deck and noticed that all of my photos had a distinct bluish overcast. None of these photos could be considered keepers (although I kept a few).

I decided to do the Turner River / Birdon Loop on the morning of 2/5/21. Water levels there, as in most of the areas I've been to so far, were pretty high. I recorded 22 species for the morning, including most of the herons and other long-egged waders. As I drove along I noticed that the areas of restored sheet flow had considerable plant growth. Last year several culverts were put across Upper Wagonwheel Dr. and these provided easy access for observation. My photographs again had a distinct blue cast. Later at home I reset the "shooting menus" and that seemed to solve the issue. Hopefully, the next outing will provide some useful photos.

On the way in to the condo on the first day, I looked for the caracaras that I used to see along Hy41 near 6 L's Farms Road. Although I couldn't find them, Susan (my bird-watching friend at the condos) indicated that they are still there. Hopefully I will find them as I drive through that area again. The grass along the road in that area hasn't been cut, so I don't expect limpkins for a while.

2/12/21

Ann reported that she saw one of our resident caracaras as she was returning from grocery shopping on 2/3/21. She indicated that it was in the area where we had been seeing them in previous years. I went to that area and parked for a while the next morning. I thought I might have seen both of them, but didn't get a really good look and did not mark the birds for the day.

Our new condo is very nice. As was the case last year, it is on one of the channels, but is further west than last year's. Relative to birds, It appears a bit quiet compared to last year's but there are a few great blue herons, egrets, pelicans and, of course, double crested cormorants. It produced the first spotted sandpiper on Feb. 7th, the first yellow-rumped warbler on Feb. 9th and the first blue jay on Feb. 11th. At high tide, the great blue herons and occasionally cattle egrets walk between the condo and the mangrove hedge at the water's edge. Shelly & Dan joined us on Saturday (February 6th) and shelly spotted two dolphins swimming by on the 7th. They returned again the next day. We also saw a small manatee on 2/10/21.

We all went to the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary on 2/8/21 and found the water levels to be higher than we had remembered from

the past. Possibly because of that, the birding wasn't great; only 15 species were recorded for the trip. Perhaps as a covid matter, the feeders where the buntings used to be seen were not being maintained; no buntings. A few plants were seen in bloom [such as climbing aster (*Symphotrichum carolineatum*)], lanceleaf arrowhead (*Sagittaria lancifolia*), pickerelweed (*Pontederia cordata*) and others], but nothing I hadn't seen in the past. Several squirrels and raccoons represented the mammals. I took very few photographs, mostly of the ferns. We ran into Doug and Gisela near the end of the walk and they also reported slim findings. They did indicate, though, that they were seeing a great horned owl in the Everglades City area and described where the nest was.



We went to Everglades City the next morning (2/9/21) for some of the "best eggs ever" and, after failing to find any curly-tailed lizards, went looking for the owls. We looked in the area, behind the filling station, where they had nested in 2019. We saw some activity in that nest but were unable to get a clear sight of the birds. We weren't sure if we were seeing owlets or, possibly osprey which nested there last year. Later that day we took our first trip into Marco Island for dinner at Nacho Momma's. House sparrows were added to the trip list.



As it turned out, I had totally misunderstood Doug's directions for finding the owls. So, on 2/10/21, as we were heading to Shark Valley, we located the nest at the intersection of highways 29 & 41, on a tower right behind the old visitor's center. When we got to Shark Valley, we learned that the park was still recovering from a tropical storm that hit the area last November and caused the park to close for 9 weeks. The water levels were still high and few of the long-legged waders could be found. Only 19 bird species

were recorded for the morning. The highlight of the tram tour was an alligator which had just caught a red-bellied turtle and held it in his mouth as he rested from the ordeal.

Shelly and Dan left on 2/12/21 after a brief walk along the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk. Water levels there were as high as I can recall ever seeing them in the past. They were much too high for even the longest-legged wading birds. Even the great blue herons and great egrets were hunting along the edges of the channel along the trail as opposed to wading out into the water. There were

few birds at the alligator hole at the end; only an anhinga and black-crowned night heron were seen. Sixteen bird species were seen in all, but these included several trip marks.

I drove to Kirby-Storter on the morning of 2/13/21 and arrived about 7:37AM. As was the case with the Fakahatchee boardwalk, the water levels were higher than I had ever seen in the past. I saw from 10 to 20 great egrets wading in the flooded areas. Floating heart (*Nymphoides aquatica*) was expanding their range into those areas. I was hoping to see a few warblers but didn't see a one. Among the dozen birds seen for the morning, though, was a pair of roseate spoonbills. On the way back to the condo, I stopped at the Burns Lake camping area. The trail that I hiked in the past was, unfortunately, overgrown and not conducive to hiking with compromised knees. I messed with Seek on some of the plants in the parking area but didn't seem to have much luck.

2/19/21

With water levels seemingly much higher than in recent years, On 2/15/21, I decided to explore some of the roadside ditches along the sideroads of highway 41 where I had some luck in previous years. I started with a ride down Greenway Ave. to Fritchey Rd. As I found last year, the road was gated as I rounded the bend and the gate was fenced off so that even travel by foot was blocked. Contrary to what I have been seeing in other places, the roadside ditches were pretty dry. So too was the case along Auto () Only a few of the commonest birds were reported for the morning.

The Picayune Strand was the destination for the morning of 2/16/21. I entered from Sabal Palm Drive and went past the trailhead to where I usually turn left. This year a street sign clearly marked that intersection as the Triple G Loop. Although much of the road appeared to be recently graded, there was much water on both sides of the road. Few plants were blooming above the water line and the areas where I had seen the bobwhites in the past were flooded. Among the few birds marked for the morning was a brown thrasher which I heard singing, a trip mark for the morning. I drove the Triple G Loop to where it made a sharp left turn, just past a second open gate. I turned around at that point, not going as far as the red-cockaded woodpecker nesting area since large potholes were threatening to swallow my car. After I left the strand I stopped at McDonald's, had a breakfast and took a coffee to the area where I had previously seen the caracaras; no luck.

The 17th was a Wednesday and Ann and I did an abbreviated form of our Wednesday routine. We went for breakfast at Ne Ne's and found it closed so we ended up at Hoots. I dropped Ann off at the beach and eventually ended up at Mackle Park. It was pretty dead there as far as birds was concerned. I did get a fish crow as a trip mark, though.

Ann was in the mood for a vanilla/orange twist ice cream cone so on 2/18/21 we decided to do the Ft. Meyer's Loop. The fort Meyer's Loop involved, first, a direct drive to Alva, FL where the Whites maintained several bird feeders in their yard. In 2018 a member of the Calusa Bird Club indicated that the future of this site was uncertain since the White's didn't come to Florida that year. When we arrived, it was apparent that someone was still maintaining the feeders even though we saw no signs of people at the residence. All of the feeders, some of which appeared to possibly be new, were full of seed and the birds were actively feeding. There was an abundance of indigo buntings, one female painted bunting and several white-winged doves coming and going as we watched. With feeders closed at Corkscrew, all of these were trip marks.



We then drove to Harns Marsh in Lehigh Acres. There were a lot of people at the marsh; seemingly from aa class. Ztzhe marsh itself appeared to be more overgrown that I had seen it in the past. My legs were not up to a hike so we just looked around for a while and then left. As we left Lehigh Acres we spotted several sandhill cranes in an open field; another trip mark for the day. We then went on to the fruit stand to enjoy our ice cream and returned to the condo.

