

1/24/24

Ann and I had originally planned to leave for Florida on January 10th, stay with Matt and Nicole for a couple of days and arrive at our Florida rental on January 15th. Then Covid hit us; first me and then Ann. We waited out our quarantines, rescheduled some medical appointments and left Waukesha on 1/19/24. Not since 2009 has the 1st day's drive to Florida been as challenging as this year's. In spite of good weather predictions, it snowed on the morning of our departure and we encountered blowing and drifting snow pretty much through Illinois. Exhausted by the drive, we over-nighted in Paducah and decided to skip our visit with Matt and Nicole and drove right on to Tifton the next day. Perhaps because I was passing a truck, we missed the Florida Welcome Center and stopped at the next rest area where the boat-tailed grackle was the first bird to make this year's BD list. A few other birds were seen en route and recorded as well. We arrived at the condo about 3PM on January 21st. We had never reached tackitherm.

Anxious to see the "new and improved" Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk, I was seriously disappointed to find that it was still not open. I was later to learn that it was apparently because of some water regulations not satisfied. I drove to Janes Scenic Drive, but as is my habit, I arrived too early for the gates to be open. I photographed some turkey vultures roosting in some trees near the gates [photos 2024_01_22_001-3], recorded a few more birds in BD and returned to the condo totally frustrated and with my Faka-habit still in serious withdrawal.



Frustrations continued the next day when I visited the 10K marsh trail. The water levels were so high that only a few birds were seen and these were spread out over a large area.. There was even water along the sides of the wooden bridge leading to the trail. I took a few photos of great blue herons and an anhinga [photos 2024_01_23_001-15], but I still hadn't learned not to photograph birds in full sunlight. The photos were not good, the details washed out. I saw 19 bird species on this trip; many of the common birds for the area not seen. I also took a few photos of the berries of the Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolius*) [Photos 2024_01_23_016-18] just to try out my new Tamron lens. The mosquitos were so bad, though, that they drove me out. I then took a short drive to the area of the old Port of the Islands hotel. Ann's car had recently been washed, though, so I avoided the gravel roads and returned to the condo.

Eagle Lakes was also somewhat disappointing when I visited on 1/25/24. Not only was the water level high but much of the area was overgrown with vegetation. I walked around the middle pond and saw 24 bird species. Even though that was a low number for that location, Eagle Lakes seems to always have the greatest diversity of birds.

With great anticipation, I visited the Six L's site on 1/26/24. I was hoping to see my Caracara, an abundance of limpkins and, possibly, a snail kite. None! The water conditions seemed right but the area was much overgrown. Only a boat-tailed grackle was seen. I went on to the Tenn K marsh trail where I saw 18 bird species. That brought the trip total to 40 species. That's still above the average for the records since 2012 but a very poor total for those since we have been coming to Florida in January, granted that this year's trip got off to a late start..

1/28/24

On 1/27/24 I took a brief drive along Janes Scenic Drive. The road was in the worst condition than I can ever recall, large potholes everywhere. I stopped at gate 2 and found several violets in bloom right at the entrance of the gate [Photos 2024_01_27_006-12]. The petals were light blue. The bottom petal had alternating white and deep blue pollination guides. The leaves were about 3.5cm. wide and were deeply indented at the base. There were widely separated

teeth. There was only one violet shown for the Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve by IRC. That is the common blue violet (*Viola sororia*). There are three violets of that genus shown for Collier County by the AFP, that species being the closest match to what I saw. Although previously seen along the C.R.E.W. marsh trail, this is the first sighting of the species in the Fakahatchee Strand. A brief walk along the tram showed my hand fern (*Cheiroglossa palmata*) in good condition and within a pretty short walk at least 5 specimens of the toothed rein orchid (*Habenaria odontopetala*) were

found in bloom [Photos 2024_01_27_001-5]. Birding continued to be disappointing. There was abundant water everywhere and the birds were pretty spread out, not hanging around the road culverts which often leads to good photographs. Only 12 species were seen or heard.

Later in the day, Ann and I took a ride into Everglades City to see what was new. As we drive out to the Chokoloskee boat launch, we saw an immature yellow-crowned night heron along the side of the road [Photos 2024_01_27_013-22] . Later, while having a drink at Everglades City's City Seafood restaurant along the water, several laughing gulls were seen. Both of these were trip marks.

The Turner River / Birdon Loop, which I visited on 1/29/24 also showed the high water levels I've been seeing this year. I drove slowly along the loop

and spotted 20 species of birds, only the great crested flycatcher being new to this year's list. I missed a hawk, though, most likely one of the accipiters. It was flying near the entrance to the Concho-Billie trail.

A number of Plants were seen in bloom along the way, including the Spanish needles (*Bidens alba*), Everglades sneezeweed (*Crinum americanum*), pine-pink (*Bletia purpurea*), glades lobelia (*Lobelia grandulosa*), Everglades squarestem (*Melanthera angustifolia*), and string lilies (*Crinum americanum*). Of these, only the squarestem and the sneezeweed were new for this location. I began to walk for a short distance along the Concho-Billie trail, but was immediately met with water over the path and along its edges. I did see a small morning glory (*Ipomoea triloba*) in bloom near the beginning of the trail. This was a new plant for the trail. Some areas along Wagonwheel and Birdon roads had recently been burned, so recently that one area that I passed was still smoldering. Perhaps this will bring out some more of the flowering plants. I should check back periodically.

I was surprised that I didn't see as many black-crowned night herons along the Turner River Road as I had seen in the past. I did see one at an intersections to a private drive but never got a good camera shot. When I went to the Picayune Strand, though, on 1/30/24 I got much better views as I was leaving the park. Sitting in the coco-plums along the sides of the road were two black-crowned night herons . One was an immature who posed nicely for photographs [Photos 2024_01_30_005-8].The other, an adult, was not too keen on having its picture taken. In all, I saw 48 species, 3 new for the trip. Along with a house sparrow seen on Marco Island the previous day, this brought the trip total to 48 species.



I had hoped to have more photo-ops along Sabal Palm Road, though. I thought there would be flooded areas with concentrated fish and long-legged wading birds feeding on them. But the water was too high; many areas on both sides of the road were flooded back into the melaleuca trees that dominated the woodland [Photos 2024_01_30_001-4]. The areas on either side of the road on the Triple G Loop were also flooded so that few flowering plants, other than tickseed (*Coreopsis leavenworthii*) were seen. This year's water levels are as high as I can ever remember seeing them in this part of Florida, and they will undoubtedly be reflected in much of what I see this year.



On my way back to the condo I stopped at the Six L's area. There was still no signs of my caracara. Things had not changed much from my previous visit. No limpkins—no snail kite—nothing worth recording. I also took a brief drive along Frichey rd. , hoping to find flooded ditches with photo-ops of wading birds. No such luck; this site is probably not worth checking if the future.

2/11/24

Much of the time spent back at the condo has been spent reviewing my photos of ferns from past years. I've been using many of them to develop a Powerpoint presentation as a way to increase my skills in fern identification. As part of that I reviewed the photos of the climbing fern that I took near the end of the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk. The photos that I reviewed from 2021 [Photos 2021_03_02_001-4] were compared with those from 2020 [photos 2020_02_27_024-28]. Seek identified both as the climbing maidenhair (*Lygodium microphyllum*). According to Nelson (2000) this is the small-leaved climbing fern. Seek easily identified the photos taken at Grey's Preserve [photos 2015_05_01_012-15] as *Lygodium japonica*. Both species are shown for Collier County by the AFP, but neither species is shown for the Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve by the IRC. *Lygodium japonica* was added to the database.

When I visited Kirby-Storter Roadside Park on 2/6/24. I found water beneath the boardwalk all the way from the parking lot. In the past, I had only seen big floating heart (*Nymphoides aquatica*) at the end of the boardwalk, but now it had spread to much of the flooded swamp [photo 2024_02_06_013-15]. Doug Drysdale had reported seeing a northern waterthrush there, but I couldn't find it. In fact, only 12 bird species were found and none of them were new to the trip list. I did get fairly good photos of a black-crowned night heron



[photos 2024_02_06_016-27], which I think was trying to nap. I also got reasonably close to great egrets [photos 2024_02_06_028-33].

Doug, Gisela and I participated in a modified bioblitz on 2/7/24. The major emphasis of the event was to document the presence of the Everglades mink in the Fakahatchee Strand. Stationed at Gate 7, we saw none during our 2 hour assignment. We did see, and report a number of bird species seen, though. Needless to say, Gisela saw the most interesting birds. Among those that she saw was a short-tailed hawk and an American bald eagle. I didn't see either of them since we had parted company during that phase of the "blitz". I didn't bother to record in BD for this activity except for a killdeer seen near the visitor's center.

