

Florida – 2014

1/29/14

There was no temperature in Franklin when we left for the 2014 Florida trip at approximately 3:45AM on 1/29/14. The thermometer registered 0 degrees and it was to stay pretty cold for most of the trip. In fact, it was only the minimum speed limit that the temperature approached between Atlanta and Macon on day two and only well into Florida did we begin to experience the weather we had come to enjoy. When we arrived at Dalton Georgia for our first overnigher, our usual motel was full. Then, while checking in at the Red Roof Inn we learned that the highways going through Atlanta (Hy75 & Hy285) had been closed due to a freezing snowfall of about two and one half inches. The city and its outskirts had not been prepared and were totally paralyzed by the event. We didn't leave Dalton until 10AM on the morning of 1/30/14 and still had slow going through the area. We got into Florida late in the afternoon and were greeted by a flock of rock doves flying over Hy75; our first Florida mark for the trip.

We didn't arrive at the Kaczmarek's until about 8:30PM on 1/30/14. We stayed with them for two nights but the weather was rainy so I didn't go to any of my usual birding haunts in the area. A few birds were seen while driving around the city and these were recorded for the trip. Interestingly, this included a limpkin walking along the shore of the retention pond by the Kaczmarek home. We arrived at the condo about 4:30PM on 2/1/14 and settled in.

On the morning of 2/2/14 I renewed my romance with the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk as usual. Robins were everywhere! Large numbers of them were flying overhead; There were many of them in the trees and their songs was the dominant sound in the swamp. Quite a contrast from last year! There had apparently been lots of rain in the recent past and the Fakahatchee Strand along the boardwalk was as wet as I'd seen it for a long time. Buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*), mourning glory (probably *Ipomoea indica*), beggarticks (*Bidens alba*) and string lily (*Crinum americanum*) were in bloom. The inconclusive id of the morning glory species should be a point of future observations. Wunderlin & Hansen (2003) list 25 species of *Ipomoea* and ten of these are shown for Collier County by the AFP. Reviewing these references, *I indicta* appears to be the correct id.

This morning (2/3/14) I hiked along the marsh trail of TenK. There too I noticed the high water levels and the birds were, consequently, well spread out. At the observation tower I



heard a sora; a Florida mark. I used my iTouch birding applications to eliminate any bird calls that could be confused with the sora (grebes, coots, moorhens) but the call was definitely that of a sora; a bird I am well familiar with from home and it was marked for the site. Playing the song of the sora from my iTouch failed to attract the bird into view. I seem to remember Fred Townsend telling me of a sora sighting at that same location last year. I was somewhat surprised that, in spite of the high water, few ducks were seen. Neither did I see a glossy ibis; a bird commonly seen along this trail. Plants seen in bloom this morning again included beggarticks (*Bidens alba*) as well as the red mangrove (*Rhizophora mangle*), potato tree (*Solanum donianum*) and saltbush (*Baccharis angustifolia*). I did see a marsh rabbit along the marsh trail and, on the way back to the condo, I saw a deer in a marshy area north of Hy41. Later, in the late afternoon, I saw another limpkin along Hy41.

2/5/14

For a great concentration of birds, albeit without experiencing the wilds of Florida, Eagle Lakes Park is hard to beat. I visited there

on the morning of 2/4/14 and recorded a total of 42 species; 43 if you add the limpkin seen along Hy41 on the way there. I thought this was an unusually large number until I reviewed last year's notes and found that I had recorded 46 and 48 species at that location on a couple of visits last year. Highlights of the morning were a purple gallinule (never seen there before), black-bellied whistling ducks and both species of yellowlegs. The yellowlegs were in close enough proximity for easy comparison and, when flushed, each of their distinct calls was distinguishable. While I was there I met the guy from New Hampshire that I seem to run into each year at various birding sites and we compared a few birding notes. On the way back to the condo I stopped at Tomato road to see if the great white heron that I saw there last year was about — no luck.

This morning Ann and I got back into our Florida Wednesday routine; breakfast, farmer's market and beaches; South Beach for Ann — Tigertail for me. Tigertail was very disappointing. There were very few birds and only four shorebirds could be added to the year's list (dunlin, least sandpiper, black-bellied plover and sanderling). Surprisingly, I ran into my New Hampshire friend again (His name is Frank). He was about to leave the area and he indicated that he had seen few species. I was also unable to find any of the burrowing owls at locations where I had seen them last year. Then I went to Mackle Park to check for purple martins. None were seen and the purple martin house appeared to be abandoned.

2/6/14

It was a foggy drive out to Kirby-Storter this morning but well worth the trip. I saw twenty-six bird species while bringing the trip count to seventy-nine. I had fairly good photo opportunities with a little blue heron in the white phase. When I began the walk along the boardwalk, I noticed a white-flowering plant apparently belonging to the umbel family. The plant was later tentatively id'd as the water dropwort (*Oxypolis filiformis*) using Hammer (2002). This plant was added to the Florida Wildlife database but needs to be confirmed at a future date. There was quite a wave of warblers (along with blue-grey gnatcatchers) as I walked the boardwalk. Most of them were yellow-rumped but a few palm, black and white and a common yellowthroat were also recorded. I also saw a green anole on the railing of the boardwalk. My understanding, although I don't know how I came to it, is that the green anole can turn brown but that the brown anoles cannot turn green; hence, a native green anole.

On the way back to the condo I noticed a new parking area developed for Skillet Strand. I stopped there and walked a short distance along the trail heading north from the parking lot. Shortly into the walk I noticed another flowering specimen of the water dropwort as well as a few other plants in bloom including showy milkwort (*Polygala grandiflora*), pitted stripeseed (*Piriqueta caroliniana*) and apparent bluemink (*Ageratum houstonianum*). The bluemink had several queen butterflies feeding from the flowers. I stopped at the Big Cypress Swamp visitor's center and the ranger indicated that the parking area was developed for permitted off-road vehicles and that the path beyond my walk was well worth the effort. He gave me a URL for a map of the Turner River Unit trails (www.nps.gov/bicy/planyourvisit/turner-river-unit-designated-trails.htm). This location was added to the Florida Wildlife database and the entrees for the plants located there were updated. When I left the Big Cypress Swamp visitor's center I noticed quite a few tree swallows. I also saw them at several places along the route to the condo. These were added to the trip list.

This evening Ann and I went to a meeting of the Marco Island Shell Club to hear a presentation by Blair Witherington, author of Florida's Living Beaches. The title of his talk was "Provenance of Seashells", mostly showing the signs of the shell's history that one could see on the shell. Things such as the holes from predatory gastropods and the grooves left by polychaete worms were shown; much as shown in his book on pages 119-121. He also showed egg cases from welks and other interesting shell related items. The talk was very interesting. Ann especially liked the part about giant oysters, of course.

2/8/14

It was very foggy when I started out at about 7:30 this morning for the Fritchee Road area to look for hummingbirds so I decided to stop at 10K and possibly see the sora that I heard there the other morning. As I approached the observation deck I noticed huge numbers of great egrets. I estimated at least 1000 great egrets with a few great blue herons mixed in. lesser numbers of little blue herons and snowy egrets were mixed in, especially where the water was more shallow. A couple of wood storks were there also but there were no spoonbills. I played a recording of a sora and possibly got a response but I couldn't be sure.