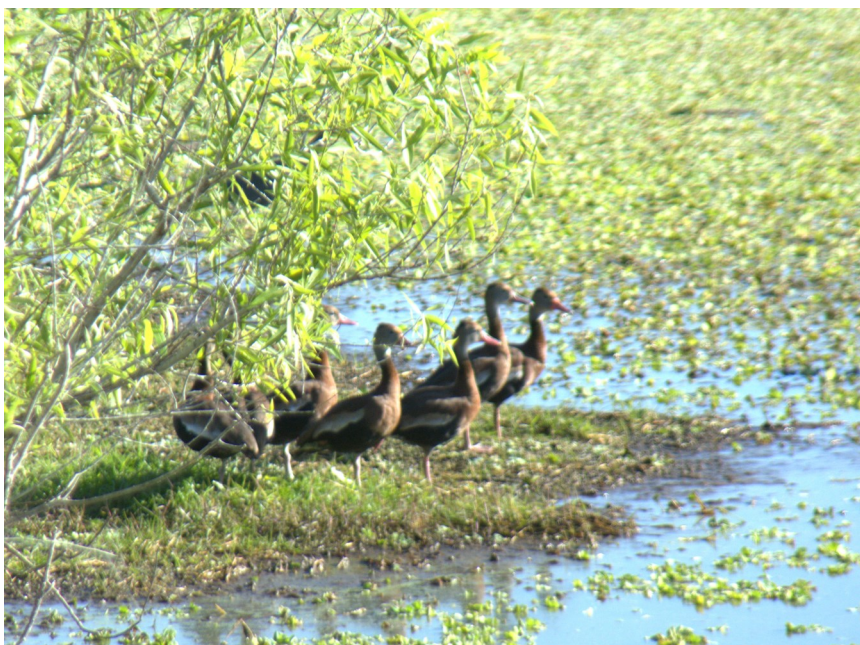
2/20/21

I drove the entire length of the Loop Road on the morning of

2/20/21 without seeing a single alligator. Apparently, the water levels are so high that the wildlife doesn't have to congregate in the areas of the culverts. Only a dozen bird species were found, including a roseate spoonbill seen near the intersection of hy41 at the west end.

Water pimpernel (*Samolus ebracteatus*) was found growing along the loop and was added to the database for the location. I also saw several patches of one of the yellow-flowering bladderworts growing in the water. My identification of the bladderworts has been weak in the past. The AFP lists 10 species of Utricularia for Dade County, nine of which are listed for the Big Cypress Swamp by the IRC. All but four of these species (*U. foliosa*, *U. gibba*, *U. simulans* and *U. subulata*) could easily be eliminated because of their purple flower color, obvious characteristics seen in photographs in my references or their familiarity to me from the past. I then used the taxonomic key in Wunderlin & Hansen (2011) to identify the species as *U. foliosa* [p492: 1, 3, 7, 8, 10, 11 — *U. foliosa*]. I used the key in a process of elimination, ignoring those species not found in the Big Cypress Swamp according to the IRC

As I was leaving the Loop Road and approaching Gator Hook, I noticed a couple of string lilies in bloom along the road. Seek correctly identified them as what they called the southern swamp crinum (*Crinum Americanum*).



2/22/21

The sun rose at 6:53AM on this date and shortly after that I was on my way to Eagle Lakes Park. Me and my wheels only made it around one of the lakes (the northern one), but it was the best birding thus far this year. Thirty six species were seen including two trip marks (mottled and lack-bellied whistling ducks). It was the closest I had ever been to the whistling ducks, but as the photograph shows, they were badly backlit. It seemed that the vegetation growth around the lake was leaving only a few places to view the wildlife. Florida's state tree seemed to be growing along large portions of the walk and was especially problematic. No plants, other than the willows were noticed to be in bloom.

Things around the condo have been relatively quiet. The low tides don't seem to expose as much mudflat as was the case in the previous condo, although quite a bit was exposed on 2/21/21. The

sighting of dolphins and manatees on Feb. 7th have yet to be repeated. At low tide, several "Furillo huge" alligators can often be seen basking along the opposite shore. One high tide (on Feb. 14) did produce an unusual condo mark as a wild turkey walked between the condo and the mangrove hedge along the channel. I've noticed that the great blue herons can be heard outside well into the dark of night. I wonder if they might not roost with other birds such as the great egrets, snowy egrets and white ibis that can be seen to congregate at TenK at night.

Ann has twice reported seeing a single caracara along hy41 where we have seen them in previous years, although I have yet to see one in spite of stopping along the road with McDonald's coffee on several occasions. She also saw the first swallow-tailed kite of the year on 2/21/21. Limpkins have been a rare site so far. The area along hy41 was finally cut on 2/20/21 and I did see one this morning (2/22/21). I'm not sure that that one sighting is much support for my theory that they only show after a cutting.

Last year was the worst birding year on record. Can I expect this year, with two bad legs, my impaired hearing and a cataract forming in my right eye, be any better? Not so far; the 21-Feb count this year was 65 birds, 3 behind last year's count. Hopefully the two trip marks at Eagle Lakes this morning will put me on the right track.

2/23/21

I decided to drive Shell Island Road on the morning of 2/23/21. As soon as I turned on to the road, it was apparent that the most of the area south of the road had recently been burned. The odor of the fresh burn permeated the air as I drove along. I left the wheels in the car and decided to walk the boardwalk with my cane. Few birds (9 species) were seen along the way. Unfortunately, I didn't see or hear an eastern towhee, a mark I usually seek at that location. At one point I thought I heard its abbreviated call but I was not confident enough to mark it (Matt would be happy about that). I tested Seek with several plants that I had previously identified. It correctly identified the glossy wild coffee (*Psychotria nervosa*) but referred to it to it by another synonymous common

name (shiny-leaved wild coffee). Seek also correctly identified the wax myrtle as *Morella cerifera*. The plant I identified as myrsine was identified as colicroot (*Myrsine cubana*). According to Wunderlin & Hansen (2011) that is the accepted name for the plant I have listed in the database as *Myrsine floridana* and colicroot is a common synonym. I chsnge the database entry accordingly.

Seek correctly identified tha giant leather fern as *Acrostichum danaeifolium* but failed to distinguish it from the coastal leather fern (*Acrosticum aureum*) which I believe I have identified there in the past. According to the IRC, both species should be found in the Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. Seek correctly identified the bracken fern as a bracken but referred to it as the austral bracken (*Pteridium esculentum*). According to Nelson (2000) and Wunderlin & Hansen (2011), the only bracken in Florida in *P. aqualinum* with three subspecies. None of these are synonymous with *P. esculentum*.



After I left the boardwalk I drove to the end of Shell Island Road. Nothing was added to my list of birds or plants along the way. I did take a few photos of the burned areas as I drove out of Rookery Bay.

2/28/21

Wednesdays are generally Ann's beach days and Wednesday (2/24/21) turned out to be a good birding day as well. We went to Marco Island and, after breakfast, I saw a flock of about 20 rock pigeons fly over a nearby building. Then, on the way to the beach I saw my first burrowing owl of the season. As Ann was baking on the beach I eventually ended up at Mackle Park. Not bad for the location, I saw eight species of birds to report in BD. The special treat of the morning occurred at about 11:15AM when 5 magnificent frigate birds flew over the pond.



The tropical storm that hit the Everglades National Park last November must have been pretty severe. When Ann and I visited the southern end of the park on 2/25/21, the apparent effects were quite visible. Water levels at the Anhinga Trail were very high; no wading birds were seen. Ann did see a purplr gallinule but, unfortunately, I missed it. As we drove toward Flamingo we encountered an extensive area of downed treen. The way they were scattered about made me wonder if a tornado had hit the area. Then when we got to Flamingo, itself, we fond the area totally devastated; the visitor's center and cafeteria were closed and abandoned except for a few workmen. The only open area appeared to be boat launch area.

At the Anhinga Trail Seek correctly identified the oceanblue morning glory (*Ipomoea indica*), and I also thought I saw wireweed (*Seta ulmifolia*) along the trail but I couldn't got close enough for an effort with Seek. In addition to the paltry few birds recorded in BD, Ann saw that purple gallinule and also a roseate spoonbill. A few landscape photos were taken.