Serenity Walk Park, on 2/8/24, also produced few species, but among the 10 bird species seen were 3 trip marks (Red-headed woodpecker, blue-grey gnatcatcher and eastern bluebird). I began to examine several of the ferns near the end of my walk and recognized the Virginia chain fern (*Woodwardia virginica*) and the swamp fern (*Blechnum serulatum*). A suspected sword fern was also seen. It had prominent reddish-brown scales along the veins of the leaflets, but it was not identified to species.

When I worked with Doug at the Bioblitz, he mentioned that the gate to Janes Scenic Drive was no longer closed until 8:00AM. Sure enough. I got to the gate at about 7:15AM on the 2/9/24 and had free entry into the park. Because of plans for later in the day, I was not able to stay long. I drove only to gate 3, where I parked and sat for a while, hoping that some interesting wildlife would happen by.



I did notice a plant in bloom just before I got to Gate 3. Several flowering plants were spread out at the culverts going under the road. Interestingly, the plants were on both sides of the road, but I only saw them at that location. I immediately identified the plant as blue mint (*Ageratum houstonianum*). This is a plant that has confused me in the past. Unfortunately, I didn't read my earlier notes before I encountered the plant and, therefore, was not prepared to make the observations needed to distinguish this species from the blue mistflower (*Conoclinium coelestinum*). I added the blue mint to the Janes Scenic Drive location.

The water may be receding a bit. At least that's what seems to be the case in the channel along the Turner River Road. The birding on the Turner River-Birdon Loop on 2/10/24 was one of the best that I can remember for that location. Fourteen species were recorded before I even left the H. P. Williams wayside boardwalk and twenty-eight before I turned onto Upper Wagonwheel Road. The total for the loop was thirty-three including three trip marks. Most exciting was an American bittern seen along the edge of the Turner River Road channel and what I first thought was a grey kingbird on a wire along the road. I had some uncertainty about the identification of the kingbird, though. The bill didn't seem big enough. I used Merlin on the photos taken of the bird [photos 2024_02_10_001-4] and it turned out to be a mockingbird. All of the species numbers were adjusted accordingly. I had actually gone to this location to check on the burned areas along Wagonwheel and Birdon roads. Although fresh vegetation appears to be developing, there were no signs of flowering plants.

The birding has been pretty slow this year, probably because of the high water in most places. The notes from 2/10/24 seem encouraging, though. Up until a few days ago I had only seen one limpkin, but for the last few days Ann and I have been seeing them along Hy.41, along the stretch near Six L's where we had seen them regularly in the past. I still have not seen my caracara in that area. While sitting in the lanai this morning I finally heard my first barred owl. The area around the retention pond outside the condo has been very quiet; an occasional great blue heron, a little blue heron, white ibis, starlings and a few vultures are the highlights. Even my notes seem to be getting a bit boring, even to

me! Hopefully, things will get better soon.

2/25/24

My optimism regarding the water levels receding was certainly not born out at the TenK marsh trail on the morning of 2/12/24. The water there was still pretty high and few bird (19) species were seen. I am yet to see roseate spoonbill (although some have been reported locally) or a glossy ibis. Also, few ducks have been seen and these are mostly blue-winged teal. I met Pierre on the trail and he reported the same scarceness of birds this year. After I left TenK, I drove along Union Road and added a kestrel to the trip list. I also saw three deer out in the field [photots 2024_02_12_001-4]. As I approached the gun club I saw yellow-rumped warblers flying into Brazilian pepper bushes loaded with berries. Unfortunately, I was not quick enough to catch some very nice photos of the warblers with berries in their mouths.

Shortly after starting to hike the trail along Eagle Lakes on 2/13/24, I was approached by a fellow who wanted to share a photo he had just taken. He showed me a picture of a black bear coming out of the area. Then I ran into Pierre again. We sat and compared notes; mostly commiserating about the paucity of birds at this time and the difficulty in deciding

where to bird. On the way back to the condo I checked the Six L's area again, only to find a lonely great egret in the channel to the left of the gate.



We met Doug Drysdale and Gisela Zelenka for lunch at Triad later that day. Of course, we bored Ann with a lot of bird talk. After lunch, they showed us to a location where they had twice seen a bunch of American oystercatchers. Needless to say, none were there at the time. On our way back to the condo, we stopped at the new Fakahatchee Strand visitor's area. We had seen several cars in the parking area on our way to Everglades City to

meet Doug and Gisela. There were many people there and I walked the whole boardwalk to where it met the open water. Ann and I decided, though, that it was probably not really open; someone perhaps having moved the cones from the entrance drive. The restrooms, although open, were not functional, and were a mess from not being able to flush the toilets.

But on the next day (2/14/24) we found that it apparently was open after all. We stopped there on our way to the Big Cypress visitor's center, where we successfully saw three manatees, and we again found the new Fakahatchee boardwalk open. There were no cones at the entrance and the bathrooms appeared to be open and functional. Now, hopefully, the old section through the cypress swamp will also open.

On our way back from the Big Cypress visitor's center we saw two roseate spoonbills. Actually, Ann saw and I got a glimpse of the birds. Updating the BD records for this year's Valentine's day shows the trip bird count to be an embarrassing 61 species, 20 species below the average seen by this date. Shorebirds and songbirds, many of which are warblers, probably account for much of the difference.

With Shelly, Dan and Trevor due to join us on 2/17/24, I decided to scout out the TenK marsh trail that morning to see what the water levels were like. There did not seem to be a significant change since the last time I was there and the birds were “few and far between”. I recorded only 22 species in BD for the morning and none of them were new to the trip list. I did get an excellent photo of a great blue heron, though, possibly one of my best pictures taken (see previous page). Blueheart (*Buchnera americana*) was added to the plant database for that location. Also, as I was sitting at bench 2, I noticed a large bunchgrass in bloom in front of me [photos 2024_02_17_004-6]. Seek was not able to identify the plant above the grass level and I will have to study grasses a bit before I hazard a guess to its taxonomy.

Shelly, Dan and Trevor were supposed to join us on Sunday (2/17/24). Shelly and Dan did, but Trevor ran into problems with his flight so, he arrived on the 18th. That was the date of an all-day rain, delivering over two inches of precipitation to the area and adding to an already exceptionally wet winter. Trev brought his new 500mm Nikon lens along and was eager to try it out on the Florida wildlife so, the next morning (2/19/24) we set out for the TenK marsh trail. Water levels were still high, probably even higher due to the recent rain. Several of the familiar birds were not seen but we did manage a meager count of 20 species. The number of brown pelicans at TenK seems to be increasing over the last few years and several of them bold enough to grant pretty close-up photos [photos 2024_02_19_001-7].

Later that afternoon we visited the new Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk [photos 2024_02_19_008-18]. Impressive as it is, I still yearn for the old one that went into the cypress swamp. Hopefully the two will be joined soon.

The obligatory trip to the Corkscrew Sanctuary was on 2/20/24. Doug Drysdale had indicated that when he and Gisela visited it earlier, the water level was not that high. That was not my impression. To me, the water level seemed as high as I had ever seen it. Wading birds were almost totally absent, although one great egret was seen flying over. No painted buntings, although they were being seen. I didn't see many warblers, although again, they were being reported. We totaled only 15 species. We did see an American bittern near the beginning of the boardwalk. It was almost exactly where we had seen one last year, possibly the same one. That's the second AMBI I've seen this year. The highlight of the trip for me, though, was five swallow-tail kites circling over head as we walked along. Ann had been seeing them for a couple of days ,but these were the year's first for me. I also added a few other birds en rout as trip marks.

After a breakfast at Everglades City's Island Café on 2/21/24, we headed to Shark Valley. By the time we got there, the place was mobbed and we had to park along the highway. After looking at the water levels and not seeing any birds along the entrance road, we decided to skip the park. Trevor was interested in seeing some alligators so we stopped at the Big Cypress Visitor's Center on the way back. Wow! Alligators galore, including a three-legged one called Stumpy [photos 2024_02_21_001-6]. We both got some good photos. There was a black-crowned night heron that had just caught a fish and was in the process of swallowing it. We both got some close-up photos [photos 2024_02_19_007-10]. Trevor got the prize; he caught the fish in the air as the bird was orienting it head-first for the swallow. My shots were one, perhaps two, splits of a second off.

We had planned to stop at Kirby Storter Roadside Park for a walk along its boardwalk. We were not allowed in, though, as the area was included in a prescribed burn. We then continued along Hy.41 and stopped at the H.P. Williams Wayside. After a few more photos, we returned to the condo.