After about an hour I went on to the Fritchee Road. I've been seeing an occasional limpkin along Hy41 but as I arrived at the

Fritchee road area I saw several limpkins in the field. It was still a bit foggy but as I continued to look, more of the birds became visible. Eventually several cars drove into the property and the limpkins were flushed. I counted 16 that flew over my head and could still see a few in the field; the total count was in excess of 20. Then I went into the property where I had in previous years seen hummingbirds. Sure enough, after a short wait, two hummers appeared. None of the other pollinators were seen though, probably because it was still pretty foggy and the blossoms pretty wet.

On my way back to the condo I again stopped to see the egrets. Most of them had moved on but there was a single roseate spoon bill waiting for me. A few butterflies were also seen, including the white peacock and gulf fritillary.

2/9/14

When I was on Fritchee Road yesterday I picked up an apple snail shell from the road. It was in very good shape; very clean. I took it home and checked it out with a couple of internet sources in an attempt to id it. According to several references there are four species of apple snails found in Florida. The Florida Museum of Natural History publishes online "AN IDENTIFICATION MANUAL FOR THE FRESHWATER SNAILS OF FLORIDA" (<http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/malacology/fl-snail/snails1.htm>). Although I had no diagrams to define anatomical features, the use of this key suggested that I had collected one of the native snails, *Pomacea paludosa*. Another reference (<http://www.applesnail.net/>) shows several diagrams which again suggest *P. paludosa*.

2/10/14

I took another trip to Tigertail today and the birds were sparse. I saw about 20-25 willets added that species to the trip list but that was all. There was one other shorebird mixed in with the group but it was well hidden from clear view and I couldn't make it out. No dowitcher; no western sandpiper; no reddish egret; no frigatebird! The tide was rising during my stay. I didn't want to cross the lagoon so I hiked behind the mangroves for as long as the path took me. While on the path I scared up a probable six-lined racerunner (*Cnemidophorus sexlineatus*) as later id'd with Alden (1989). A number of butterflies were also seen. Several very small bright yellow ones were seen but I never got close enough to attempt an id. A small moth or beetle that I saw had an orange body with totally black wings with white tips. The common buckeye was also seen.



Among the plants seen in bloom was a small shrub with yellow flowers. The flowers were in groups of 4 or 5 but only one of the group was in bloom at a time. There were five somewhat rounded, overlapping petals. The sepals were green, pointed and alternated between the petals. The leaves were thin and narrow, widest near the distal end and arranged in a whorl. These were slightly ascending and had short but dense hairs. These hairs were also present on the brown stem. This appears to be the bay cedar (*Suriana maritima*) of Witherington & Witherington (2009) and Alden et. al. (1995). The AFP seemed to confirm the id and the plant was added to the plant list. Other plants seen in bloom included the water pimpernel (*Samolus ebracteatus*), yellow-top (*Flaveria linearis*) and the beach naupaka (*Scaevola taccada*).

When I took Cooch out this evening I saw a relatively large indo-pacific gecko on the outside wall of the condo. There was also a bright green tree frog there; probably the green treefrog (*Hyla cinerea*) according to Alden (1995).

2/12/14

Yesterday Ann and I decided to go to the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. Last year we went late in our stay and the swamp was seriously drying up. We thought, with the recent rains this year, we'd go early and possibly see more. I decided to go north on Hy29 so I could scope out the entrance to Bear Island Road for a future visit. Then, I continued with the image of Hy951 in my mind and went way too far north; well into Hendry County. It turned out to be a good thing, though, because a red-headed woodpecker flew over the road and I added it to the trip list. When we finally got to Corkscrew it turned out the we had the opposite problem from last year. Recent rains resulted in deep water and the few wading birds we saw were really spread out. At one observation deck, though, a guide had a scope set up on a nesting group of wood storks. This, she said, is the first time they've bred in the park since 2008.

I didn't see many plants in bloom on this trip although all three species of *Sagittaria* (*S. graminea*, *S. lancifolia* and *S. latifolia*) were. Several of the more weedy species were also seen in bloom [beggarticks (*Bidens alba*) and southern beeblossom (*Gaura angustifolia*)]. I also saw a bush with distinctly purple clusters of fruit. When I searched for the plant in Nelson (1996) it turned out to be the plant on the cover of the book, the American beauty berry (*Callicarpa Americana*). The fruit in my photos appeared more purple



than the photo on the book's cover, but the text suggested that color variation of the fruit was to be expected. The plant is on the species list for the Corkscrew Swamp that I downloaded from its web site and I added it to my plant list.

We also saw a black snake basking on fallen leaves. This snake was all black but one of the guides along the boardwalk id'd it as the Florida banded water-snake. Bartlett and Bartlett (2003) does not list any snakes by that name but it does list a banded water snake (*Nerodia fasciata fasciata*) and a Florida water-snake (*Nerodea faciata pictiventris*). My guess is that the *N. fasciata pictiventris* is the snake in question. The reference indicates that this snake can appear unicolored, especially when dry.

This morning I went to TenK for a while, hoping once again to see or hear the sora. No luck, again. I was also curious to see if the egrets would again be congregated near the observation tower. They were not. Many of them could be seen among the mangroves in the distance, though. I took a few photos of particularly cooperative herons and an anhinga and managed to add a royal tern that flew overhead to the trip list.



Later I dropped Ann at South Beach and went on to Tigertail. Finally, as I approached the park, a burrowing owl was out in the open and added to the list for the year. Again I found few shorebirds at the lagoon shore. A park ranger indicated that I had to cross the lagoon and go to Sand Dollar Island to find them but that they were here. Near the end of my stay I saw my first magnificent frigatebird for the year. Then the second. And then, several more. Hoping that my luck was changing I went to Mackle park to look for purple martins. When I got out of the car I saw a frigatebird overhead. Then another and then, several more. They circled over the pond for a while and one of them was actually seen diving into the water for something. No purple martins!

2/13/14

Although disappointed by the lack of purple martins in Mackle Park so far this year, I was happy to find them in Everglades City on the morning of 2/13/14. Ann and I went in for breakfast and took a driving tour along the channel where we saw a martin house that was occupied.

2/14/14



I hiked about a mile along the off road vehicle trail at the Skillet Strand this morning. When I arrived at the strand, a large number of black vultures were gathered at the entrance. The walk took me through a variety of habitats including prairie-like areas, pinelands and cedar stands. I didn't see a large number of birds along the way but was able to add the downy woodpecker and the prairie warbler to the trip list. Although there were deer track at several locations, no mammals were seen. The most prominent woody plants noted were the southern bayberry, dwarf cypress and pine.

A number of previously identified plants were seen in bloom. These

included the pineland heliotrope (*Heliotropium polyphyllum*), tickseed (*Coreopsis laebenworthii*), costal plains yellowtops (*Flaveria linearis*), everglades daisy (*Helenium pinnatifidum*), marsh fleabane (*Pluchea rosea*) and water dropwort (*Oxypolis filiformis*). At least one of the whitetop species (*Rhynchospora sp.*) was also seen as was one of the wild petunias (*Ruellia sp.*). Cardinal air plants (*Tillandsia fasciculata*) were showing purple flowers but they were not yet open. Also identified among the plants in bloom was a possible axilflower (*Mecardonia acuminata*). This plant was id'd with Hammer (2002) and Taylor (1992). The plant was abt 6-8" tall with opposite leaves measuring abt 3/4" long by 1/4" wide. The leaves were toothed distally. There were 5 petals in a tube which was free about half of its height. The alternating sepals were pointed. The flowers were long-stalked coming from the leaf axils. The AFP shows two species of *Mecardonia* for Collier County but the other species (*Mecardonia procumbens*) appeared to have wider leaves than the plants seen.