Two target birds were in my mind when I went to Serenity Walk Park on 2/27/21, the red-headed woodpecker and the brown-headed nuthatch. Bull's eye! When I entered the park I turned to the left (south) as is my usual routine. I met a couple from Ohio who were also birding and the guy said he always came to the park for the red-headed woody's. As he was speaking, one flew into a nearby tree. I must admit that I cheated though, for the brown-headed nuthatch. I played the sound of the bird using the Sibley Birds app on my iPhone and two of the birds flew in and worked a nearby pine almost immediately. Iran in to that same couple a little later and they reported also seeing flickers and downy's. Unfortunately, I missed those marks for the morning and also, so far for this trip.

Following our usual Sunday routine on 2/28/21, Ann and I took a brief pass through Sugden Park. I remembered seeing a lesser black-backed gull there last year and hoped for a repeat. There was a small group of gulls in the beach area but it didn't include the sought after gull. Ring-billed and herring gulls were seen, though, and along with a single royal tern they were marked as trip marks 74-76 for the year and put me three over the count mark of 3/1/20.

3/1/21

Three roseate spoonbills flew over the channel on the morning of 3/1/21. These were new to the condo bird list and, along with the wild turkey, were the first condo birds added since 2018.

Doug and Gisela left to go back to Wisconsin this morning. In an email Gisela indicated that she had seen 115 birds during their stay. She had mentioned having a good shorebird day at Tigertail and good warbler mornings at Kirby-Storter while they were here. My meager count for this checkpoint of March 1st is pretty poor in comparison but I can blame some of that on the condition of my knees. That's my excuse and I'm sticking to it. In 2016 I did have a March 1st count of 118. The fact that Gisela is an excellent birder might have contributed a somewhat.

Ann and I went to the Cuban café on March 1st and I did a little birding along the way. It was approaching low tide and I saw two oystercatchers from the bridge over Smallwood Ave. These were the first oystercatchers that I saw in southwest Florida but I have seen them up near Kaczmarek's. Nothing was seen at the gap in the mangroves further toward the café but two immature yellow-crowned night herons were seen across from the boat launch area. Surprisingly, and disappointingly, no shorebirds were seen. At the intersection of Hy29 & hy41, we stopped to take a few photos of the great horned owls.



3/7/21

I went to the Big Cypress Bend boardwalk on the morning of 3/2/21 hoping to see a few warblers for this year's trip list. I didn't have any luck with the warblers but did add a white-eyed vireo (trip mark #79). I had heard them in the past but, for some odd reason, had not marked them. I found several ferns with their spore bearing structures nicely in the sun with dark backgrounds to photograph. Seek identified one of the vines as the pohuehue (*Muehlenbeckia australis*) but none of my references showed this to be in Florida at all, let alone Collier County. It appears to me to perhaps be one of the Smilax species but, at this time, it remains unidentified.

Ann decided to cross the lagoon at Tigertail Beach on Wednesday,

3/3/21 but, not surprisingly, I was not up to the venture. Fortunately, a small, but diverse, group of shorebirds landed on the near side of the lagoon and I was able to identify six shorebirds including the black-bellied, Wilson's and semipalmated plovers as well as the dunlin, least sandpiper and short-billed dowitcher. That added six more trip counts bringing the total to 85. That's well past the March 14th check point for 2020. The total species count for the morning was only 10 birds and that did not include the osprey which normally nest there. Apparently they are not nesting there this year, at east not yet. I also saw a curly-tailed lizard on the beach, my first at Tigertail.

While I was waiting for Ann to return,, I used Seek to identify one of the grasses planted along the parking area. It was identified as the fountain grass (*Pennisetum setaceum*). According to Taylor (2009) this is a nonnative grass.

I had a reasonably good morning at the TenK Marsh trail on 3/5/21 with a total of 26 bird species added to DB for the morning. I used the walker to hike to the second bench where I saw a group of four shovelers. I've seen shovelers there in six different years, as early as February 3rd (2012) and as late as April 15th of the same year. The water levels had fallen quite a bit since my last visit to the trail. Other birders indicated that reddish egrets have been seen there earlier. I know that I've seen them there also but my records don't include the sighting.

The Berninger group was hiking Union road to the Dan House Prairie on 3/6/21 and, although I was not up to the hike, I did meet the group and "catch up", so to speak. I then drove to McDonald's, bought a coffee, and parked along Hy41 and waited for the resident caracaras. They never showed up so I drove back to the condo.

Coming back from our usual Sunday routine on 3/7/21 I finally saw my first swallow-tailed kite of the year. That was Ann's fourth. She also has reported seeing the local caracaras on two occasions, but I have yet to see them. In any event, the swallow-tailed kite was trip mark #87 for this year, already tying me with the March 21st count of last year. Since the grass was cut along Hy41 near Six L's Farms Road, limpkins have been occasional along the roadside. I have yet to see more than three at any one time, however.

3/11/21

The owls at the intersection of Hy29 were nowhere to be seen as I sped past on my way to Kirby-Storier just after sunrise on 3/8/21. In an email dated 2/28/21 Gisela ZD told me that she and Doug had seen an American bittern there on that date, their last day before leaving for home. Then, when I met with the Berninger group, Dick Johnsen reported that he had also seen it on 3/5/21. When I got to Kirby-Storier, I hurriedly walked to the end of the boardwalk and, sure enough, there it was. This is the second year that I have had excellent sightings of American bitterns. The bittern was among the 15 species that I saw that morning. I had also hoped to see a few warbler species but the only one that I had not previously seen was the black and white warbler. This was a trip mark, as was the bittern and the goldfinch, bringing the list to an even 90 species



Water levels were still pretty high at the roadside park. That may be the reason that there are few plants in bloom compared to this time of the year in previous visits. I've noticed that in all of the areas that I've been to. On the way back to the condo I drove through the Burns Lake camping area and found the hiking trail at the end had been cleared. This might be a good area to check for flowering plants later. This time, when I passed the owl's nest, two small white owlets could be seen.

I drove down Janes Scenic Drive to gate 12 on 3/9/21. There was still plenty of water in the roadside ditches and few birds were to be seen. As in the past few years, the road was gated beyond gate 12. I sat at a picnic table along the edge of the parking area and waited for the birds to show up — they didn't. Then I decided to walk the road beyond the gate where I examined several vines growing there. One of them (photos 2021_03_09_002-006) appeared to be one of the Smilax species. It appeared to resemble the earleaf greenbrier (*Smilax auriculata*) as shown in Taylor (2013). According to this reference, though, that species does not have spines and the specimens I observed did have a few. Taylor (2013) indicated that *S. glauca* (wild sarsaparilla) could be distinguished from *S. auriculata* by the fact that the former had spines. In their key to the genus Smilax, Wunderlin & Hansen (2011) show both of these species to have "prickles or spines". Using their key for the three species of Smilax to be expected in the Fakahatchee Strand by the IRC (*S. auriculata*, *S. bona-nox* and *S. laurifolia*) and the photos of these three species found on the AFP, the id of *S. auriculata* appears to be supported.

I also examined an apparent species of *Vitis* (photo 2021_03_09_007) which I believed to be the summer grape (*Vitis aestivalis*). The IRC does not show this species for the Fakahatchee but the AFP does show it for Collier County and Wunderlin & Hansen (2013) indicates that it is frequent and “nearly throughout”. Both of these species were added to the Florida plant database.

After I returned to the car I decided to take a short hike (with neither cane nor walker) down tram 12. I walked just about to the end of the royal palms before turning back. I looked at a few ferns along the way, some of which I believed to be the true marsh fern (*Thelypteris palustris*). I also found and photographed what appeared to be a species of Asteraceae, possibly *Pluchea* or *Eupatorium* (photos 2021_03_09_012-15). I didn’t identify the species beyond that..