We saw a huge flock of white pelicans as we were going to meet Shelly and Dan at Skillet's the next morning (2/22/24). After breakfast Shelly and Dan left for the Flannagan's while Trevor stayed on for one more day of wildlife photography. We did the Turner River—Birdon Rd. loop with, me as the driver and Trev the photographer, early in the afternoon. It was certainly not prime time for birding, but we did manage to record 15 species and Trevor got some nice photos. We left the loop at Lower Wagonwheel Road and went back by way of Hy.29. Just north of Hy.41, Trevor



spotted two (perhaps more) roseate spoonbills. Traffic prevented me from stopping so Trev didn't get any pictures of the birds. When we got back to the condo I got a text from Doug Drysdale indicating that there were 15 of the birds in what appeared to be the same location. Trevor and I returned and did see all 15 of the birds. He even got a few photos this time. Near dusk, Ann accompanied us to the TenK marsh trail. I made some feeble attempts to stop some birds in flight (Pelicans and an osprey) but didn't get any keepers. Among the birds there was a northern shoveler duck.

With Trevor gone, I went to the Kirby Storter Roadside Park on 2/24/24. The area was still flooded, the water still reaching back to the parking lot. There was plenty evidence of the recent burn, especially in the higher prairie areas. Among the 19 bird species seen were only 2 warblers (the palm warbler and the yellow-rumped warbler). BD shows a number of wading and song birds seen as well. The area was burned two days ago as indicated earlier in these notes. That brought to mind a visit to the park in 2012 (4/28/12) when I walked out to the small pine island and the cypress dome behind the park and saw a nice variety of wildflowers [photos 2012_04_28_015-82]. I especially remember the pineland pinklet (*Stenandrum dulci*) and the pineland waterwillow (*Justica angusta*), neither of which I have seen since. Perhaps, if the area dries up enough, I will get another chance at these species late in our stay. On the way back to the condo I detoured to where Trevor and I had seen the roseate spoonbills the previous day. They were no longer there.



3/3/24

Matt & Nicole arrived on 2/25/24, Each had their stay pretty well planned out. For Nicole it was the pool and the sun; for Matt, it was fresh water fishing. He had watched several videos about fishing along the Tamiami trail and my job was to guide him to some of the locations described in the videos. Easily done. I added a few locations to his list. We went to the Turner River road, the road behind the Big Cypress Welcome Center, the new BCBB and the Hy41 gate to the Collier County dump site. None of them turned out to be very good for fishing at the time we were there (mostly not prime fishing times). He did have good luck in the ponds outside our lanai, though. He caught large-mouth bass, blue tilapia, bluegill, snook and Mayan cichlids during his stay. We were surprised by the variety of fish in the ponds.



On 2/26/24, we went to Everglades City for breakfast. Along the way, Matt spotted several roseate spoonbills along Hy.41. We saw them again as we returned. On the way back to the condo we stopped at the new BCBB where we met Fred and Alyce Thompson. We talked with them for a while as Matt scouted out the designated fishing at the site. Fred indicated where he had seen a prairie warbler, which is always a difficult target bird for me.

It was 2/27/24 when we went to some of the fishing areas mentioned above. Not only was Matt not getting many bites, I was not seeing many birds. BD has few entrees for this time period. I did manage a few shots of a snowy egret photos 2024_02_27_001-9] at the Collier County dump site, though. It was pretty bold; perhaps used to getting a few tidbits from people who fish the location. Matt's target fish was the Oscar which a local fisherman told him could be found there.

We dropped the women at Marco Island's South Beach on 2/28/24. On the way I finally saw my first burrowing owls for the year. While Ann and Nicole were sunbathing, Matt and I made a brief visit to Mackle Park. There were quite a few ducks there. They were mostly mottled ducks but quite a few appeared to be divers. After some inner conflict, I decided that they were lesser scaup ducks. I was vacillating between the two species of scaups, but ebird reports suggested the lesser.

Matt took off for fishing spots east of Shark Valley on 2/29/24.. With Matt gone, I leaped at the opportunity to do some birding. I went to the BCBB. Fred had mentioned prairie warblers and bitterns being seen there and I was anxious to find them. No luck with either. Matt and Nicole left on 3/1/24.

Yesterday, 5/1/24, I received a text from Doug Drysdale at 5:13P.M. When he and Gisela were returning from Naples, they saw the caracara and a couple of limpkins in the location of the Six L's site. Needless to say, I went there the next morning (3/2/24) at the crack of dawn. No caracara, or much of anything else! I went on to Shell Island Road where me and Merlin both heard an eastern towhee, a trip mark. Then I walked the Briggs boardwalk. Water levels were still high and I wondered why there were no clapper rails; the flooded areas seemed a perfect place for them.

Not much was in bloom along the boardwalk. Seek helped me identify the netted pawpaw (*Asimina reticulata*) [photos 2024_03_02_005-8] and the Herb-of-Grace (*Bacopa monnieri*) [photos 2024_03_02_002-4] which were both in bloom



in the recently burned area. Both have already been listed for the location. 19 bird species were recorded for the morning. That includes those seen on Shell Island Road while I drove to the boat launch area. Near the parking lot of the Rookery Bay Offices was a tree totally covered with love vine [photos 2024_03_02_009-13]. Quite a site.

On my way back, I grabbed a cup of coffee at Racetrack and stopped to enjoy it at Six L's. Of course I was hoping to see the caracara whom I had had breakfast with in earlier years. It never did show up. I did see 8 species while I was there, but no caracara, limpkin or snail kites. A birder that I met there suggested that a short

drive down Six L's road would have a high likelihood of a sighting of the caracara, but that turned out to be a waste of gas.

3/9/24

After our usual Sunday routine, Ann and I drove through Sugden Park. I wanted to see if the ducks that had been reported there on ebird were still around. We saw a large raft of diving duck swimming quite a distance from the shore.

Some appeared to be lesser scaup, but others in the group could have been ring-necked ducks. I plan to come back in the near future and set up the spotting scope to determine the composition of the group.

The near future turned out to be the next day (3/4/24). When I arrived at Sugden park, there were literally hundreds of ducks. I got the spotting scope out and began to examine the. I can't boast of looking at each duck, but I sure looked at a good sampling. Every one of them turned out to be scaups; no ring-necked ducks. The only other ducks seen was a pair of mottled ducks that passed loudly overhead. When I got back to the condo I checked the most recent ebird reports and found that a fellow by the name of George Eschenbach had most recently reported. He also had only scaups among the divers. George is ranked 17 among the Collier County birders, according to ebird, so perhaps I didn't overlook the ring-necked birds. My count for the time spent in the park was 16.

On the way to the park that morning, I finally saw the caracara. At 8:17AM. it was perched in a tree near the end of the bike trail close to the Six L's Farm Road, where I had seen it in the past. I went back to the site after leaving Sugden Regional Park, but the bird was nowhere to be seen. A short walk to the gates at the end of the road was, again, disappointing. As I returned to the car I saw a small white-flowering plant along the path [photos 2024_03_04_004-6]. Seek recognized the genus (*Samolus*) immediately, although it took a few camera angles for it to identify the plant as the seaside brookweed (*Samolus parviflorus*). According to the AFP, the plant's correct name is *Samolus valerandi* subsp. *Parviflorus* which is a synonym for the species. The AFP did list the species for Collier County as did the IRC. Six L's is not recognized by the IRC. The plant was added to the database of Florida plants.

I dropped Ann at the beach of 3/5/24 and went on for my blood draw for my INR. After that I went to Mackle Park. I sat on a park bench there, scanning for birds until it was time to pick her up again. While I sat there, I watched several wood storks feeding. Only ten birds and a large soft-shelled turtle showed up during this time but, among them was a magnificent frigate bird which didn't oblige me until 11:20AM, about the time for me to leave the park to pick up Ann. The frigate bird was a trip mark. Hopefully, I will again see purple martins in the park again soon. A fancy new martin house was put up.

I met Doug Drysdale at Gate 7 along Janes Scenic Drive on Thursday, 3/7/24. I actually got there earlier than Doug and took very brief walks along the drive and Tram 7. I noticed the fourleaf vetch (*Vicia acutifolia*) [photos 2024_03_07_004-5] as well as the showy milkwort (*Asemeia violacea*) [photo 2024_03_07_002] in bloom along the road. I also noticed a very small plant growing on the large limestone rocks at the entrance of Gate 7 [photo 2024-03_07_0008]. It appeared, at first, to be one of the fern relatives or possibly a moss or liverwort, but Seek identified it as the artillery plant (*Pilea microphylla*). According to Wikipedia, "It has light green, almost succulent stems and tiny 1/8" leaves which contribute to its other nickname, "artillery fern", though it is not related to ferns." The AFP does show the plant for Collier County and the IRC indicates its presence in the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park. The plant was added to the database of Florida plants.

I also used Seek to test my identification skills on some of the ferns along the tram. It agreed with my identification of *Thelypteris kunthii* and seemed to confirmed my identification of one of the sword ferns as the fishbone fern (*Nephrolepis cordifolia*). I must admit, though, that my faith in Seek for identifying ferns is still weak.

Seventeen bird species were seen or heard along Janes Scenic Drive on this morning. Two of them (tufted titmouse and wild turkey) were trip marks for the year. Doug texted me about the wild turkey; it seemed to be leading his bike down the road. No interesting mammals. My apologies to the puny grey squirrel seen along the road.