My Florida wildlife database to this point clumps all of the yellow bladderworts as *Utricularia sp.* In spite of this the AFP lists 9 yellow bladderworts for Collier County. One seen this morning appeared to be distinctive because of its lack of visible leaves and its terrestrial habit causing me to tentatively id it as the horned bladderwort (*Utricularia cornuta*). The id was based on photos shown on the AFP. This was added to the database.

As I was returning to my car, a fellow from the park service met me. He had seen my car and walked in to see if I had gotten dehydrated or having some other problem. He indicated that the vultures I had seen coming in had been all over the car and, sure enough, there were actually scratches on the hood. Then I stopped at the Big Cypress Visitor's Center to purchase a copy of the new edition of The Everglades Handbook. As I left, hundreds of tree swallows were seen overhead.

2/23/14

I visited the Big Bend Boardwalk of the Fakahatchee Strnd on the morning of 2/15/14. There was nothing new in birds; in fact, the area has been pretty quiet so far this year. On the way out I did collect a couple of pinnae from two of the marsh ferns along the boardwalk. Later, while examining them I adapted a key to the ferns of Florida (Simplified Key to Some Common, Unique, and Exotic Florida Ferns) from University of Florida Publication #CIR1471 that I found online.

Matt and Nicole joined us on 2/16/14 and on 2/17/14 Matt joined me for a morning bird hike at TenK. Later we dropped the girls at South Marco Beach and went on to Tigertail. While there we saw a reddish egret; what appeared to be a first year juvenile according to pictures in Sibley (2000). No burrowing owls were out at any of the known Marco sites but we did see one gopher turtle near Tigertail.

Both Matt and Nicole joined me on an early walk on 2/18/14. We decided to go to Eagle Lakes Park so Nicole could power walk while Matt and I checked out the birds. The birding was a bit disappointing compared to my first visit to the park (2/4/14) but we did see a purple gallinule again. Nicole apparently saw a roseate spoonbill but Matt and I missed it. Nicole wanted to see Sanibel Island so, on 2/19/14 we drove to the island, dropped the women off at the beach and then visited the Ding Darling NWR. We didn't concentrate on song birds but saw most of the herons and egrets except the night herons. Two adult reddish egrets and at least two roseate spoonbills were seen. On the way home we saw a northern harrier along Hy41.



The only other birding that I did was again at TenK on the morning of 2/21/14. This was B_Y_O_Bird day, according to a couple that I met from Wisconsin Rapids. Although the water levels were still fairly high, the water did seem to be drawing down somewhat. It will be interesting to see if the birding gets better as the area dries out a bit. Matt and Nicole left to go back to Wisconsin yesterday, 2/20/14.

I've been noticing that there have been several reports of swallow-tailed kites showing up on the Brdbrain listserv lately. I have still not seen one this year. Checking the Birder's Diary records indicates that the earliest sighting for me was 2/18/2000, but the location of this sighting was not recorded. I saw one on 2/24/2008 at the Six Mile Cypress Slough and the other February mark was on 2/28/2012 at Corkscrew.

2/24/14

I went to TenK this morning and finally met up with the Townsends and compared birding notes with them. Later, after dropping Ann at the beach, I went to Tigertail. Again, the birding was terrible. The Townsends indicated that they too had not had



much luck there so far this year. Then I went under the Judge S.S. Jolley Bridge where I saw spotted sandpipers last year. I didn't see any sandpipers but I did see a starfish and a sea hare; both washed up on the shore. Matt and Nicole were seeing sea hares while they were here but I hadn't seen them before. The starfish appeared to be the nine-armed sea star (*Luidia senegalensis*) according to Witherington & Witherington (2009). The same reference suggests that the sea hare was the mottled sea hare (*Aplysia brasiliana*). I put the sea hare back in the water and saw it release its ink.



Later the Townsends told me that they saw a panther along tram 12 at 1:31 PM. I'm anxious to see the photos of them that Fred took.

2/28/14:

I finally met up with the Bernenger group on 2/25/14 for a tour of the Gator Hole Preserve in Lee County. The group consisted of about 25 people and we were led by the Coordinator of the preserve, Laura Jewell. We spent over four hours there; riding the back of several pickup trucks and stopping at several locations throughout the preserve. I concentrated on plants rather than the birds although a red-tailed hawk nest was seen and Richard Johnson saw quite a few other birds including a brown-headed nuthatch. I added this location to the Florida Wildlife database and marked the plants seen to this location. A number of plants were of special interest, though. In a thank you note sent to Laura after the hike, Jack Berninger listed five Plants worthy of note; all found in Taylor (1992).

1. *Nothoscordum bivalve* "crow poison."
2. *Xyris elliotii* "yellow eyed grass" small one and the large one *Xyris smalliana* or *X. difformis*
3. *Erechtites hieracifolius* "fire/burn weed"
4. *Befaria* or *Bejaria racemosa* "tar flower"
5. *Mitreola petiolata* "lax hornpod"

Because the group was large and not always together, I didn't see all of these; particularly the crow poison, tar flower and lax hornpod. Other plants were of special interest to me, though, because they were either additions to my Florida plant list and, thus, added to the database or otherwise noted.

One of these was one of the yellow-eyed grasses, *Xyris smallianii*. Both this species and *X. ellioti* were seen at the site but I had never id'd the larger species before. Jack pointed out that this species isn't listed on the plant list for the site. According to Taylor (1992), the flower spike *X. smallianii* is 10-15mm long while that of *X. elliotii* is 7-9mm long.

Another plant that was added was the false garlic (*Nothoscordum bivalve*). This species, once id'd, was seen multiple times.

Innocense (*Hedyotis procumbens*) was also identified and added to the database. This was seen near our first stop along



with a probable madder that never was id'd, although Taylor (1992) suggests that it may have been *Hedyotis corymbosa*. On 2/28/14 I sent an email to Laura suggesting that these plants be checked for possible addition to their list for the preserve.

A species of milkwort was also added. According to the AFP, there are ten species of *Polygala* in Lee County. Comparing the photos of these species suggests that the one seen was the orange milkwort (*Polygala lutea*). This species is listed on the plant list for the site. The species is also shown in Taylor (1992) but the photo in this reference is more yellow (rather than orange) than the flowers seen.

One final plant considered for addition to the list was one of the fleabanes or camphorweeds (genus, *Pluchia*). Jack Bernenger thought that this was one of the more uncommon species. I took a few photo of the plant but was not able to id it positively. I did not add this species to the list.

Queen's delight (*Stillingia sylvatica*) was added to the plant list. I had previously identified corkwood (*Stillingia aquatica*) at Sabel Palms but that species was a rather large woody plant. According to Wunderlin & Hansen (2003) *S. aquatica* is a woody plant with usually solitary stem from the base while *S. sylvatica* is more herbaceous with several stems from the base.

The only sundew listed in the site's plant list is the pink sundew (*Drosera capillaris*). I saw sundews last year when I was hiking with the Bernenger group in Collier Seminole Park but these were never id'd to species. My recollection is that they were the same plants. Although the id based on year old memories cannot be considered reliable, I edited the entry in my plant database to show this species. Formerly it simply listed *Drosera* sp.

Not too much animal life was seen on the trip. I did see a likely black racer and a small toad. Laura gave us an interesting talk about the biological methods used to control the melaleuca trees and actually found one of the weevils to show us.

On 2/26/14, Ann and I went to Tigertail for our first serious shelling trip. The tide was high and the shelling was about as bad as the birding has been. We did find a colorful moonsnail (*Naticarius canrena*) that we kept and we added the alphabet cone (*Conus spurius atlanticus*) to our collection as collected but we actually kept few other shells. I did collect several of the arcs for later examination. We saw another sea hare that was washed up on the beach. I moved it back into the water but I doubt that it survived.