As I was driving out of the strand I met Fred and Alyce Thompson who had just recently arrived at their place in POI. We gabbed for a while and then continued in our opposite directions.

3/10/21 was a Wednesday and that means beach day. I dropped Ann at Marco’s south beach and then went to short term parking at Tigertail. It was a total bust. Only four species showed up on at the near side of the lagoon and that included 0 shorebirds. Then I went to Mackle Park. That was also a bust—no magnificent frigatebirds—no magnificent anything!

I used the walker to hike around the middle lake at Eagle Lakes Park on 3/11/21. Although I did record 29 species for the morning, I think the north lake is a more interesting hike even though I only beat this count by 7 birds when I visited it earlier on this trip. No trip marks were seen on 3/11/21.

3/14/21

The Marco Island Shell Club held their annual shell show on Friday (3/12/21) and Saturday (3/13/21). Ann and I went shortly after it had opened on the first day. The show was held outside and was a lot smaller than in previous years. Ann bought the usual selection of shell crafts and I bought a nice horse conch shell for my collection.

With a Barron River low tide expected shortly after 9AM on 3/13/21 I headed toward Everglades City that morning. I left a bit early so I could check the flooded fields along hy41 on the way. There were several areas where I found large collections of egrets and other water birds. Among them were the first black-necked stilts of the year as well as a large group of white pelicans.



After taking a few mediocre photographs I drove on to the Chokoloskee causeway toward the boat launch area. Fishermen were on the exposed areas where I had seen oystercatchers earlier. I must remember not to try this tour again on a Saturday. Trucks with boar trailers lined the road as I approached the landing. In spite of a wide mud flat region, no shorebirds were seen. I had hoped to possibly find a ruddy turnstone or two but that was not to be. Luckily, I did see a couple of reddish egrets along the way; that was another target for the morning. In spite of the problems, though, the reddish egret and black-necked stilts were trip marks #88 & 89, bringing this year’s total to 7 above the March 14th total of last year. The great horned owls at the intersection of highways 29 & 41 were clearly visible when I left the area.

2/21/21

Warblers are conspicuously absent on the trip list thus far this year. To rectify that, I went to the Big Cypress Bend boardwalk on 3/15/21. The birding was fairly good, 24 species. But—no warblers! I did see a barred owl with two young (actually, I only saw one of the young—others told me there were two). Both the adult and the young were too far away for decent photos. The eagles

were not seen anywhere around the nest; in fact, the nest was pretty much grown over and not visible to me. I sat at the end of the boardwalk for quite a while and took a few photos of a great blue heron and a great egret. On the way back to the car I examined my favorite strangler fig and found two interesting epiphytes growing on it. One was my favorite fern, the whisk fern (*Psilotum nudum*) [photos 2021_03_15_026-29]. It was good to see this fern again. Specimens seen earlier seem to have disappeared in recent years. The other was one of the orchids [photos 2021_03_15_023-25]. I don't know my orchids very well but I suspected it to be a butterfly orchid. The plant was not in bloom but the pictures in Brown (2005) seem to suggest a possible Florida butterfly orchid (*Encyclia tampensis*). As it turned out, Paul Hines had introduced me to this species by pointing out another specimen in 2019 (see FloNotes 2019, p.8). The IRC does show this species for the Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve.

Later that day, when Ann and I were sitting in the Lannie, she spotted a small bird which she described as being warbler size and having a red breast. When I later showed her a picture of an American redstart, she confirmed that that was the bird she had seen. Needless to say, I didn't see the bird. That makes three birds, now, that she claims to have seen but that I have not (American redstart, ruddy turnstone and northern caracara). Of course, I cannot count those birds. On the very next day (3/16/21), though, her advantage began to diminish. Ann had decided to spend that day with another crossing of the Tigertail lagoon. After I dropped her off, I wandered down to the lagoon and checked the near side. I found a willet and a ruddy turnstone among the few shorebirds present. Both of these were welcome trip marks and the ruddy turnstone left Ann with only two birds to her advantage and only the sanderling as a likely shorebird to be seen yet.

Later, back at the condo, her American redstart morphed into a painted bunting. Three of them, one female and two males, were seen in the hedge between the condo and the channel. She immediately realized that that was what she had seen the previous day. I had already seen one at the White residence but that was, disappointingly, a female and it lacked the brilliant color of the male. This was also a new condo bird, the third to be added this year, bringing the total to 54 species seen in or from the various condos we've rented since 2010. Now Ann had only the caracara to her advantage.



Still looking for warblers, I thought my next best bet would be the Kirby-Storter Roadside Park so I went there on 3/17/21. Although there was still plenty of water at the end of the boardwalk, the higher areas were starting to dry up a bit. As I walked along the boardwalk, the dew on the backlit cypress trees and several orb webs of the spiders glistened in the sunlight. Some of the herbaceous plants were beginning to bloom. Among them were white tops (possibly *Rhynchospora colorata*), rosy camphorweed (*Pluchea baccharis*) and one of the miterworts (*Mitreola* sp.). Because it was below the boardwalk, I couldn't distinguish between the *Mitreola* species but the plant I saw appeared to be *M. sessilifolia*. I also saw one of the butterworts in bloom below the boardwalk. According to the IRC, the only butterworts found in the Big Cypress National

Preserve would be *Pinguicula lutea* and *P. pumila*. I identified this one as *P. pumila*. The butterwort and the miterwort were new plants for Kirby-Storter and the location field of the database was updated accordingly.

While I was there I noticed some lady's-tresses in bloom in the lawn near the parking area. I remember seeing them in previous years. They were about 18 inches tall with about 15 flowers in a somewhat spiraling terminal inflorescence. The flower spiral measured 7cm long with individual flowers about 1cm long. The flowers appeared to bloom from the bottom upwards. I did not notice any leaves on the ground but the cauline leaves were small and hugged the stem, the bottom one or two mostly withered at the time of blooming. The upper leaves seemed to be reduced to hairlike structures. The plant stems and floral parts were hairy.

Hammer (2014) includes five of the lady's-tresses but I found it hard to identify the species with this reference. The AFT lists 7 species of *Spiranthes* for the Big Cypress National Preserve. I attempted to use the key in Brown (2005) but had difficulty making some of the choices, partially because a cataract in my right eye made it difficult for me to use a hand lens. I ended up identifying the plant as *S. torta* [p.240: 1a, 2a, 3a, 4b — *S. torta*]. but I had a high degree of uncertainty with the id, especially regarding the ciliate condition of the lip. In fact, I believed that even my earlier identification of lady's-tresses species were also very doubtful so I removed the species epithet in the database, referring to all lady's-tresses identified to date as *Spiranthes* sp.

Only 10 bird species were recorded for the morning and, of course, none of them were warblers. Also, I could not locate the American bittern seen earlier.—no warblers—no bittern

Back at the condo, the painted bunting showed up again on 2/16 & 17. On 2/18/21, a lone common ground dove walked by and provided a trip mark. Both Ann and I think we are seeing fewer limpkins and swallow-tail kites than in previous years and, much to my chagrin, I have yet to see a northern caracara.



Finally, pine warblers were seen high up in the pine trees at Burns Lake on 2/20/21. It was among the 8 species of birds recorded for the morning. I took a short walk along the trail behind the camping area which, according to a sign posted near the beginning, is part of the Turner River Unit of the Big Cypress National Preserve. This trail appears to have some interesting wildflowers, especially in the recently flooded areas. Among those seen this morning were the horned bladderwort (*Utricularia cornuta*), growing in several clumps along the edges of the trail, and a small group of butterworts. At first I thought there were two butterwort [*Pinguicula caerulea* (blue butterwort) and *P. pumila* (small butterwort)]. As it turns out, *P. caerulea* is not shown by the IRC for the Big Cypress National Preserve but the AFP does show it for Collier County. It is possible that the plant identified as *P. caerulea*, though, were young plants of *P. pumila*, since it was growing with more obvious specimens of *P. pumila*; the blue plants were smaller and they could lose their color as they mature. I decided to record only the *P. pumila*. I recorded a list of many of the plants seen and used the list to update the location fields of the database.