I met the Berninger group on the Dan House Prairie on 3/8/24. The entire prairie was flooded. We walked to the area where we had previously entered the prairie and where I had sat with the deer last year, but it was inaccessible. A few plants whose flowers emerged from the water were seen in bloom. These included the lanceleaf arrowhead, (*Sagittaria lancifolius*), and the water pimpernel (*Samolus ebracteatus*). Mexican clover (*Richardia grandiflora*) was, of course in bloom along the roadside, as was Spanish needles (*Bidens alba*).

3/12/24

Lately, Ann has been noticing mushrooms growing in the mulch around the condo. When she wanted to show them to me, they were gone. Finally, on 3/9/24, we both saw them and the mystery of the disappearing mushrooms was solved. Seek identified the mushrooms as pleated inkcap (*Parasola plicatilis*) mushroom whose “fruiting bodies grow at night after rain and will self decompose after spore dispersion is achieved”.

When we went out for breakfast the next morning, I marked one of the mushrooms by placing a recognizable piece of bark near it. When we returned about 2 hours later, all but the stipe had withered away. I also noticed a possible dog vomit slime mold also growing in the same mulch. This was brown rather than the yellow varieties pictured on many web sites.



I went to check on the water levels at the TenK Marsh Trail on 3/11/24. As I entered the site I noticed an Ontario license plate on one of the cars in the parking lot and wondered if Pierre had preceded me. Sure enough; I ran into Pierre a short way down the trail. The water level was still very high, especially for this time of year. Pierre and I began to wonder if this was just an odd year or if this was the beginning of a long term change. There were few birds, although I did recorded 22 species. Three of them (reddish egret, glossy ibis and Caspian tern) were trip marks, bringing the total to a paltry 80 for the year. Seeing the Caspian tern [photos 2024_03_11_001-2] made me wonder if I had mismarked the tern seen there earlier. Expecting a royal tern may have influenced my sighting on 2/17/24. There's no way to tell now. As we were leaving, Pierre noticed the reddish egret at quite a distance from us. When it seemed to fly off, Pierre left and I decided to stay a bit longer. Shortly later, two reddish egrets appeared much closer and I got a few photos of them [photos 2024_03_11_005-16].

Never before have we been in Florida this long without a trip to Tigertail beach . We finally went there on on 3/11/24. The beach had been much rearranged since our last visit. Ann indicated several changes on the far side of the lagoon, which I never saw. The near side of the lagoon had also been changed a lot. There was much more access shoreline and I could walk much further in search of shorebirds. Much to my disappointment, though, only four were seen (willet, ruddy turnstone, least sandpiper and black-bellied plover). Along with the herons and other birds, only 15 species were recorded. That included, though, the prairie warbler, heard from the bordering mangroves. I used Seek in an attempt to attract it, but that didn't seem to work. Shortly later , with the song fresh in my mind, I heard it calling from the mangroves. I recognized it clearly as did Seek.

The second bioblitz was on 3/12/24. I met Doug and Gisela as before and we were assigned to the 5.5mi marker along Janes Scenic Drive. Fred and Alyce also participated and were stationed at Tram 4. I had to leave early, so I only spent an



hour helping to gather the data. When I arrived at our designated spot, Gisela was hearing a red-eyed vireo at a bit of a distance from our station. Attempts to call in the bird with birding software was disappointing. Listening to the bird sing reminded how rusty my knowledge of bird songs had become; it took me a while to recognize the bird by sound alone.

The emphasis of the bioblitz has mainly been about the mink in the park. Near the end of our first hour, Doug saw three mink crossing the road. Of course, I was looking in the opposite direction at the time. By the time I left, only six birds species had made it to DB for the morning.

3/17/24

During the bioblitz, Gisela was telling me how her audiologist set up her hearing aids especially for birding. I decided to do the same by exaggerating the high frequencies and increasing the volume. I saved the settings on my Widex app as one of the favorites and named it "Birding". I tried it out the next morning, 3/14/24, I at Kirby Storter Roadside Park. It may have worked! I was able to hear the sound of the northern parula, a bird that others around me had been hearing in spite of the fact that I was not. After a few attempts at identifying the bird by sound and having others confirm the identification, I marked the bird even though I didn't see it. Matt would not approve. Including the parula, I saw 16 species for the morning. I ran into Doug and Gisela at the park. They were enjoying their last morning before leaving for the north tomorrow morning. In fact, Doug was one of the persons who confirmed my identification of the parula; the others were birders who I met there that morning.

Ann and I took our annual trip to Alva, Florida on 3/15/24. As we entered the city I stopped at the gas station to use the facilities. Although they had none, I noticed some unfamiliar lizards running along the walk. They were not skinks, anoles or curly-tailed lizards and I thought at the time that they could be iguanas. Their walk reminded me of collard lizards. On my way out of town, I could not find them. Needless to say, I never identified them or got a picture of them

Of course, the purpose of the trip to Alva was to visit the former White residence where several feeders attract indigo and painted buntings as well as white-winged doves. After a short time, all three of the target birds were seen. The number of male indigo

buntings at the feeders was truly phenomenal. In spite of a large number of red-flowering shrubs and a humming bird feeder, no hummingbirds were seen.



From Alva we drove to Lehigh Acres and the Harns Marsh. Four helicopters, as part of a mosquito and invasive plant control project, were staging at the opening of the marsh and their loud takeoffs, I'm sure, affected the birds that I could find. No snail kites! I walked down to the first bend and a bit further to find, literally, hundreds of black-bellied whistling ducks [photos 2024_03_15_]. Among them were at least two purple swamphens.

These birds brought the

bird count for the trip to 93, just ten birds below last year's count and six more than in the worst year (2020). The marsh had changed considerably from previous years, even from last year. Cattails are seemingly taking over the marsh. There is much less open water, at least in the area covered this year.

I left early on March 16th, a day of celebration, to do some last minute shopping for Ann's birthday. Before shopping, I went to Eagle Lakes for a bit of wildlife photography. Pierre had indicated that that was a good spot to photograph anhinga as they caught fish and tossed them in the air to position them for swallowing. It's a good thing I wasn't into serious birding that morning. When I arrived at the park, I found that there was a footrace going on around the lakes and the bird watching would have been a problem.

Although I did get some decent photos as far as distance is concerned, I was not happy with the exposures and lighting [photos 2024_03_16_002-18]. Unfortunately, I was shooting in jpeg, so the editing capacities were limited.

4/8/24

After breakfast and a bit of shopping, Ann and I drove through Sugden Regional Park. I was interested to see if any new duck species or gulls were there. A large group of lesser scaups were all that I identified.



I had plans for the Loop Road on the morning of 3/18/24, but the tide was low on the Barron River when it was time to leave. I decided that the Chokoloskee causeway would be more likely to produce some trip marks so I decided to go there instead. It was a good omen that I heard a chuck-will's-widow from the parking area as soon as I left the condo. When I arrived at the boat launch area, two immature yellow-crowned night herons were seen feeding along the small beach-like area across the road [photos 2024_03_18_001-36]. It was hard to determine what they were eating, but photo 2024_03_18_005 appears to show a small crab in the bird's mouth (you must enlarge the photo ridiculously above its quality level to see this).

There was also a small but diverse group of shorebirds feeding along the beach. Luckily, each of the birds that I identified in the group was new to the trip list for 2024.

This included the dunlin, western sandpiper, spotted sandpiper and the semi-palmated plover. These, along with the purple martins flying overhead and the chuck-will's widow heard earlier, brought the trip list to 99 species, just 4 species behind last year at the March 21 point.

I saw my first snake of the year in the mulch right outside the back of the condo. The snake appeared to be a black racer. According to Seek, there are several new growths of the dog vomit slime mold (*Fuligo septica*) growing in the mulch.

Loaded with a driver cup full of coffee on 3/19/24 I drove to the new Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk to bring in the morning's daylight. When I got there I found entrance to the boardwalk chained. I went on to the TenK Marsh Trail where I ran into Pierre but not many birds and few photographic opportunities. I did mark 20 species for that location. At one point I heard 3 loud (sharp) notes that I thought might be from a greater yellowlegs, but I never saw the bird. Later, Merlin reported the call of a short-billed dowitcher. To my ear, at least at this point, the two birds could easily be confused. I decided not to record the bird on BD.

Later that day I saw a dark morph of a short-tailed hawk from the condo lanai. Not only was this a new trip mark, but it was also a new condo mark. This was the first new condo bird since 2021.

I went to the Kirby Storter Roadside Park on 3/20/24. As usual for that location, I was hoping to add a warbler or two to the 2024 trip list. I was happy to confirm my identification of the northern parula with the "birding" setting of my hearing aids. But I was disappointed that I didn't see or hear any other warblers, especially since other birders heard a redstart and black and white warbler in the very location that I was in. I recorded 16 species of birds that morning, but nothing unusual. I saw what I thought was an unusual plant growing on one of the trees, but it turned out to be a climbing aster (*Symphotrichum carolinianum*). I also noticed the false hop sedge (*Carex lupuliformis*) in bloom.