I was supposed to meet the Bernenger group again on 2/27/14 but I decided ,instead, to go to the Fakahatchee boardwalk. What a fabulous morning! On the way in I scared up a barred owl near a fallen tree. When I looked in the small pool formed by the uprooted base of the tree I saw an immature owl in the pond. The adult (presumably the mother) was sitting in a nearby tree watching me very carefully. I was then treated

to a pretty good look at two immature bald eagles in the nest. Then, as I approached the final leg of the boardwalk, there were two otters feeding. When I finally got to the end of the boardwalk, I found large numbers of great egrets and wood storks along with some immature white ibises and a few snowy egrets and a couple of black-crowned night herons. There were also a couple of alligators feeding in what they probably consider their hole. It was interesting to watch the different feeding habits of the birds. The touch feeding wood storks didn't seem to mind being close to others. They even appeared to cooperate in flushing the fish (perhaps my imagination) with only an occasional aggressive encounter. The great egrets, on the other hand, did aggressively defend their small feeding areas and chased away others of the same species. Only a panther sighting (maybe even a few warblers) could have made it any better. Later in the afternoon I finally saw my first swallow-tailed kite for the year along Hy41.



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A short drive north this morning (2/28/14) allowed me to get the trip list for the year over 100 on the last day of February. Ann

and I (and Cooch) stated by driving to Hendry County to the White Bird Yard. There I was able to add a goldfinch and the painted bunting. Mrs. White visited with me as I looked for the birds and repeatedly welcomed me back any time. Then we drove to the Harns Marsh and added the snail kite and the ring-necked duck. This is only the second time that I saw this species of duck in Florida. In 2012 I saw ring-necked ducks in the lake near the entrance of the Fakahatchee Strand on Janes Scenic Drive. The sighting of the snail kite has me thinking about snail kites vs northern harriers. Both of these birds have distinct white rumps (or, perhaps, tail bases) and could be confused; especially in flight. I have to admit that I may have misidentified these birds on occasion in the past. Driving home along Hy75, in Collier County, I finally saw a red-tailed hawk. In all, six trip marks for the day bringing the total to 105. But, who's counting! This evening, as Cooch was taking me for a walk, I saw purple martins along the Faka-Union Channel.

3/2/14

Yesterday (3/1/14) I spent some time checking some of the arc shells collected on 2/26/14. One of them appears to be new to our collection; the cut-ribbed arc (*Anadara floridana*). I found a really neat web site, , that has very helpful photos showing major morphological differences between closely related shells. Some of its photos will be helpful in future identifications or in presentations.

In the afternoon, Ed and Joan St. Germain took Ann and me out on their new boat. We were accompanied by another boat with Suzanne, Phil Donahue and his wife, Carol. We went out the Faka-Union Canal to the Gulf of Mexico; passing Panther Key and Faka Union Bay eventually beaching at a small island called White Horse Key. There we did a bit of shelling and I, of course, did some birding. I was able to add the western Sandpiper to the trip list as well as a Caspian tern. There were two Caspian terns in a group of royal terns. Their bills were distinctly redder (rather than orange) and the eye was definitely surrounded by black as shown in Sibley (2000). The shelling wasn't as great as we expected. We did see a few more of the sea hares and several of the folks in the area picked up horseshoe crabs. Ann collected one of these but it isn't in wonderful condition.

3/3/14

I drove up the Loop Road this morning. As everywhere else, water levels were high but most of the common birds of the area were recorded. Not too many plants were seen in bloom but everglades sunflower (*Helianthus pinnatifidum*) was found at one of the stops. Also, blue porterweed (*Stachytarpheta jamaicensis*) and pickerelweed (*Pontedaria lanceolata*) were also in bloom.



Later in the day Fred Townsend gave me copies of the panther photos that he took. I usually only put my own photos in these notes but his wonderful picture will be an exception.

3/6/14

Cooch has been left alone quite a bit lately and needed a day with the folks so Ann and I drove to the southeast part of the Everglades National Park on 3/4/14; through Homestead and Florida City. At the Anhinga trail both the cormorants and great blue herons were ventilating to rid themselves of excess heat. Their mouths were open and their throats vacillating. Relatively few birds were there, though, and one of the guides indicated that it was because the relatively wet winter has the birds somewhat dispersed. I did not see the great white heron or the eastern

kingbird that I was hoping to add to the trip list. In Flamingo, though, I saw my first crocodile. It was located right behind the marina store and it was HUGE (to borrow an emphasis from Fuccillo Kia). There were quite a few birds on a mound out in the gulf but they were too far out for close identification. Both white and brown pelicans were there, though, along with laughing gulls, cormorants and the usual mix of long-legged waders. Smaller shorebirds were not seen Although the board at the visitor's center indicated that they had been there earlier. I did get some photos of a nesting osprey with three young.

On 3/5/14, we went to Tigertail for another shelling adventure. We got there right before low tide and had the best beach access we had ever experienced. The shelling was better than our earlier trip but still not as good as our worst day last year. Ann's search image continues to be better than mine; she found a nice lace murex (*Chicoreus dilectus*) and several nice sand dollars while I found only one. While still not as abundant as last year, there were several groups of shorebirds on the gulf side of the lagoon. Western sandpipers were there and I added a short-billed dowitcher as well as a piping plover to the year's list. I originally thought the plover was a snowy plover but photos taken clearly show the bright yellow-orange legs typical of the piping. I also saw three roseate spoonbills in the lagoon; the first time I remember seeing them there.

This morning, I drove the Turner River / Birdon route. Water levels were high there as everywhere this year. I saw most of the typical birds for the area but also saw one of the empidonax flycatchers. Unfortunately, the bird never vocalized but, looking, at the illustrations in Sibley (2003), it most resembled the willow flycatcher. The eye-ring was virtually nonexistent and the bird had dusky sides and a very slight yellowish tint to its belly. Although Sibley indicates that this bird is rare in this area and id's without vocalizations are not suggested, I recorded it as this species with a cautionary note.

Nothing new was seen among the flowering plants. Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*), Small's flax (*Linum carteri*) and bluehearts (*Buchnera Americana*) were seen in bloom along with a goldenrod previously id'd as the wand goldenrod (*Solidago stricta*). These plants were about one foot tall with a single stalk of flower heads. There was a basal whorl of spatulate leaves and cauline leaves that were ascending and closely appressed to the stem.

3/7/14

My disappointment at not finding a great white heron at the Anhinga Trail the other day was trumped today by finding two of them. I had a pretty good morning at TenK by listing 34 species. One of these was a red-breasted merganser; not only a trip mark but also a site mark for TenK. Another was, of course, the great white heron, not a separate species but, at least, a subspecies. This bird was right along the paved part of the walk between the parking lot and the observation tower. This is right about the place I had seen one in previous years — could be the same bird. Later in the morning Ann and I drove to the Briggs Nature Center and walked the boardwalk; failing in my attempt to find my annual eastern towhee. Then we drove to the end of Shell Island Road and walked the Rookery Bay trail. At the end of the trail we saw a second great white heron out in the mangroves. We also walked to where there were roped off areas for gopher turtles. We didn't see any there but as we were leaving along Shell Island Road, we saw a gopher turtle by the side of the road.