I've been having some problems with Birders Diary lately, specifically with the generation of reports. Jeff Jones, owner of the software program, took over my computer to trouble shoot the problem and in little time he recognized the cause of the problem and fixed it. With the program now performing correctly I reviewed the sightings of this trip. As of today, I have seen ninety-six species which is nine species above the count of this date last year. I need eight more birds to beat the worst year ever.

3/26/21

I drove Janes Scenic Drive again on 3/22/21. I noticed the magnolia trees in bloom as I drove. I only went as far as Gate 7 and then parked and walked with the cane for a short distance along the tram. Along the road edge at the gate I found a shrub that reminded me of the elderberry [photos 2021_03_22_011-14]. It had opposite, three parted compound leaves which were toothed. I also noticed a (*Pluckia*) species [photos 2021_03_22_004-10], which I determined to be *P. Odorata*, and several sedges. One was clearly a species of *Carex* which I believed I recognized as the bottlebrush sedge (*Carex comosa*). This sedge is not shown by the IRC for the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park but the AFP does show it for Collier County. Two others were recognized as flat sedges (genus *Cyperus*). These two need to be identified to species. On my way out of the strand I stopped at gate 3 and saw an alligator which seemed to be attracted by my presence and a mink.

The eastern towhee was the target bird on 3/23/21 when I visited the Briggs Boardwalk along Shell Island Road. I walked the entire boardwalk with just the cane. As I walked along I scared up a large group of ibis and egrets, but I only saw 8 species for the morning and the eastern towhee was not among them. I did see an apparent beautyberry bush near the end of the walk.

On 3/24/21 I dropped Ann at the beach and then went on to Mackle Park. As I sat on a park bench along the edge of the pond, I saw pretty much the same birds I had seen on my previous visit; in fact, some of them might have even been the same individuals. Several common moorhens and a little blue heron worked the shoreline. I also saw several mottled ducks in the pond. As the time to pick up Ann neared, I packed up my camera and binoculars, put them in the car and went into the building to use the restroom. Then I returned to the car and, in a few minutes, four magnificent frigate birds began to fly over the pond. In a while they were joined by several others. They flew low over the pond and would have presented great photo ops, but it was time to pick Ann up from South Beach. This may sound a bit like “the fish that got away”.

By 3/25/21 the water levels along the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk had begun to drop. When I went there that morning I could hear the commotion as I approached the alligator hole at the end. The water level must have been perfect. The alligators were accompanied by most of the long legged waders common to the area. Great blue herons, tri-colored herons, black-crowned night herons, great egrets, snowy egrets, white ibis and wood storks were all there. I had already seen little blue herons and green herons in the more shallow channel leading to the boardwalk. Most of the birds flushed as I approached but they returned a few at a time as I sat quietly on my walker. I hadn't seen that much activity there for a long time. I recorded 16 species for the morning but, not surprisingly, few songbirds and no warblers or new trip marks.

I went back to the boardwalk the next morning (3/26/21) to see if there was still as much bird activity at the alligator hole. There was. I added an anhinga to the list of birds seen feeding there. Actually, the count of bird species for the morning (20) exceeded that for the previous day (16). I also noticed lizard's tail (*Saururus cernuus*) was in bloom along the boardwalk. I photographed the plant and used it to replace that previously used in the plant Powerpoint that I developed last year. But, still no warblers or new trip marks.

4/4/21

I was really disappointed when I drove the Turner River-Birdon loop on the morning of 3/27/21. The only heron that I saw through the entire drive was the green heron. Much of the area, especially the upper portion, had been burned since my last visit. This may be the reason that neither the eastern bluebird or the eastern meadowlark could be found. Only 15 bird species were recorded in BD for the morning and none of them were trip marks.

The environmental restoration areas seem to have developed lots of terrestrial vegetation and several new areas have been filled in, especially along Birdon Road. It seemed to me that the growth of cattails was more evident than I recall from the past. These



seemed to be developing more in the upper regions.

Back at the condo I examined the perigynia from the suspected *Carex comosa* [photos 2021_03_023-24] that I collected from Janes Scenic Drive on 3/22/21. I used the digital microscope to photograph them [photos 2021_03_28_006-10] and searched for web sources to identify them. I found photos of the perigynia of *Carex comosa* from Minnesota Wildflowers (<https://minnesotawildflowers.info/grass-sedge-rush/bristly-sedge>) which seemed to clearly confirm the identification. This sedge is also found in the Midwest so I confirmed the id with Smith (2018).



The genus *Cyperus*, though, is another story. I am relatively unfamiliar with the terminology describing these sedges so I had to depend on “process of elimination” taxonomy. According to the AFP there are 33 species of *Cyperus* in Collier County and the IRC shows that 7 of them are found in the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park. According to Smith (2018) only one of these is found in the Midwest. I suspect that one of the species [photos 2021_03_22_015-16] found was *C. ligularis* which has been identified previously in Serenity Walk Park. Comparing the photos in the AFP, I suspect the other [photos 2021_03_22_017-22] to be *C. odoratus*. A photo in Dressler (undated) seems to agree with this id as does Smith (2018).

Floral

I went back to the same site on 3/29/21 to make more observations of this sedge and to collect material for further study. The plant was about 1 meter tall with a number of long stalks, four of which terminated with clusters of flowers. Below each flower head was a group of about 10 bracts of varying length. Several shorter multi-leaved stalks were also present. These were shorter than those with flowers and may develop flowers later. The fertile stalks also had several leaves. The stems were triangular, about 3/8” per side. The flower clusters consisted of a group of ‘bottle-brush’ spikes with terminal spikelet at right angles to the others. I did not recognize any flower parts or fruit at this time. The identification of *C. odoratus* is tentative but I did add the plant to the database.

As I was sedgeing on these two mornings I found another plant in bloom along Tram 7. It had a head of small white flowers on long stalks [photos 2021_03_22_031-34; 2021_03_29_029-32]. The small white flowers reminded me of those of the snow squarostem (*Melanthera nivea*) but the plant is more shrublike. The stem is very tough, seeming to become almost woody in the lower portions. The lower stem regions also appear to have ridges which were reddish-brown. The leaves were entire or slightly toothed. They were more or less oval and on long petioles. Hammer’s (2014) photo of Feay’s Palafox (*Palafoxia feayi*) resembles what I saw and photographed but, unfortunately doesn’t show the leaves. Checking my other references and looking at web descriptions of this species presented the same problem. The descriptions of all of these references are consistent with my observations but the flowering time is off. The plants that I saw were in bloom but all of the references suggested a fall blooming period. The AFP does show this species for Collier County but, although the IRC does show it for Collier County, it does not show the species for the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park.

With bobwhite in mind I visited the Picayune Strand on the morning of 3/30/21. At first the morning seemed a disappointment; few birds were seen or heard. At several points I parked along the side of the road to examine plants. I noticed some very small primrosewillows. They had thin woody stems about 1 foot tall. The plants had apparently already bloomed and had what I expect were about 1 inch fruit developing. Although mostly dried up, there were a few linear leaves which were 1½ x 1/8 inches. These were somewhat in-rolled dorsally. I don’t know if this was a different species of primrose willow than what I see growing along more moist roadsides of the strand or just the same species dwarfed by the more difficult growing conditions of the drier areas.