I was off to Janes Scenic Drive in the Fakahatchee Strand on 3/21/24. I was happy to find the gate open, even though it was not yet 8:00AM. I was also happy to find that the water, although still pretty high, no longer seemed to be gushing through the road culverts. Perhaps that was a signal that the water levels would start to return to normal for this time of the year. I found only 13 bird species and none of them were new to the trip list. My hearing aids, even with them newly tuned for loud volumes and high frequencies, couldn't even find a northern parula. I drove as far as gate 7, where I took a short stroll along the road. I noticed a few plants that were in bloom and began to update plant list for location with the plants that I saw.

Among the shrubs or small trees, Seek recognized a plant as Persea or laural. I decided that it was most likely the red bay (*Persea borbonia*). I confirmed its presence in the Fakahatchee Strand with Austin's Vascular Plant List of Fakahatchee Strand State Park. This plant was added as a new plant for the database. A shrub that Seek and I both recognized as a dog-

wood was probably *Cornus foemina*, which is also found on the Fakahatchee list according to Austin. Myrsine (*Myrsine cubana*) was recognized also. It was not in bloom at the time but its fruit was evident. Groundsel (*Baccharis halimifolia*) was also added to the Janes Scenic Drive location.

Among the vines was Poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*), Virginia creeper—probably *Parthenocissus quinquefolia*, Green-brier (*Smilax* sp.), Moonflower (*Ipomoea alba*) and a grape which Seek identified as the graybark grape (*Vitis cinera*). This was added to the database.

Herbaceous plants included Floating hearts (*Nymphoides aquatica*), a species of Desmodium (*Desmodium paniculatum*) is the only species of Desmodium listed for the park and a small vetch (*Vicia acutifolia*).

Among the ferns identified was the giant sword (*Nephrolepis biserrate*), southern shield fern (*Thelypteris kunthii*), hoestring (*Vittaria lineata*), strap fern (*Campyloneurum phyllitidis*), ladder brake (*Pteris vittat*) and bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*).

All of these were used to update the database for this location

I also saw an Everglades mink between gates 2 & 3. A photo was taken through car window but the critter looks more like a squirrel than a mink. It's a mink!

When I got up on 3/23/24, The National Weather Service was reporting that 4.5 inches of rain had fallen in our area in the last 24 hours and that another 3/4" was expected in our area. Good time to get out of Dodge City!

We went to visit the Flanagan's on 3/24/24. I got three trip marks while we were there, two of them (the two terns) while simply sitting in their lanai. I admit to some reluctance in identifying the Forsters tern but, after many sightings, I finally marked it. I enjoyed sitting in their lanai early in the morning as the sun rose, and seeing the black-crowned night herons evacuate their retention pond and fly off to their daytime locations. I wondered where they might be. Jim and Lisa took us to two locations of special note while we were there. Both of these were in Manatee County.

The first was the Felts Audubon Preserve which we visited on 3/25/24. We got there near noon, so we didn't see many birds. Both Jim and Lisa were happy to see the indigo and painted buntings at the feeders, though. It was the first time either of them had seen them. I also added the common ground dove as a trip mark at the feeders. Although we didn't see either of the two birds, there were both purple martin and chimney swift houses at the center. I had never seen a chimney swift house before. During a short walk through the grounds we saw several interesting plants. Three of them were new to me and were added to my database of Florida plants.

Plants id'd in Manatee County

Felts Audubon Preserve

Common Name	Scientific Name	
Coral bean	Erythrina herbacea	
Cross vine	Bignonia capreolata	*
Florida parsley	Richardia scabra	*
Portulaca, shaggy	Portulaca pilosa	*

Moody Branch Wildlife and Environmental Area

Cactus, prickly pear	Opuntia sp.	
Dayflower, whitemouth	Commelina erecta	
Dogfennel	Eupatorium capillifolium	
Frostweed, pine barren		
Hatpins		?
Lupine, skyblue	Lupinus diffusus	
Milkweed, sandhill	Asclepias humistrata	*
		*
Oak, American turkey	Quercus laevis	?
Oak, sand live	Quercus geminata	*
Pawpaw netted	Asimina reticulata	
Tasselflower, lilac	Emilia sonchifolia	
		*
Yucca twisted-leaf	Yucca rupicola	?

On 3/26/24 we visited the Moody Branch Wildlife and Environmental Area. With its sandy soil and sparsity of vegetation, it reminded me of the Blue River Sand Barrens back home. We didn't see many birds there, only a palm warbler and a white-eyed vireo, but I really connected with the vegetation. Another four plants were added to the database, although I remember seeing the turkey oak in Pasco County years ago and, for some reason, had never included it.

The plants identified at these two locations are shown in the accompanying chart. Those which were added to the database are indicated with an asterix. Seek was involved with most of the identifications. Some special notes:

The prickly pear cactus was clearly a member of the genus *Opuntia*. According AFP, there are three species of *Opuntia* found in Manatee County. Of the three, the photos of *O. ausrina* in the AFP most resembles those of the plants I saw. There were no photos of the flowers of *Opuntia mesacantha*, though, so this identification is uncertain.

The skyblue lupine (*Lupinus diffusus*) is the same as that seen in Pasco County.

The plant identified as hatpins appeared to be much smaller than those seen in Collier and Lee counties and may be a different species.

American turkey oak (*Quercus laevis*) was not in the database, but had been seen earlier in Pasco County.

The pinebarren frostweed identification is uncertain.

Seek identified the Yucca plants as the twisted-leaf yucca (*Yucca rupicola*), but that appears to be a western species. It is not shown anywhere in Florida by the AFP. I did not add it to the database.

After visiting Flanagan we went to Sarasota on 3/26/24. Then, on 3/27/24, I got what I had been waiting for, three more hours at the Celery Fields. I got a Florida mark as soon as I went to the feeders. A female yellow-headed blackbird had been coming regularly. The feeders also supplied two other trip marks, the Nanday Parakeet and the brown-headed cowbird. The other trip mark was seen in the Palmer Street pond, the purple gallinule. Not surprisingly, the water level in the ponds appeared higher than when I had visited in the past. The attraction at the ponds was the common gallinule with its 6 (perhaps 7) chicks. I got a fairly decent photo of Mom with one of the chicks. In all, I saw 30 bird species at the site. Unfortunately, I was not able to find either a least bittern or a sora.

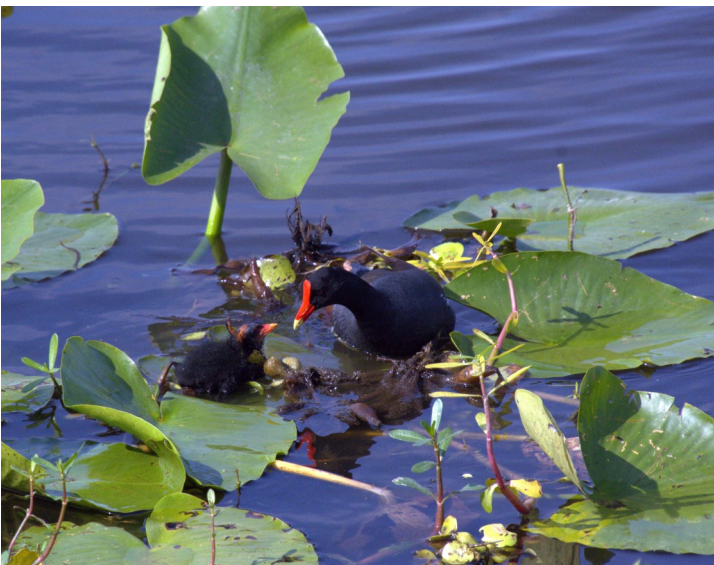
We took a couple of days off of the natural history stuff. We went to St Armands Circle on 3/28/24 and then on to Lido Beach where I did add a ring-billed gull to the trip list. Then, after breakfast and a brief shopping spree in one of the older sections of downtown Sarasota on 3/29/24, we drove out to visit with Gary and Kathy Stresman in Bradenton. And on 3/30/24 we went to the Marie Selby Botanical Gardens. Beautiful gardens but not as beautiful as the Naples Botanical Gardens and no natural section to discuss.

After an Easter Sunday (3/31/24) breakfast in the historic section of Sarasota, Ann and I drove to the Oscar-Scherer State Park. The idea was to see my first Florida scrub jay, which are known to be there. After talking to the guide at the gate, and getting directions to their whereabouts, I learned that there was a bald eagle nest in the park as well. That added up to a

potential two trip marks, the jay being a potential lifer. We hiked through some deep sandy trails behind the nature center and never saw a scrub jay. Two jays flew into the bushes at one point, but I believed them to be common bluejays. Later I learned that the eagles had fledged and had not been seen for several days. So much for the lifer. No scrub jays, no eagles!