3/13/14

Over the last several days I've gone to several areas without any significant additions to my Florida natural history experiences. I visited the Fakahatchee Strand on several of those days. On 3/8/14 I went to the Big Cypress Bend boardwalk in the morning. It was quite a contrast from the last time I was there. Hardly any birds and nothing else. Dogwood was in bloom as was buttonbush but there was little else worthy of note. Then on 3/11/14 I drove down Janes Scenic Drive for a short distance. It appears that several of the trams that were not easily accessible in the past are now somewhat cleared. One of these was about 2.6 miles from the park office; possibly this is gate 2. I hiked a short distance along this tram but found little of interest. I did take special note of several ferns along the walk, though, and am reasonably confident that I found two of the *Nephrolepis* species listed for the park: the giants sword fern (*N. biserrata*) and wild sword fern (*N. exaltata*). I also thought I had found the tuberous sword fern (*N. cordifolium*). Although this species is found in the [Simplified Key to Some Common, Unique, and Exotic Florida Ferns](#), this species is not listed for the park.

I also examined one of the marsh ferns growing along the road near the entrance of the tram. This fern had soft, somewhat yellow-green fronds which were very hairy on both surfaces; perhaps more so on the bottom. The pinnules were deeply divided; 3/4 of the way to the rachis. Bottom veins of adjacent pinnules met at the cleft between them and both the petiole and rachis were green and hairy. According to



Nelson (2000); p.159 [1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11 — *T. kunthii*]. With Wunderlin & Nelson (2000) [1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, — *T. kunthii*]. The alternatives “3” was somewhat uncertain with this key. My modified simplified key also is consistent with this id but the key is not definitive. On the way out of the park I saw the pine-pink (*Bletia purpurea*) in bloom and got nice pix.

I also went to Janes Scenic Drive today. Cooch and I drove the full length of road to the Picayune Strand but saw little activity. I have met several people now who indicate that they are seeing panthers along this road and along Tram 12 but I've had no luck so far. One woman said she has had eight panther sightings in the last two weeks. Another guy said he saw a mother with three young. I just don't seem to be in the right places at the right times.

On 3/10/14, Ann and I went to Shark Valley. I spent the usual amount of time taking photos of big wading birds and got a few nice ones; especially of an anhinga flipping and swallowing a fish. I picked up a couple of apple snail shells along the drive and Ann actually saw a limpkin eating one of the ones I later collected. She tried to get my attention so I could get a photo but the bird had moved on by the time I got there. A Large soft shelled turtle was seen in the channel and I also found a horrible thistle in bloom along the shore. There were huge wasps with large yellow spots on the flowers. Later, I used the internet to possibly identify it as the female *Campsomeris quadrimaculata* of the family Scoliidae. I also saw a lot of water spangles, *Salvinia minima*, in the water. I've seen this fern on several occasions but never added it to the database — done.

Tigertail Beach was again a bust on 3/12/14. I've talked to several folks now, including the Townsends and the Bernenger group and they all indicate disappointing birding there this year. I still need to find a snowy plover and a red knot for this year's list.

Today, Ann and I went to the Marco Island Shell Club's shell show. I noticed that they had bags of apple snail shells for sale and asked if they were the native species. The woman at the table was not sure of the differences and referred me to one of the judges, a Dr. Lee from Jacksonville. He indicated that all of the shells for sale were on the invasive species referred to as the channel snail. He also said that the native snails never got as big as these and showed me the deep groove typical of this species. Apparently then, those that I've collected to date are invasives. When I told Dr. Lee that Ann had seen a limpkin eating one of them, he said that both the limpkin and the snail kite have adapted to eating the invasive species.

3/15/14

Yesterday (3/14/14) I walked tram 12 of the Fakahatchee Strand all the way to the Fakahatchee Hilton. WOW! What a neat camp site for observing wildlife. I wasn't fortunate enough to see a panther, which was the target for the day. I did collect and examine some fern specimen, though and, since then, have spent quite a bit of time studying Nelson (2000) and Wunderlin & Hansen (2000) to learn to identify some of these Florida ferns; especially those of the genera *Nephrolepis* and *Thelypteris*. In the process I noticed that I never entered the true marsh fern (*Thelypteris palustris*) into the plant database. I remember seeing this at Starkey's on the return trip last year and have now entered it to the list. I have not yet found it locally, though.

I also noticed that one of the very small shells picked up at White Horse Key on 3/1/14 is actually new to our shell list. According to Witherington & Witherington (2009) it is a variable dwarf olive (*Olivella mutica*). The collected specimen is only 1/2" long but, according to this reference, adults are only 5/8". The shell was added to the list.

3/25/14

The Mudlaff's visited with us from March 16th to the 23rd. While they were here the Foti's also joined us for a couple of nights. Needless to say, serious B&B was suspended for a while. While walking Cooch one morning, though, I heard a brown thrasher at POI on 2/17/14. This is the second species added to the list of condo birds this year bringing the total to 46. That evening (near dusk) we took a walk along the marsh trail and saw huge numbers of white ibises roosting in the mangroves along the trail. The entire group went to Shark Valley on 3/21/14 and I recorded more or less the usual list of birds for that area. One of the guides showed us the difference between the native and channel species of apple snails and I realized that the difference is not easily recognized. We also got a rude visit by a large cockroach which surprised Rosemary Foti when she found it on the floor of the dining area. Jerry saw it again the next evening and Ann set a trap with baking soda in the furnace area (where it seemed to be hanging out). The next morning we saw it, obviously compromised) and easily got rid of it. None have been seen since although we have set a sticky trap.

The Foti's had been gone for a couple of days when we said goodbye after breakfast to the Mudlaff's on the 23rd. That evening, while I was comparing birding notes with Fred Townsend, a pair of mottled ducks landed on the retention ponds by the condo; adding another condo bird to the list. The next morning (2/24/15) I resumed my birding activity at the Briggs Nature Center boardwalk looking for my towhee, as usual. This time I was successful. Not only did I add that bird to the year's trip list but I also added the common ground dove, bringing the total to 114.

I also spent some time looking at a few of the plants along the boardwalk. One of the volunteers confirmed that I had been seeing

both species of the leather ferns and pointed out the blooming potato tree which I had noticed. Not seeing the fruit, there is still a question of whether it is the *S. donianum* or *Solanum erianthum* but it does not appear hairy enough for the later. I also saw the balsam pear (*Momordica charantia*) in bloom but did not recognize it immediately. I noted its five light yellow petals with five pointed sepals between them. The plant had very divided leaves and a very hairy trailing stem. Later I recalled that this plant had previously been recognized as being in the Cucurbitaceae family had been seen last year at Rookery Bird Swamp. The id was confirmed with Hammer (2002). Another vine, possibly one in the Smilax group was seen in bloom. As I left the boardwalk I studied the signage regarding scrub oaks and tried to recognize proximate oaks in the area.



3/30/14

The morning of 3/28/14 was spent at TenK's marsh trail. I added the black-necked stilt to the trip list. I thought I had seen them on the previous day along Hy41 going to Everglades City but didn't stop to confirm the id. I also got some fairly decent photos of a glossy ibis. The blue color showed it to be approaching its breeding time. As I was leaving the trail, at the observation deck, I noticed a white rumped hawk flying low along the mangroves to the west. The white rump suggested either the snail kite or the northern harrier. As I watched the bird, I noticed that the top of the wings had slightly dark tips and there appeared to be somewhat reddish underparts. Eventually though, the long tail was considered decisive and the bird was recorded as a northern harrier.