I also examined another small, somewhat succulent plant growing along the roadside. The plants varied around 2ft tall with linear leaves which hugged the stem in their lower portion but diverged somewhat distally. The inflorescence was terminal and consisted of several round clusters of flowers (not in bloom at this time). This plant had been observed last year and found to be the bighead rush (*Juncus megacephalus*). Of the 7 species of *Juncus* listed by the AFP, only three of them are found in the Picayune Strand by the IRC. Comparing photos of these in the AFP leaves little doubt of the identification.

As I was leaving the strand, approaching the fruit outlet, I saw a hawk circling above the road. It landed and perched in a pine along a clearing. It was clearly a short-tailed hawk. I had reported one of these on Marco Island (in Mackle Park) back in 2012 but I have had serious doubts about this sighting. Was it a dark morph short-tailed hawk or was it another turkey vulture with others it was flying with. No doubt now—this was a clear id, most likely an immature white morph.



I slept in on 4/1/21 but Ann and I took a ride for breakfast in Everglades City (They goofed and scrambled my eggs). The tide was low so we drove the Chokoloskee causeway in search of possible yellow-crowned night herons, oystercatchers or shorebirds. We saw none of the above. There were a bunch of brown pelicans hanging around the Chokoloskee boat landing, though, so I took a few photos. On the way back we could not see any owls in the nest along hy29; possibly, they had fledged.

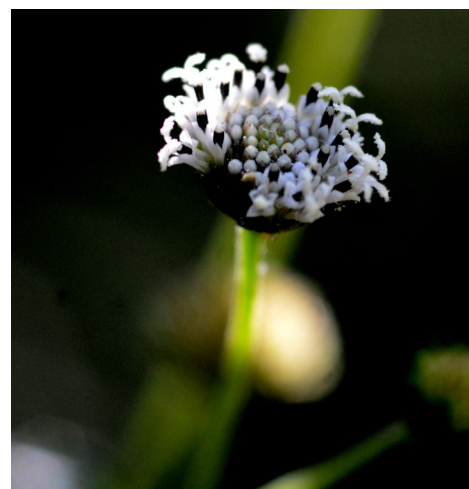
On 4/2/21 I visited Kirby-Storter with the hope of seeing warblers or other songbirds to add to this year's species list. The area had dried considerably since my last visit, only the only standing water

was near the end of the boardwalk. Alligator trails (highways) were evident in the near muddy ground of the higher areas. Most on the resurrection fern, well resurrected in the previous visit had again gone into dormancy. Only 8 bird species were recorded for the morning; no trip marks.

As these notes have shown in previous years, no birds - I turn more of my attention to the plants. I decided to go back to the Fakahatchee' tram 7 on 4/3/21. I wanted to make further observations of the plants seen there on 3/29/21 and get better photos of them. I swapped out my Tamron zoom lens for the Nikon macro I had purchased from Renee Rudolph, mounted the camera on my tripod, grabbed my \$5 folding chair and headed down the tram for a short distance (4 culverts). I took more photos of the supposed Feay's Palafox [photos 2021_04_03_003-7] -but was bit disappointed with the results. The short depth of field did not give me the effect I wanted. I had to back up quite a bit to get the whole flower in focus so there wasn't much of an advantage to using the macro lens.

There were several sedges growing along the tram's edge which is what attracted me to this site in the first place. Several of them were of the genus *Carex*. *Carex lupuliformis* was one of them but I was not sure of another [photo 2021_04_03_009]. It had 3 spikes at the end of the fertile culm which also had 5 leaves equally spaced along its length. It was a relatively fragile sedge. I could not determine the location of the staminate flowers. I had hoped to confirm the identification of *C. vexans* which I examined there in 2011 & 2012, but there were no white bands at the summits of the leaves as Curtis (2008) described for this species. Of the three species of *Carex* shown for the Fakahatchee Strand by the IRC, *C. longii* would be another possibility but no positive identification was made.

There was also another species of *Cyperus* growing along the tram [photo 2021_04_03_010]. This was a much less robust sedge than the one on Janes Scenic Drive. It was about 18" tall with no apparent basal leaves. There were only 2 bracts visible below the inflorescence. The inflorescence consisted of about 7 spikes, mostly held close to the stem but some with short stalks. The fertile culm was triangular, about 1-2mm in diameter. The identity of this sedge was not determined.



Another plant was recognized as a species of whitetop (*Rhynchospora* sp.) [photos 2021_04_03_011-12]. It was growing in a mass with apparently short rhizomes judging by how close the plants were to one another. The terminal inflorescence was subtended by 5 or 6 bracts, the longest of which was about 4" long. Wunderlin & Hansen (2008) show three white bracted species of *Rhyncho-*

spora for Collier County and two of the three are listed by the IRC for the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park. According to Hammer (2014) the larger of the two is *R. latifolia* and this is consistent with photo in Taylor (2013). It seems to me that I may have confused *R. colorata* and *R. latifolia* in the past and that the present plant is actually the *R. colorata*; most previous observations being *R. latifolia*.

Back to Janes Scenic Drive I was still unable to see the flower structures of the Cypress plant listed earlier as *C. odoratus*. I did take a couple of photographs of the *C. ligularis*. There were only 12 bird species seen or heard on this morning.

4/15/21

Fifteen species of birds were recorded in BD for the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk for 4/5/21; none of them warblers or other trip marks. Water levels had receded considerably since my last visit and the concentration of waders at the alligator hole gone. Only the anhinga and an immature black-crowned night heron were seen there. A number of shrubs, including possibly marberry and buttonbush were in bloom as was the dotted smartweed (*Polygonum punctatum*). While I was there I met Bill Trachtenberg. He showed me some of his photos on his phone and shared the URL of his web site (williantrachtenberg.smugmug.com) where I could see more. His password is 2020. I looked at some of his photos later at home — beautiful! I especially liked one of a snail kite eating a snail.



The morning of 4/6/21 was a four-woodpecker morning, including a trip mark (northern flicker) at Serenity Park. The majority of the birds seen (7) were woodpeckers. Had a downy woodpecker shown up it would have been another trip mark. Red-headed woodpeckers were active all along the circular trail. I saw any where from 2-7 of them, depending on how active they were.

I used Seek in an attempt to confirm some of the plant identifications in the park. The app confirmed the identity of shrubby false buttonweed (*Spermacoce verticillata*), rosy camphorweed (*Pluchea baccaris*) and the Virginia chainfern (*Woodwardia virginica*). It also recognized the laurel-leaf greenbrier (*Smilax laurifolia*), a plant that was consequently added to the species database. This species is listed for Collier County by the AFP; the IRC does not include Serenity Walk Park. Apparent rusty lyonia (*Lyonia fruticosa*) was in bloom but Seek didn't recognize it. Neither did it recognize the flowering corkwood (*Stillingia aquatica*) or Leavenworth's tickseed (*Coreopsis leavenworthii*), although it did identify it as a tickseed. The app was not very useful with any of the graminoids. Even what I consider an

easy id, the swamp flatsedge (*Cyperus ligularis*), was not identified. Some ferns were only identified to families.

On 4/7/21 Ann and I went to Lovers Key State Park in Lee County. I was hoping for a few shorebirds or terns or black skimmers to tie last years bird count. Unfortunately, none of these birds cooperated. There were no new birds to add to the list for this year. In fact, only four species were counted for the morning including a single brown pelican and a couple of royal terns. As I was waiting for Ann to sun bathe, I walked along the edge of the beach and found a bay cedar (*Suriana maritima*), later identified with Witherington & Witherington (2017). This plant was added to the database. I took a few photos but the bright sunlight washed out the details.

The next day (4/8/21) I recorded 20 species along the Big Cypress Bend boardwalk. A 21st species could have been a trip mark but it flew as I was convincing myself that it was a prairie warbler. In spite of the fact that I saw no new species, it was a pretty good morning. There were two barred owls at the alligator hole at the end and an interesting interactions between a great egret, a young black-crowned night heron and an immature white ibis. Both alligators were also home; both are quite large.