The woman tending the nature center commented about an abundance of caterpillars presently at the park. She referred to them as woolly bears and indicated that they were the larval forms of the echo moth (*Seirarctia echo*). We saw several of them as we walked along. They were quite different from what we call the woolly bears back in Wisconsin, which are the immature form of the Isabella moth (*Pyrrharctia isabella*).

We again saw coral bean and a species of prickly pear (possibly the same as before) and, with Seek's help, I added two more plants to the Florida database: netal grass (*Melinis repens*) and lyreleaf sage (*Salvia lyrata*). Spurge nettle (*Cnidoscolus stimulosus*) was also identified but has been seen earlier in Lee County. Seek also identified partridge-pea (*Chamaecrista fasciculata*), which is



a close relative to sensitive pea (*Chamaecrista nictitans*). With only Seek as a taxonomic reference, I decided not to add the partridge pea to the database. Neither did I add oriental false hawksbeard (*Youngia japonica*). This group of composites is too difficult to identify to trust Seek with it.

We went to Myakka River State Park on 4/1/24. We had planned to take the boat tour, but contrary to everywhere else we had been, the Myakka area was dry as a bone and all of the boat tours had been cancelled. Instead, we took the tram tour. Although it was interesting, it was more about the cultural history of the park than the natural history and I found myself dozing off at times. There was not much attention to the plant life except for a few general comments about the trees in the beginning. I did find it interesting, though, that most of the fallen trees seen along the road were the result of weakened root systems due to waterlogged soils. Later, We took a very short walk on Canopy walkway. Ann would have walked further but I was having some leg issues and wanted to cut it short.

I saw 18 bird species while we were in the park. Two of them were trip marks, but they were such that I would have surely seen otherwise (black-necked stilt and black skimmer). These two brought my trip total to 112. Among the plants seen in bloom was the harp vervain (*Verbena scabra*), Nuttall's thistle (*Cirsium nuttallii*) and the cudweed (*Gamochaeta antilliana*), which appeared to be done blooming. I also saw a small lobelia which I couldn't identify.



As I walked along one of the trails, I saw a man bending over and photographing something with his phone. I was about to suggest he was seeing one of the caterpillars when he showed me dung beetle rolling a large ball of dung across the path. I took a few photos but the beetle was quickly disappearing into taller grass.

We left Sarasota on 4/2/24. I had planned on talking Ann into one more stop at the Celery Fields, but she had anticipated my plan. We spent about three hours at the Sarasota Audubon Center. During that time I checked out both the Palmer and the Raymond



Road ponds as well as spending a little time at the feeders. I recorded a combined 39 bird species. One of these, the wood duck, was not only a trip mark, but a Florida mark which I had sought for some time. This was seen in the Palmer Road pond. Also at this pond I got an excellent view (but unfortunately no photo) of the northern harrier. I also got a good look at all 6 (perhaps 7) of the common gallinule chicks. I had seen the swamp sparrow earlier at the Raymond pond. Both of these were trip marks, bringing my total to 115 birds. Purple gallinules were so abundant that I caught four of them in one photo. Unfortunately though, no least bittern and no sora.

Seen emerging from the water of the Palmer Road pond were two plants in bloom. One was the angle-stem primrose-willow (*Ludwigia leptocarpa*)

which I had identified before, and the other was identified as the Alligatorweed (*Alternanthera philoxeroides*), a new species for the database. Spatterdock (*Nuphar advena*) and the softstem bulrush (*Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani*) were also in bloom. Although I had seen it before, at several sites, I had never added the bulrush to the database. I did so after this trip.

Although we got back to the condo on 4/2/24, I needed to get my blood drawn for an INR on 4/3/24 and be home for a plumber so

couldn't get out in the field 'till the next day. I started out at the TenK Marsh trail on 4/4/24. I was anxious to see if the water levels had gone down during our trip to Sarasota. They clearly had not, and the birding there was still unproductive. Only 2 cars were in the lot when I got there and few people came while I was there. I walked just past the observation deck and could only find 8 species to record in BD.

I went on to Eagle Lakes Community Park where I recorded 27 species. Although that's a low number for Eagle Lakes, I didn't walk very far and the number included 2 trip marks (brown thrasher and bronzed cowbird). The song of the thrasher was clear from a distance to both me and Merlin. The bronzed cowbird was on the corner of the barbed wire fence, just where it had been last year. I recognized it immediately even though its red (bronze) eye was hard to see because the bird was terribly backlit. Its behavior was a giveaway, though. It seemed to confuse me with a lady cowbird by fluffing its feathers toward me. Perhaps the behavior was an aggressive display. I took several really bad photos but you can see the bronze eye by manipulating the brightness with Picassa 3 [photos 2024_04_04_006-10]. The two new trip marks for this date brought the new total to 117.

Of the places that I frequent, it seemed to me that Kirby Storter Roadside Park would be the most likely to produce additional trip marks for 2024. I left for the park before dawn on 4/5/24, hoping to avoid the blaring sunrise from the southeast. I walked the boardwalk twice and turned up a total of 15 species but none of them were new to the list. Along the way I noticed a possible red bay (*Persea borbonia*) growing close to the railing. Seek agreed but, as along Janes Scenic Drive on 3/21/24, it could not get past the genus. The possible red bay that I saw on this date was near blooming; it had flower buds present but they were not open.

A particularly photo-cooperative American crow allowed me to take several pictures of it. I wanted these to be able to clearly distinguish the American crow from the fish crow in my presentation of The Birds of Southwestern Florida.

I drove along Janes Scenic Drive on 4/6/24. Sixteen bird species were heard or seen along the road. I stopped at Gate 2 and again at Gate 3. I then parked at Gate 3 and waited for about an hour for a possible Florida mink to happen by. Although that didn't happen, I was visited by a green heron and an American crow as other birds were heard in the background. After that, I took a very short walk along Tran 7 and, almost immediately saw what I believe were several vanilla orchids (not in bloom, of course) [photos 2024_04_06_003-5,8]. The identification was based on photos that I took when Elaine Berningers pointed it out during a fern walk along Tram 12 several years ago. According to the AFP, two species of vanilla orchids occur in Collier county but only *V. phaeantha* is shown in the Fakahatchee Strand by the IRC. That is also the species shown in Eric and Rita Bauer's new book on Orchids of the Fakahatchee Strand State Park (2023). Pretty weak taxonomy!



I also noticed a couple of interesting plants along the shoulder of the road at Gate 03. One was the Coastal rose gentian (*Sabatia calycina*) and the other was identified by Seek as Cuban jute (*Sida rhombifolia*). Seek also identified this species along Tram 02 back in 2023. I didn't record it in the database at that time because of confusion between this species and wireweed (*Sida ulmifolia*). Could Seek get it wrong twice? I included both species together in the database. I also recognized white vervain (*Verbena urticifolia*) growing in the same area. It is apparently the same species as that which grows in Wisconsin, but the plants back there bloom in the fall. Although this plant is known to grow in Florida, the AFP shows it only in the panhandle—not in Collier County, and it is not shown for the Fakahatchee Strand by the IRC. Judging by its location, it could well have been introduced from someone's boots. Who knows, perhaps my own. The database was updated regarding all of these plants.

4/15/24

With Ann beached on 4/9/24, I visited the Otter Mound Preserve. Recent ebird checklists for that area suggested possible 2024 trip marks. I saw or heard few birds but I did see chimney swifts overhead. This brought the trip list to 118, two above the average for this time of the year.

But the plants in the preserve were truly overwhelming! Everywhere I looked, there were plants I had not seen before. Many of them were shrubs or small trees. I wondered how many of them were natural flora, probably having been planted there by the park service or other parties. I added Otter Mound Preserve as a new location in the database and then updated the database with the plants already familiar to me. Then then I started to sort out the species that were new:

What Seek identified as the Sreambank stickleaf (*Mentzelia hispida*) was probably *M. floridana* [photo 2024_04_09_004]. This species is found in Collier County according to the AFP. *Mentzelia hispida* is native to Mexico. *M. floridana* was added to the database.

The triangle cactus (*Acanthocereus tetragonus*) [photos 2024_04_09_002-3] is found in Collier County according to the AFP. The species was added to the database.

The quihoui privit (*Ligustrum quihoui*), according to the AFP, is only found in northern Florida (Leon County). Of the 5 species of *Ligustrum* in the AFP, none are found in Collier County. The species was not added to the database.

According to the AFP, coffee senna (*Senna occidentalis*) [photos 2024_04_09_006-8] is referred to as septicweed and it is found in Collier County. The species was added to the database.



The AFP shows coral vine (*Antigonon leptopus*) [photos 2024_04_09_014-15] to be in Collier County and I added it to the database.