On 3/29/14 I drove to the end of Shell Island Road in the Rookery Bay. I hiked to the end of the trail without seeing much. Then I went along the Catclaw trail for a short distance. While on the trail I saw a bush with interesting spiny seed pods which was later id'd with Taylor & Bell (1982) as the yellow nicker (*Caesalpinia bonduc*). Then, in the parking area, I noticed a yellow flowering plant immediately recognized as one of the legumes. The plant had alternate compound leaves with varying numbers of pinnate leaflets (my photos show 24-30). The flowers were on long stalks between leaves and had five yellow petals; the bottom one being somewhat larger than the others. There were reddish marking at the base of the petals. The stem reddish-brown. Long seed pods with



about 20 locules were present. Taylor (1992) was used to tentatively id the plant as the partridge-pea (*Chamaecrista fasciculata*). I confirmed the id by comparing the three species of *Chamaecrista* shown for Collier County on the AFP. This plant is new for the plant list although one of the species (*C. nicticans*) had been seen before.

On the way

back to the condo I stopped at Tomato Road to see if the great white heron seen there last year was possibly hanging out there again. Not so. The area's plants seemed mostly represented by pioneer and alien species. Most of the ditch near Hy41 was nearly dry and totally occupied by water hyacinth and water lettuce. Morning glory (probably *Ipomoea indica*) was abundant and an apparent prickly poppy (*Argemone Mexicana*) was seen along the disturbed area. Another legume was also seen in bloom. This plant had yellow flowers and three-parted compound leaves. The middle leaflet of the three had a significantly longer stalk than the other two. This could be the hairy pod cowpea (*Vigna luteola*) but the id needs to be confirmed. Huge castor bean plants (*Ricinus communis*) with fruit were also common along both sides of the road.



Yesterday, Fred Townsend reported that he had seen a yellow-crowned night heron while on the electric boat trip at the Conservancy of Southwest Florida. Today (3/30/14) I got a feeling for how the rich guys watch birds. Ann and I went to the Conservancy and paid our \$13 each for admission fee. Then we went to the boat tour area and asked if the heron was still being seen. The guide indicated that it had been seen on her last tour so we hopped into the boat and were taken to the area. The bird, along with its nest, was found exactly where Fred had reported. Check number 116! It apparently is nesting in the area but the nest we saw seemed very small and weak. Few other birds were seen on the trip. We then walked along both of the site's trails and it was nice to see several of the native plants I'd with signs.

left of the condo. After about ten minutes I heard the sound again but was not able to see what caused it. Later, when we were leaving for the Conservancy, Mil (one of the neighbors) asked if we had seen the excitement this morning. She reported that one of the alligators had killed another. When we got home, in the afternoon, the activity was still going on. I got several photos of the fight. We couldn't be sure if one of the gators was alive and still putting up a fight or if it was simply being chewed up by the bigger one. It is worth noting that the pair of mottled ducks recorded earlier is being seen regularly around the condo's retention ponds.

3/31/14

Ann and I decided to take advantage of the low tide this morning and do some serious birding and shelling at Tigertail. Our shelling is a bit more selective than it was last year but I did find a small Florida horse conch (*Triplofusus giganteus*) to add to our list of collected shells. Both of us found a couple of sand dollars: Ann's pretty good size. Once again there were no shorebirds on the near side of the lagoon. I did find quite a few after we crossed the lagoon, though. With the exception of the snowy plover and the red knot, most of the common shorebirds have been seen now. I also had a black skimmer fly bye as I was watching the shorebirds. I marked a ring-billed gull for the day. I thought, perhaps, I had a glaucous or Thayer's gull but a close comparison of my photos with the pictures in Sibley (2000) suggested an immature ring-billed. I was especially glad to see my first white morph of the reddish egret; actually, both morphs were present. The white one came pretty close for photos. Comparing these to the pictures in Sibley (2000) suggests that the bird may be in its second year.



Later, back at the condo, the alligator drama from yesterday continued. Two large gators were in the pond to the right of the lanai. One was along the far shoreline and had cradled a smaller gator it had apparently killed. Unfortunately, I got too close in an effort to get pictures and scared the gator into the water. According to the neighbors, this large gator has now killed two others.

4/2/14

Yesterday (4/1/14) I went to Bird Rookery Swamp with Ann and Cooch. One woman that I met there indicated that she see's both waterthrushes along the path. Also, she said that she often sees short-tailed hawks which, according to her, nest in the area. I didn't see any of these birds but I did record a few of the common birds for the trip. As I was leaving there was a doe along with a faun. I photo'd the couple and then I was approached by a guy (Rick) who indicated that he had taken pictures of me while I was



taking pictures of the deer. He took my email address and said he would email them to me. Thus far I've not heard from him. Today I went to Tigertail and, again, there were no shorebirds on the near side of the lagoon. The contrast from last year is amazing. I spent a little time taking photos of the fiddler crabs but didn't record bird sightings for the day.

4/6/14

On 4/3/14 I went back to Bird Rookery Swamp and failed to see any of the target birds (both waterthrushes and the short-tailed hawk). The common birds that were seen were recorded in Birder's Diary, as usual. Several interesting plants were seen in bloom: including the blue iris (probably *Iris hexagona*), four-leaf vetch (*Vicia acutifolia*), Moon flower (*Ipomoea alba*), one of the Bladderworts (*Utricularia sp.*) and a primrose-willow (*Ludwigia sp.*). One plant of the Apiaceae was photographed and later id'd as the mock-bishop's weed (*Ptilimnium capillaceum*). This plant was added to the plant database. Another plant was immediately recognized as a likely species of *Cyperus*; probably *Cyperus alternifolius* according to Dressler et al. According to Wunderlin & Hansen (2003), this name is misapplied to *C. involuocratis*. I'm sure that I've seen this plant several times and it was added to the database as an excluded plant until the id can be confirmed by further study.

Several of the composites were also seen in bloom. One of these was a species of *Pluchia* (*Pluchea rosea*). A yellow composite, probably butterweed (*Packera glabella*) and one of the sow thistles (*Sonchus asper*) were also in bloom.

Walking along the drive toward the boardwalk I noticed what appeared like a yellow iris in bloom. I figured that it was probably a domestic discard. Later though, when looking through one of the plant books, I wondered if I may have missed an opportunity to list a golden canna (*Canna flaccida*). If I go back to the area I will check for this plant.

Ann called me out to the lanai shortly after 8PM on the evening of 4/2/14 to listen to a strange bird sound. On that night, I was hearing a three note phrase that reminded me of the “drink your tea” of the towhee but without the trill at the end. I did think of both the whip-poor-will and chuck-will’s-widow and listened to the songs of these birds on the iPod app on birds from National Geographic but I wasn’t hearing enough to confidently id the call. The next night, though, Ann and I both heard the complete call. After comparing it to the calls of both the whip-poor-will and chuck-will’s-widow we were both convinced that we were hearing the chuck-will’s-widow. The question then was whether or not to accept a life mark from only a sound? Yes, I did. The next question was, what about the Whip-poor-will that Ann heard from the condo two years ago (2/23/12). Was that possibly a chuck-will’s widow as well. I was convinced at that time that it was a whip-poor-will, so the record stands. The chuck-will’s-widow was again heard shortly after 8PM on 4/4/14 but could not be heard on the evening of 4/5/14. It was heard again tonight, though, at about 8:15PM.

I spent Friday morning (4/4/14) hiking the marsh trail at TenK. Twenty-nine species were recorded with nothing out of the ordinary. I was able to id a snook in the water at one of the culverts though. I photographed a few plants at the end of the trail. Included were the yellowtops (*Flaveria linearis*) and the rosegentians, the marsh-pink (*Sabatia stellaris*). Pine-pink (*Bleta purpurea*), water pimpernel (*Samolus ebracteatus*) and horrible thistle (*Cirsium horridulum*) were also in bloom.