Given all the activity at the alligator hole on 4/8/21, I decided to return the next day (4/9/21). Along the boardwalk, Seek identified the sweet bay (*Persea palustris*), which the IRC does show for the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park. I chose not to put it in the database, though, because I was not confident that I could identify it again, I did photograph dahoon holly (*Ilex cassine*) which was in bloom.

It was only a three woodpecker morning but one of them, the downy woodpecker, was a welcome trip mark (#101). This was among the 21 species recorded in BD for the morning, one more than on the previous morning. I enjoyed watching the interaction among the herons around the alligator hole. There were at least four immature black-crowned night herons which were able to prevail in scraps over feeding places with a tricolored heron. The apparent immature barred owl was pretty much in the same place it had been the previous morning but I could not locate the adult.

On the way back I noticed a tailed strap fern (*Camptoneurum costatum*) on my favorite strangler fig. This fig is getting more interesting each time I look at it; first the whisk fern and orchid, now the tailed strap fern. This was the first tailed strap fern I've seen since one was pointed out by Paul Hines' wife a couple of years ago. I have never been able to find that one again.

On 4/12/21 I again did the Turner River/Birdon loop. It had rained heavily the previous day and overnight and there was some standing water in the roadside ditches and in the road itself. I only saw 17 bird species. I was hoping to add an eastern bluebird and/or an eastern meadowlark to this year's trip list, but I saw neither. I was beginning to think these two species were only winter visitors to southern Florida but Pranty's (2005) bar graphs indicate that they are both breeders in the area. What I didn't realize at the time was that I had never recorded any of the previous limpkin sightings in BD and that the one seen on this date was actually a trip mark #102).

I noticed a path apparently made by a four wheel vehicle leading into a prairie-like area at the corner of Wagonwheel and Birdon roads. I walked in a short distance (unassisted) and found prairie milkweed (*Asclepias lanceolata*), showy milkwort (*Polygala violacea*), rosy camphorweed (*Pucea baccharis*), marsh-pink (*Sabatia stelaria*) Leavenworth's coreopsis (*Coreopsis leavenworthii*) and sawgrass (*Cladium jamaicense*) among the plants growing. This will be a nice place to check periodically as are other prairie-like areas along Birdon Road.

The effects of recent rains were evident along the BCBB when I walked there on the morning of 4/13/21. Much of the ground was saturated and a few puddles were seen along the way. There was not much action at the alligator hole. A couple of tricolored herons argued over the rights to fishing locations and then disappeared. There was an adult barred owl high up in a tree watching over several young in other close trees. A fellow that I met there said that there were three young owls but I could only find two of them. Few other birds were seen.

At this point I am still 1 bird shy of last year's count. Trip marks are getting hard to find; many birds having gone back north. I went through Birder's Diary and found that between April 13th and May 3rd of 2020, only three species that have not yet been seen this year were among the sightings (yellow-billed cuckoo, eastern bluebird and black skimmer). Those birds, along with a few other terns and shorebirds, that I have so far missed this year, will be my target birds for the last couple of weeks.

I did the reverse Turner River-Birdon Loop on 4/14/21. I did see a couple of deer along the roadside but nothing to add to either the bird or plant lists.

Although the TenK Mash trail has been drying, recent rains have restored some water surrounded by large mudflats. I went there on 4/15/21 after seeing reports in ebird of several interesting shorebirds being seen there recently. The reports were accurate. I saw 25 species, a presentable number for the morning. Interestingly, though, most of the long-legged waders were replaced by the largest bunch of shorebirds I had ever seen at that location. Most of them were concentrated around the observation deck and a bit further south. The morning's entry in BD shows that among the birds seen were six species that I would consider shorebirds and, among them was trip mark #103, the lesser yellowlegs. With this mark I have tied the trip list of 2020, the worst Florida birding year of my experience. Perhaps, if I had brought my spotting scope along, I would have been able to exceed it.



There were also several brown pelicans. I was surprised that they were still sticking around with the water being so shallow. I enjoyed seeing them in a natural area rather than begging for fish around some dock or pier (I haven't been able to cross the Tigertail lagoon this year). An adult and several immatures were seen. There were also four (I only saw 2) roseate spoonbills and several black-necked stilts, birds that I thought had long since moved on.



4/17/21

It was the sanderling (trip mark #104) that pushed me over the 2020 count. I saw several of them at Tigertail Beach Park on 4/16/21. The experience was much like the last one. No large groups of shorebirds were seen on the near side of the lagoon but a diverse group of them straggled in. Along with the sanderlings were Willits, ruddy turnstones, dunlin and both black-bellied and Wilsons plovers. I id'd the sanderlings at the beach but I later, back at the condo, I attempted to confirm the identification. The sanderling and the western sandpiper appear very similar and Sibley (2000) did little to clarify the distinctions. According to the bar charts in Pranty (2005) both species would be in the area at this time. Recent reports for Tigertail on ebird did not include the western sandpiper but the presence of the sanderling was documented in the last 5 hours. Either bird would be a trip mark; I stuck with my original identification. The Wilson's plovers seemed to get in a few turf battles as they were feeding far off of the beach. There were also a few other birds present and reported in BD. Among them was a little blue heron that was fishing just off shore. It appeared to me that the fish it was catching could have been puffers. In all, 13 species were recorded.

Ann and I went to the Pepper Ranch Preserve on 4/17/21. I had found the preserve while driving around the Lake Trafford area several yeas ago but it was not open to the public at that time. According to their web site, it is only open to the general public on Friday, Saturday and Sunday on nonhunting times. Although there are many acres of various habitat to hike, we only did a drive through the preserve and probably saw little of what it had to offer. Crested caracara and nesting swallow-tailed kites are supposedly present. What we did see was cattle and cattle egrets. We saw few flowering plants but I noticed the

scarlet milkweed (*Asclepias curassavica*) in bloom at several locations along the roadsides. I recorded the few birds seen in BD. I am unlikely to return to this area, given the nearby C.R.E.W. Marsh trail, so I did not add the location to the plant database and did not record the plants seen. On the way back through Immokalee, we visited the Collier County Pioneer Museum.



425/21

When I went to the TenK Marsh trail on 4/19/21, the first bird I saw was the gray kingbird, a trip mark. I went on to record 29 species for the morning. I stopped at the observation tower for a while and then rode the walker to the second bench and back as is becoming the normal routine for the marsh trail. I saw most of the common long-legged wading birds but not many of each. Three reddish egrets were feeding in the shallow water (I only saw 2 of them) and one was chasing a greater yellowlegs from its feeding area.

The shorebirds were again numerous but I didn't recognize quite as much diversity as I did on the last visit. Least sandpipers were the only peeps that I recognized with confidence but both yellowlegs and the black-

necked stilts were still present. Spoonbills were touch feeding in the shallow pools along with 10 or 12 great egrets. An immature eagle could be seen at the top of a tree near the parking lot.

I noticed quite a few plants in bloom along the trail. Among them were wild allamanda (*Pentalinon luteum*), southern amaranth (*Amaranthus australis*), beggarticks (*Bidens alba*), wand goldenrod, (*Solidago stricta*), buttonwood (*Conocarpus erecta*), saltmarsh morning-glory (*Ipomoea sagittate*), Jamaica swamp sawgrass (*Cladium jamaicense*), southern beeblossom, (*Gaura angustifolia*), pine-pink (*Bletia purpurea*), red mangrove, (*Rhizophora mangle*), ground cherry (*Physalis walteri*), sleepy morning (*Waltheria indica*), Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) and Mexican clover (*Richardia grandiflora*). Admittedly, the goldenrod and the groundcherry could use taxonomic work and the Mexican clover had to be added for this location. This was the first time that I noticed buttonwood in bloom. Photos on the AFP confirm the identification.