The AFP refers to pigeonberry [photo 2024_04_09_013] (*Rivina humilis*) as rougeplant. It is listed for Collier County and I added it to the database.

I also found a large plant bug which Seek identified as one of the leaf-footed bugs (*Spartocera fusca*) [photo 2024_04_09_020] and a small lizard [photos 2024_04_09_021-22] which I haven't identified. It appears to be a curly tailed lizard but it wouldn't curl its tail. A woman that I met there said she saw a large lizard in one of the trees. She took me to the location but the lizard was gone. I recognized her photo as that of a large iguana, a lizard that I am yet to see.

In spite of all of the air boat rides we've taken with guests and the grandkids, Ann and I decided to take another one on 4/12/24. This one was much further east; with Everglades Safari. The hope was that being further east, we would see a different type of habitat and, perhaps, a different set of organisms. That didn't work so well. Although the landscape was different, it was a bit monotonous. We travelled through mostly sawgrass prairie with a few cattails (perhaps invasive) and a scattering of shrubs including coco plum, willows and others. Much of the open water area was stuffed with yellow pondlily and big floatingheart. The more western airboat rides go through a more interesting mix of mangroves and their associated vegetation. Several alligators were seen but the water was mostly too deep for wading birds. Although I am not tabulating species as I do in other spots (hence the lack of scientific names), two of the plants were of particular interest to me.



Seek identified the yellow pond lily as the variegated yellow pond lily (*Nuphar variegata*). That is apparently a northern east coast species. According to the AFP, the only species of *Nuphar* found in Florida is *N. advena*, although three subspecies are noted. I had included that species, without reference to subspecies, back in 2007.

At several points there were groups of an emergent plant which Seek simply identified as Sedge [photos 2024_04_12_026-28]. Sometimes it would show some other related group; Seek was clearly confused, as was I. The plants simply consisted of an upright stem, apparently segmented, with apparent conical spore structures at the top. The plants reminded me of horsetails but none of my references were helpful in identifying them.

We drove through the Loop Road on our way back to the condo. It was very early afternoon by then. Several alligators were seen, including one with young which I did not see. The water was high and few birds were seen. One badly backlit great blue heron was very close to the road at one of the culverts. I took several photos but they were a bit disappointing.

I did the Turner River—Birdon Loop on 4/13/24. There was little to see. The entire west side of the Turner River Road as well as the south side of Wagonwheel Road and the east side of Birdon Road had recently been burned. No fresh green leaves—no insects—no song birds! I recorded only 19 birds for the morning. Water blocked my path along the Concho Billie Tram so I didn't hike it very far. I looked in the portions along the west side of Birdon Road, which had been burned earlier, but was disappointed by what I found. I updated the plant database for the locations visited.

It seems pretty clear that the TenK Marsh Trail will not dry down before we leave this year. With only two weeks to go, there is as much, if not more, water there now than when we arrived three months ago. I hiked the trail just past the observation tower on 4/15/24 and wondered why. Few birds (19 species) were seen, although a single roseate spoonbill as well as an American white pelican (also just one) did fly by. Seek identified a sand live oak (*Quercus geminata*) and a white indigoberry (*Randia aculeata*). I had been wondering what the identity of the oak was for quite a while. It seems to be spreading in the area. It was added to the database for the location. The indigoberry had been identified there before and was already marked for the marsh trail. The mosquitos and the deer flies were bad.

4/21/24

I went to Picayune State Forest on 4/16/24 with the hopes of recording a bobwhite for this year's trip. I parked at the Sabal Palm trailhead on the way in and again on the way out. Merlin heard the bird but I did not. Merlin also heard a few other birds (house wren and eastern bluebird) that I never heard, even on the Merlin playback. I drove a short distance along the 3G loop road and stopped at several places to listen for the quail. I never heard them and didn't record them on Merlin's word. I did see an American eagle fly overhead, though and added number 118 to the trip list. That put me right on the average for this point of the trip. Fifteen species were seen and/or heard.

A few plants were in bloom but nothing that had not previously been marked in the database for the location. A false foxglove was recognized by Seek as the purple false-foxglove (*Agalinis purpurea*). Seven species of *Agalinis* are found in Collier County according to the AFP. The IRC doesn't show any of these in the Picayune Strand State Park, either by the name *Agalinis* or by the previous name for the genus, *Gerardia*. I now have three possible species names for the false foxgloves that I see in the Picayune and I still haven't had the ambition to get the taxonomic keys out.



Although the road was fairly dry and passable, there must have been some flooded areas recently. Some depressions near the entrance to the 3G Loop were still muddy and were filled with huge masses of the horned bladderwort (*Utricularia cornuta*) [photos 2024_04_12_008-12]. Seek identified one of the rushes that was abundant along the road as Torrey's rush (*Juncus torreyi*) [photo 2024_04_16_007]. According to the FNA's range map for this species, it is not found even close to Florida. Perhaps it is the big-headed rush (*J. megacephalus*) which had before been recognized in Picayune State Park. Seek also recognized a plant [photos 2024_04_16_013-16] as the round-headed clubrush (*Scirpiudes holoschoenus*). That is apparently a European species. Perhaps Seek did not know where we were.

Lover's Key State Park was a real disappointment when we visited it on 4/18/24. We hadn't been there since the hurricanes hit, and apparently they hit pretty hard. We shouldn't have been surprised, given the proximity to Fort Meyers Beach, but the whole beach was rearranged. We went there because I was hoping to see some terns and gulls, especially the sandwich tern, which would have been a trip mark. But there were few birds to see. I recorded only 8 species. A reddish egret offered an opportunity for some good photos until another chased it away and they both disappeared. I got a few photos of ruddy turnstones [photos 2024_04_18_001-12] and a single sanderling. There was also a small sandpiper which I wanted to call a semipalmated sandpiper, but I eventually recorded it as a least sandpiper. It seemed to have dark legs and lacked any reddish tones. My confidence level is low, though, and another birder, Susan Valenti, who has submitted several checklists for Lover's Key, recorded the least and not the semipalmated just hours before I was there.

With Merlin's promise of several possible trip marks, I went back to the Picayune State Park on 4/19/14. I turned Merlin on at 7:26 A.M, and in about 20 minutes he registered the sounds of 23 bird species. Really! During that same period I saw or heard 4 (maybe 5) species. Interestingly, Merlin did not hear the bobwhite; neither did I. I then listened to the Merlin recordings. Several of the songs were clearly recognized. Now for some birding ethics:

1. If Merlin records a bird which the birder doesn't see or hear, should the birder include that bird in his/her ebird checklist?
2. If Merlin records a bird which the birder doesn't see or hear, but can clearly hear and identify in Merlin's recording, should the birder include that bird in his/her ebird checklist?

These questions come up now because, having only 118 for this year's trip, I have a strong bias to count the birds — Matt would not approve. I delayed that decision for now and emailed Diana Lembck for her opinion.

During a short drive along the 3G Loop I examined one of the Agalinis plants. Its roots were fibrous. The stem was red near the base but turned green at the point where it divided into several upright branches. The leaves were in whorls and were this with the forward one significantly longer than the others. The flowers were pink [photos 2014_04_19_003-4]. There were 5 petals, each fringed with short hairs. The lower petal had red dots, an apparent insect guide. Peduncles were very short, or perhaps lacking. I marked the species found in Collier County in Wunderlin & Hansen (2011), but could not get past the first dichotomy. I decided to go along with Seek.



During each of the last two trips along the Triple G Trail, I noticed large numbers of Halloween pennants flying about. They seemed to hover around me as I walked along the road.

4/26/24

On 4/22/24, Matt and I took a brief walk along the TenK Marsh Trail. There were slight traces of drying but the water levels were still high. Very few birds were seen. Matt identified wood bees as they flew around. But, the deer flies were enough to drive us out,

We went on to the new Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk. In the parking area were beds of flowering plants which Seek identified as the sunshine mimosa (*Mimosa strigillosa*). The AFP shows this plant to be well distributed, pretty much throughout Florida. I added it to the database and demonstrated its sensitivity to Matt.

The BCBB had changed quite a bit since my last visit. The sawgrass (*Cladium jamaicense*) was pretty tall in places and was in bloom. Also in bloom was the Virginia salt marsh mallow (*Kosteletzkya virginica*). We ran into Alex Gobel, the volunteer coordinator for the Fakahatchee State Park Preserve. Matt engaged him in a discussion of the fish in the channel running through the area. Then I asked him about bitterns, which he reported to see often. We then got into a discussion of some of the bromeliads and he identified several giant bromeliads (*Tillandsia utriculata*) for me. He also identified another bromeliad which I had not seen before but don't recall its name. Seek identified it as the cardinal bromeliad (*Tillandsia fasciculata*) from a picture that I took [photo 2024_04_22_002], but Alex referred to it by a different name.