Along the trail I found a small shrub in bloom. It had small flowers with five white petals. The leaves were opposite, entire, egg-shaped and about 1 inch long. Some of the branches ended with a thorn off to the side but there didn’t seem to be thorns along the branches. The twigs were grey. I was unable to id the plant with any certainty. Photos in Nelson (1996) and Taylor (2013) suggest the white idigoberry (*Randia aculeata*) and this plant is listed by the AFP for Collier County. A review of my notes for 2013 suggests that I’ve id’d this as the indigoberry before (see notes of 3/18/13).

In the afternoon, Al Tanner, the next door neighbor, took Ann and me for a boat tour of some of the key islands and into Everglades City. Birding was difficult from the boat but I thought I might have seen loons along the way. I did not mark them since I was uncertain. We also saw several dolphins on the return trip.

4/11/14

Anticipating the arrival of the Kaczmarek’s sometime in the afternoon of 4/7/14, I spent the morning of that day visiting a few of the more distant natural areas. I first went to the Loop Road and found the birding there somewhat disappointing. I’m beginning to think that not only the human snowbirds are leaving for the north but many of the migrant birds have also gone home. While there I examined some of the large ferns that I’ve been calling bracken ferns (*Pteridium aquilinum*) and began to wonder if I might be confusing these with the giant bracken or Giant brake fern (*Pteris tripartite*). According to Nelson (2000), the former species is more typical of upland areas whereas the latter is found in the wetter areas. I need to examine these ferns more carefully.

On the way back from the Loop Road I stopped at Gator Hook and photo’d some of the plants that were in bloom at the time. Among the plants in bloom were the pitted stripeeed (*Piriqueta caroliniana*), wild petunia, Everglades squarestem (*Melanthera parvifolia*), beggarticks (*Bidens alba*), starrush whitetop (*Rhynchospora colorata*), Showy milkwort (*Polygala grandiflora*), marsh flea-bane (*Pluchea rosea*) and sleepy morning (*Waltheria indica*). With regard to the wild petunia, I have in the past id’d the plants of this location as *Ruellia caroliniensis*. Hammer (2000) shows two *Ruellia* species (*R. succulenta* and *R. tweediana*, the former of which it says is synonymous with *R. caroliniensis*). According to the AFT, though, there are four species of *Ruellia* in Collier County and *R. succulenta* and *R. caroliniensis* are both listed



as separate species. Examining the photos of these four species suggests that *R. caroliniensis* is probably the correct id. It is possible that I was also seeing two species of *Rhynchospora* at this location.

Examining the ferns at Gator Hook finally revealed a true marsh fern (*Thelypteris palustris*) with its forked veins. I also collected a sample frond of one of the sword ferns and later observed the scales of the petiole. These were clearly two-toned (dark in the middle with lighter borders) identifying them as the Asian sword fern (*Nephrolepis multiflora*). This species had not been id’d in the

past and was now added to the plant list.

I then went on to Kirby-Storter. I was hoping to add the eastern meadowlark as the 119 bird species for the year but I didn't see or hear one. I then walked along the path leading west from the parking lot. The small pine island that I had visited two years ago had



succeeded quite a bit and several of the anticipated plant species were not there. I did add Small's flax (*Linum carteri*), Longleaf milkweed (*Asclepias logifolia*) and horrible thistle (*Cirsium horridulus*) to the morning's list of plants in bloom. Also, the Carolina scalystem (*Elytraria caroliniensis*) was in bloom. It had a basal whorl of narrow leaves with scale-like leaves on the stem. The enlarged flower head had one flower in bloom; seeming to bloom from the bottom up. Each flower had 5 petals forming a long tube which was divided and spread distally. The showy milkwort, beggarticks and starrush whitetop were also seen at this location.

Because of the Kaczmarek visit, most of the rest of the week was without serious B&B. I did get an email from the fellow (Rick) that I met at the Bird Rookery Swamp, though, and he sent some photos of me taking photos of deer (see notes of 4/1/14); another photographic entry into these notes that is not my photography.

4/12/14

This was a morning for "Fun With Ferns" in honor of Jack Bernenger who left for home recently. I went to Tram 11 of the Fakahatchee Strand and hiked in for a short distance, examining many of the ferns along the way. This was to be "fun" not "work" so I didn't carry any references along but I did take notes on many of the ferns that I saw, especially those of the genera *Nephrolepis* and *Thelypteris*. Later, back at the condo, I used several references, especially Nelson (2000), to evaluate my notes. First, *Thelypteris*:

The first of the *Thelypteris* examined was rather small, light green plant with a mostly green rachis. The fronds were hairy on both surfaces and the veins of adjacent pinnules met at or shortly in the sinus. I believe this plant to be *T. kunthii*. The next of the plants in this genus was somewhat darker but still rather light green. Older portions of the rachis were reddish and the fronds were again hairy on both surfaces as was the rachis. The veins of adjacent pinnules met below the sinus and ran together for some distance before getting to the sinus, forming three areolae. Some specimens of this plant had sori which were in more or less 6 pairs midway along the vein of the pinnules. This was determined to be *T. dentata*. The third *Thelypteris* was clearly *T. palustris*, with the veins of adjacent pinnules clearly branching and reaching the sinus somewhat above its bottom. I photographed a young plant of this species to show how that its basal pinnules developed and expanded first. This may be true of other members of the genus but I hadn't noticed it before. The last of this series was one I had earlier id'd as the hottentot fern, *T. interrupta*. It tended to be rougher with darker, somewhat glossy fronds. The veins of adjacent pinnules met and ran together to the sinus for more than a millimeter. The stem was light brown and the pinnae seemed more spaced out than in the others. If these id's are connect, then the only species of *Thelypteris* listed on the plant list for the Fakahatchee Strand that I



have not seen are *T. hispidula* and *T. grandis*.

I was not as certain with the id's of *Nephrolepis*, though. Here I used the IFAS bulletin SSAGR22. I clearly did not see the Asian sword fern id'd earlier in these notes. The larger specimens of the giant sword fern, *Nephrolepis biserrata*, was obvious by their size and the somewhat inconsistent double toothing of the pinnae. One of the smaller sword ferns was about 18 inches tall with fronds about 1&1/2" wide, tapering somewhat at both ends. The scales of the petiole were sparse, hair-like and very light in color. The teeth of the pinnae did not seem to be doubled as in the giant sword fern and the rachis was brown. This was most likely the wild Boston fern, *Nephrolepis exaltata*, but I could not be certain. Other plants examined could have been the same species at different stages of development.

Another fern was a very low growing fern reaching about 5-6" in height. It was a delicate plant, very soft green in color. It appeared to be growing from rhizomes along the edge of the path. An uprooted plant had four fronds with petioles extending for about half their length. The petiole was light green and hairy as was the rachis extending into the blade. The fronds were hairy on both surfaces and were pinnate with pinnules lobed to pinnatifid. The plant was photo'd but not id'd at this time. Other ferns noted along the way were the shoestring fern, resurrection fern, strap fern, Chinese brake fern and swamp fern.