Two more trip marks were recorded when Ann and I went to Clam Pass Beach on 4/22/21. Several hundred sea birds were gathered on the beach when we got there. The majority of them were black skimmers (#106) along with fewer royal terns. As I scrutinized the terns I noticed a yellow-tipped beak of a single sandwich tern (#107). There were a few gulls present as well and 12-20 sanderlings. I was disappointed not to see a least tern, another possible trip mark. Hopefully that will show up on our last trip to Tigertail Beach, planned for next week.

On 4/23/21 we went to the Naples Botanical Gardens. I was hoping to see a hummingbird. I didn't, but the orchids were fantastic. We also viewed the Clyde Butcher photography exhibit and I purchased his book, [The Everglades](#).

The last trip to Kirby-Storter was on 4/24/21. Water levels were low, leaving only the area at the end of the boardwalk with standing water. The rest of the lower areas were mostly muddy with a noticeable telltale alligator highway. There were few birds to see (9), although a very pretty great blue heron was fishing below the end of the boardwalk. It appeared to be in breeding plumage. I watched it feed for over a half of an hour but couldn't match its patience as it stalked its prey. I took lots of photos but most of them were later culled. When I saw the size of the fish it finally caught, I realized that great photo-ops were not likely.

I noticed quite a few plants, both herbs and shrubs, in bloom as I walked along the boardwalk. I checked what I saw against the plant database to update the locations field for Kirby-Storter. False nettle (*Boehmeria cylindrica*), Everglades squarestem (*Melanthera nivea*) and pineland heliotrope (*Heliotropium polyphyllum*) had to be added to the list. I noticed that the plants of the latter had a slightly yellow color.



I also noticed another shrub in bloom which I thought I hadn't seen in the past [photos 2021_04_24_016-18]. Its leaves were lanceolate, entire and opposite. Each leaf had one central vein with pinnately branching lateral veins which ran nearly to the edge of the blade. The petioles were very short, tapering to the stem. The flowers were in spherical inflorescences on long stalks, possibly not all blooming at the same time. As I perused Nelson (1996) it occurred to me that I was seeing the buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*) in which the flower head was almost fruiting; most flower parts having fallen off.

As I approached my car an eastern bluebird apparently recognized my handicapped condition and flew to be included in this year's count (#108). I then met two women whom I had passed on the boardwalk who told me of a good place to see eastern meadowlarks and, likely, northern caracaras. It I called the Dinner Island Ranch Wildlife Management Area, located in the Clewiston area. Hopefully, I will have an opportunity to check it out before we leave.



2/29/21

I spent most of the evening of 4/25/21 looking at the photographs and reading the Clyde Butcher book on the everglades that I bought at the Naples Botanical Gardens. I was especially impressed with the role of the clouds in his landscapes. With that in mind, I went to the Turner River / Birdon loop on 4/26/21 to see a meadowlark and practice landscape photography. There wasn't a cloud in the sky and no meadowlark was seen or heard. I still took several photos of the pine habitats in the area. I noticed quite a few flowering plants in bloom along the way and wondered if some of them might have been stimulated into growth and anthesis by the recent burns. I was especially excited to find alligator lilies (*Hymenocallis palmeri*) in bloom. I had only seen that plant in bloom once before, at the Kirby-Storier Roadside Park. I compiled a list of the plants seen in bloom and later used it to update the



location field in the plant database. One of the plants seen in bloom was later identified as a possible *Ruellia simplex* (Britton's wild petunia) and I added it to the database. This plant was noticeably different from what I have called wild petunia in the past but its identity is somewhat tentative. I used the web sites for the AFP and IRC to arrive at the id by a process of elimination between the plants which those sites suggest to be in the Big Cypress Preserve. According to the IRC, this plant is not native and is possibly invasive.

My last trip to the TenK Marsh trail was on 4/27/21. There were still shallow water pools with many shorebirds. Again, I didn't bring my scope and had all I could do to recognize a few of the shorebirds that were present. Only a few of the long-legged waders were found but not many

of each. I did the familiar two bench walk and, on the way back photographed some of the shorebirds that I could not identify with any degree of certainty [photos 2021_04_27_003-7]. As expected, the photos were terrible but I was able to manipulate them enough with Picasa 3 to identify the birds as stilt sandpipers. The heavy, slightly drooping bill, the yellowish legs and other things visible in the photographs matched well with the photos in the Audubon and Sibley apps on my iPhone. This was not only a trip mark but also a Florida mark and life mark. I was surprised and a bit embarrassed later when I got back to the condo and checked ebird for the latest sightings at TenK. Nineteen species of shorebirds had been reported along the marsh trail over the last 7 days. Ten, including the stilt sandpiper, as recently as 1 day ago.

Identifying these birds as I did causes some review of the changes in my birding ethics. At one time I would not count a bird unless I identified it with some degree of confidence in the field. No later, second thoughts were considered. Matt would shudder at the fact that two of my present life marks are birds that I've heard but never seen (chuck-wills-widow and mangrove cuckoo). Now I am adding a bird that I identified in photos that I took but hadn't identified at the time that I took the photos. I am confident of the identification, though, and there is no question that I actually saw the bird. I guess I'm not a luddite and am ready to use whatever technologies can be applied to identify the birds.

My last trip to Tigrtail Beach was on 4/28/21. There was an early low tide and Ann wanted to cross the lagoon and look for shells. I, of course, lagged behind and watched for any shorebirds or possibly least terns to show up on the near side of the lagoon. None! Only a handful of birds were seen at all and none of them out of the ordinary. I noticed the coinvine (*Dalbergia ecastaphyllum*) and coco-plum (*Chrysobalanus icaco*) in bloom along the path leading to the beach [photos 2021_04_28_001-9] and photographed them. I also saw another shrub in bloom [photos 202104_28_010-14]. I only recognized this plant as a dicot. Ann came back with one sand dollar (more like a half dollar) and no other shells in her basket. This was certainly not a fruitful trip to Tigertail.

The final fix for my faka-habit for the year was on 4/29/21. I pretty much had the boardwalk all to myself; a few others were entering just as I was leaving. I noticed the pond apple () and glossy wild tobacco () in bloom along the way. Another shrub had a leaf much like that of the pond apple but each leaf had a vein running along its periphery. Quite a few lubber grasshoppers were there to send me off but they were nowhere as abundant as they were one or two years ago. I saw no birds at the alligator hole at the end of the boardwalk but I kept hearing what I thought was a young barred owl. Try as I did, though, I couldn't find it or a possible adult looking after it. I paused around the corner to watch for possible songbirds and then the young owl flew in and landed in clear



view. At first I thought it was the adult but soon I saw the light beak and the brownish feathers around the head. After a while, it flew down to the water and appeared to be looking for fish. Apparently it wasn't though; it seemed to take a drink and then flew.

Notes

We left the Port of the Islands on Friday, 4/30/21 and decided to go to Kaczmarek's by way of Lewiston, in search of the Dinner Island Ranch Wildlife Preserve that I had been told about earlier by two women at Kirby-Storter. Hopefully I could find a northern caracara and eastern meadowlark to add to the trip list for this year. I saw both and actually heard several other meadowlarks bringing this year's count to 111.

I was hoping to find a low tide when

I visited Green Key on 5/1/21 but I wasn't that lucky. White-winged doves were on the wires along the road but only a couple of willets were seen in the water. At the shoreline, only one great egret and one great blue heron could be found along with a few other ordinary coastal birds. I stopped at the Boy Scout Preserve but only added a red-bellied woodpecker to the morning's list. A few other birds were seen in the Green Key neighborhood as well as around New Port Richey.

On 5/3/21 we left for Matt,s. We overnighed in Tipton and arrived at Matt,s on May 3rd.

Green key - 5/1/21

Go

QzaGe

Gbh

LGY

1h

L gully v

Ww dove

Willit

F crow

Redwing \$76

Rb woody

W ibist vtcv crgvg

Wood stork

B