I went back to the BCBB the next day (4/23/24) to get some better photos of the bromeliads, although the bright sun and photographing through the trees made it difficult. Beside the bromeliads previously mentioned, I thought I might have seen the potbelly airplant (*Tillandsia pauciflora*) [photo 2024_04_23_014]. This was based on the very short leaves on the plant. Possibly, though, the plants might just have been young. My familiarity with the bromeliads isn't thorough enough to be sure. There were also some false-foxgloves in bloom along the path [photo 2024_04_23_018]. Seek didn't identify them past the genus, but they appeared different from the ones seen in the Picayune Strand State Park.

I returned to the Picayune Strand, probably for the last time this year, on 4/24/24 for one last chance to see or hear the bobwhite. I

went right to the Sabal Palm trail head and sat with my coffee at the picnic table in the parking lot. While there, I did a little experiment with Merlin. I set it up to listen for birds for three approximate ten minute intervals. Merlin heard 8 birds during the first interval, 10 during the second and 8, again, during the last interval. In the three periods combined, Merlin heard a total of 16 bird species. Five of those species were heard in all three periods. One species was heard in two of the periods and 10 of the species were unique to their time period. No conclusions are to be made from this data; just idle curiosity at play. No birds were recorded in BD for this trip.

Again, I noticed large patches of horned bladderwort (*Utricularia cornuta*) in several of the apparently more moist areas. One of those areas appeared to be a driveway, no more than tire tracks in the mud. I followed the tracks on foot for a while and noticed some purple bladderwort scattered among the horned ones. Seek suggested the cape bladderwort (*Utricularia bisquamata*), but that is a plant native to South Africa. Others were identified as the purple bladderwort (*U. purpurea*), the species I had entered in the database. The AFP shows three species of bladderwort in Collier County with purple flowers. According to Wunderlin & Hansen (2011), *U. purpurea* would be a floating or submerged plant with dissected leaves. The other two (*U. amethystina* and *U. resupinata*) are terrestrial. These two are distinguished by the nature of the bracts which subtend the pedicel. Needless to say, I didn't make the necessary observations to make this decision. None of the purple bladderworts are shown by the IRC to be in the Pica-yune State Park.

The Kirby Storter Roadside Park was finally showing definite signs of drying up when I visited it on 4/25/24. As one of the Big Cy-



press Staff put it, just in time for the rainy season. Most of the floating hearts were no longer afloat and the resurrection ferns were no longer resurrected (the humidity had been relatively low of late). As I walked along the boardwalk, I looked for plants in bloom to update the database for the location. Desperate for a trip mark or two, I went to the park hoping to see some song birds. After spending about 1/2 hour at the end of the boardwalk, and watching several tufted titmouses feed, a beautiful magnolia warbler obliged. According to the bar graphs in Pranty (2005), this warbler would be seen occasionally at this time of the year. I walked back to the car and

then took a second stroll along the boardwalk. This time, I actually saw a northern parula (previously I had only been hearing them) and a yellow-throated warbler, both of which are permanent residents in the area. In all, 17 species were seen and added to BD.

The Fakahatchee, too, was showing signs of drying as I drove along Janes Scenic Drive on 4/26/24. The roadside ditches were still pretty full of water, but I saw little flow through the culverts except as I approached gate 12. It looked like a pretty good morning. A raccoon crossed the road as I entered the prairie area and a lone deer soon followed. I drove to gate 12 and then hiked a short distance along it. The mosquitoes were biting me in spite of copious amounts of repellent. I took a few photos, but I didn't last long. On the way back, I stopped at gate 3 and parked. A resident volunteer that I met indicated that a panther had been seen there a while back and that mink had also been seen, but the morning wasn't that good. I couldn't find the white vervain I had seen the last time I was there, but I did see some unidentified flatsedges and a possible small rush outside the gate. Only 13 bird species were seen this morning.

4/28/24

I drove out the Chokoloskee causeway on 4/27/24 to see what I could find. Surprisingly, there were several shorebirds on the small beach across from the boat launch. Most of them (16) were semipalmated plovers. There were also a couple of ruddy turnstones. I also noticed a small sandpiper among the plovers. The lighting was good so I could see that it had dark legs. It did not appear to have any warmish brown areas which, in my mind, eliminated the western sandpiper. It was dull brown-grey throughout the back with a distinct breast band and white throat. I marked the bird as the first semipalmated sandpiper that I ever recorded in Florida. That brought the total trip marks to 120. On the way back to the condo I stopped at the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk to finish my coffee. Except for a very cooperative tricolored heron, things were quiet there.

This was the week of “lasts” for the 2024 Florida trip:

On 4/27/24, we took our last trip to Marco Island for breakfast and, on 4/28/24, for dinner. Thankfully, several burrowing owls were out of there burrows to see us off.

On 4/28/24, we took our last trip to Everglades City for the “best eggs ever”. The curly-tailed lizards, which we had no seen there for a couple of years, were out to say goodbye.

On 4/29/24, I took my last trip to the new Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk for my “fakahabit” fix. Hopefully, the renewed old boardwalk will be open next year.

5/9/24

We left Florida on 4\30\24. As we drove through northern Florida, I again saw the unidentified patches of blue and yellow flowers in bloom. We overnighted in Tifton and arrived at Matt and Nicole’s home on 5\1\24, where I saw my first robins of the year.

On 5\2\24, I went to the new boardwalk at Murfree Springs Wetlands In the late morning . I found the boardwalk very interesting; a place where one can get close to the wildlife. Except for the facts that I was always shooting down and that I arrived at near noon on a sunny day, it seemed an ideal place for wildlife photography. I photographed a yellow-crowned night heron, Canada goose, a female wood duck with young and the common grackle [photos 2024_05_02_001-37]. Red-winged blackbirds and cardinals were also active.

Although there were no alligators, there was plenty alligatorweed (*Alternanthera phuloxeroides*) blooming in the shallow water under the boardwalk. There was also large patches of one of the milfoils. Seek was confused as to the species, though. Sometimes it called it the Eurasian water milfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*) and at other times parrot’s feather (*M. aquaticum*). Because of its tendency to emerge from the water surface, I favored the later identification.



Later in the day I drove to Garfield Crescent Park. Most of the spring had and sprung and no ephemerals were in bloom. The only flowers that I noticed were of common fleabane (*Erigeron philadelphicus*) , smooth Solomon’s seal (*Polygonatum biflorum*) and what Seek identified as the grassleaf spurge (*Euphorbia graminea*) [photos 2024_05_02_047-48]. This species is not included in Horn & Cathcart (2018), possibly because it is an invasive species.

With Seek's help, in some cases, I also noted leafcup (*Polymnia canadensis*), eastern redbud (*Cercis canadensis*), chinkapin oak (*Quercia muehlenbergii*), sugar hackberry (*Celtis laevigata*) and slippery elm (*Ulmus rubra*) among the plants that were not in bloom. Many of the leaves of the slippery elm were infected with elm sac gall aphid (*Tetraneura luminous*) according to Seek.

Merlin recorded 23 bird species in 22:27 minutes at Matt's patio on 5/3/24. Included was a scarlet tanager, house finch, common yellowthroat and a northern bobwhite. It was my hearing of the bobwhite which prompted me to turn on the app. I was sure of the bird's call, but it seemed like such an unlikely place for it. I didn't record most of the birds that Merlin heard (I'm over that now) but I emailed the spectrogram to myself to incorporate into these FloNotes for 2024. Unfortunately, I couldn't figure out a way to incorporate it though, so I just saved it with the FloNote files.



5\4\24 was the eventful day. Nicole spotted the scissor-tailed flycatcher as she and Ann came back to from the store. Matt and I hastened to where she had seen it and, sure enough, I finally saw my first ever scissor-tailed flycatcher — a Lifer! Also, on that day, Seek identified the Pharaoh cicada (*Magicicada septendecim*), a species of the 17 year cicada. Both 13 and 17 year cicadas are expected to emerge in Tennessee this year and this might have signaled the event.

We left Matt's place on 5/5/24, overnighted in Farmer City, IL and arrived at home on 5\6\24.

Summary

When we arrived in Florida, Floridians had seen one of their wettest falls in recent years and we could certainly see the consequences. It was the wettest winter we had ever experienced. And when we left, most of the water, refreshed by several hard rains during our stay, was left behind. The dry-down had only become evident in recent weeks.

The birds were widely distributed and the usual concentrations were lacking. Unfortunately, that translated to a poor birding year. I missed many of the common marks and, If it hadn't been for our brief trip to Manatee and Sarasota counties, the count may have been an all time low. Even with that, it was below average. But, to emphasize the good, I did get 1 new condo bird and 4 new Florida bird, not to mention the lifer on the Tennessee.

I added 26 new species of plants to the database. Again, this was largely due to the short trip north as well as the rediscovery of the Otter Mound Preserve on Marco Island. The number of new plants was almost overwhelming; I will be lucky to remember a few of them if I see them again.

All in all—Florida is always good!