A few other plants along the path were also examined. One of these was a small white-flowering plant immediately bringing to mind the small flowers of the bedstraw family. The plant was about 18" tall with very small flowers in whorls of about 12 in the leaf axils. Only a few of the flowers in each inflorescence were blooming and these had four white petals which, when magnified, were seen to have slightly pinkish tips. Each flower had 4 petals, four stamens and a single pistil. The stems had rows of short hairs and the leaves were opposite, the pairs being widely spaced along the stem. The leaves were sessile and narrowed at both ends. They measured about 1" x 3/8". A photo in Taylor (1992) suggests the plant to be *Spermacoce assurgens* of the madder family (Rubiaceae). According to the AFP, the correct name for this species is *Spermacoce remota* and it was added to the list as such.

One of the grasses that has continuously attracted my attention was also finally examined. The plant was about a foot or so high with widely spaced leaves along a reddish stem. The leaves were about 4" long and about an inch or so wide and were widest near their base. The leaf tips were pointed. The base of the leaf surrounded the stem and formed a sheath for about an inch or so. The base of the leaf and the edge of the sheath were hairy. The inflorescence was terminal and consisted of several open whorls of round fruit. It reminded me of one of the panic grasses but I doubt if it is actually in that group.

A red-eyed vireo was heard along the path, bringing the trip list to 119.

4/13/14

This morning I was paging through Schmelz & Stacell (2009) and found a photo of woodland false buttonweed id'd yesterday at the Fakahatchee Strand. The photo clearly showed the pink petal edges I had described. The other references didn't refer to them. I've been rather cowardly about id'ing the false buttonweeds. One of these days I'll have to get serious about them. There seems to be several species in the area.



Then we went to the market in Naples and I purchased several prints by Diana Calleja. On the way back from the market Ann and I stopped at Serenity walk Park. I was hoping to see the brown-headed nuthatch to get the trip list to 120 but it was pretty quiet, the birds probably having gone north. I did see a few birds, though, including a pair of bluebirds. Some of the lower areas also had some interesting wetland plants. It might even be a good place to learn some of the sedges and rushes. I found a large sedge there that I later determined to possibly be the swamp flatsedge (*Cyperus ligularis*) by viewing all of the *Cyperus* species in Collier County with the AFP. I added this to the plant list but should confirm it in the future. I did take several photos of the plant. One of the ferns along the trail turned out to be a Virginia chain fern (*Woodwardia virginica*). This fern had been pointed out to me last year by Jack Bernenger at the north section of Collier-Seminole

Park and has also been seen at Sabel Palm. This and other plants seen were updated for this location in the database.

One of the plants that I marked was the cut-leaved evening primrose (*Oenothera laciniata*). I decided upon this id after looking at some terrible photos that took with my point and shoot but I think the id is correct. Adding to the confusion is that the AFP indicates that this species is not vouchered for Collier County.

4/14/14



Ann and I had lunch plans with Suzanne today so I took a short walk along the marsh trail of TenK. Finally, the area was showing definite signs of drying out with a lot of mud exposed in various areas. The morning was pretty foggy and bird photography almost impossible. The birds were not numerous but I did manage to record 19 species including several of the roseate spoonbills.

I also noticed several bushes that I've id'd in the past but never seen in bloom. One of these was the Brazilian pepper and another possibly the myrsine. The false-Willow or saltbush (*Baccharis angustifolia*) and red mangrove were also in bloom.

While I was walking along the trail I noticed a white-flowering woody vine growing on one of the mangroves. I had previously id'd the wild alamanda in the

area and thought, at first, that this was probably a sport of that plant. The plant had opposite, entire leaves with pinnate veins. These leaves measured about 3&1/2 x 1&1/2 inches. The flowers were large and trumpet-like, measuring about 1&1/2 inches across. The corolla tube was long but the sepals were very short and pointed. Later, as I looked in Nelson (1996), I id'd the plant as the mangrove rubber vine (*Rhabdadenia biflora*) of the family Apocynaceae; the same family as the alamanda.. The yellow centers of the flower were evident in the photos that I took.

I examined one of the marsh ferns growing along the trail as I went back to the parking area. The veins of adjacent pinnules of this fern met and travelled together for a short distance to the sinus between the pinnules. I thought I was making further progress with this group and had finally located a specimen of the *T. hispida*. Later, though, I noticed that the AFP shows 11 species of Thelypteris for Collier County. It appears that I have a long way to go before I get this group confidently id'd. *T. hispida*, though, was at least temporarily added to the plant list.

Speaking of ferns, later in the day Ann and I took Suzanne to see Clyde Butcher's studio. I walked along a short path in the back of the building and found that it was a virtual display of Florida ferns. Most of the ferns that I know and several others were there.

4/16/14:

We had plans to meet Shirley Rodman for lunch yesterday so the morning outing had to be short. Consequently, I decided to go to the Big Cypress Boardwalk. Surely I could find one warbler to bring the list to 120. I even met a guy there who was there because he had read reports online that several warblers were being seen at that location. I did not see one species of warbler, though, and the birding, in general, was pretty bleak. Two alligators at the end of the boardwalk, however, were pretty active and made the morning especially worthwhile. They were possibly a pair (one distinctly larger than the other) and they seemed to be feeding by rolling into the bottom mud, taking in much of it and then, possibly, sifting it through their teeth for fish or whatever. The smaller of the two actually dove; its (her) head and upper body actually coming out of the water. In spite of the fact that the light was low and the shutter speeds slow, I did manage to get a few fairly decent action shots. I also practiced a bit with the video mode of my 7100 and took a few short clips of the action.



OK! If I couldn't get a warbler to cooperate for #120 (not that the count is important), perhaps a shorebird of some type or a least tern. So, with the tide low, Ann and I set out for Tigertail this morning. Finally, success!! The least tern was #120 and the Forster's

tern #121. There were really a lot of least terns. A large area had been roped off for their breeding. I only saw one Forster's tern but got a pretty good look as it flew by. Ann has really been lucky lately. She won in Bingo a couple of weeks ago, won over \$200 at the Seminole casino in Immokalee last week and hit the jackpot with sand dollars today. She found 10 of them today; most of them in one spot. I found one! Nothing special in other shells.

4/17/14

I took the "A" hiking loop at Sabal Palm this morning for what was primarily to be a plant walk. I did pay attention to the birds, though, and even tried to attract a brown-headed nuthatch with its song played through my iPod. That was unsuccessful, though. I met a group of birders shortly along the path and they reported that they had seen a red-cockaded woodpecker along the trail from the parking area to the beginning of the "A" loop. Later, when I was leaving for the morning, I walked slowly and watchfully in that area but no such bird was seen or heard. Only a few birds were recorded for the morning.

Plants were another matter, though; many being seen and a lot of them in bloom. A list of those seen was used to update their presence at that location in the database. Several, though, are worthy of special mention:

Two species of St. Johns-wort were examined. One of them was an upright bush with grey bark and needle-like leaves about 1/2" long. The bark appeared to be peeling slightly. The flowers had five yellow petals with rusty centers. The 1/2" leaves places this right at the distinguishing point (12mm) noted previously between *Hypericum brachyphyllum* and *Hypericum fasciculatum*. The taxonomy of this species will remain unchanged at this time. The flowers of the second plant had four petals. It had small opposite leaves measuring about 5/16 x 1/4 inches. This was likely the four-petal St. Johns-wort (*Hypericum tetrapetalum*) id'd at this location before.



Two possible species of yellow-eyed grass were also examined. The scale-like base of the first plant measured 3/8" x 3/13". The flower was about 5/8" across. The leaves of the basal rosette were about 10" long with the flower stalk extending well beyond to about 24". The shorter of the two plants was only about a foot tall and its flower base was about as long as wide (3/16"). These plants could be *Xyris smallianii* and *Xyris elliottii* respectively. That would be consistent with the plants id'd by Jack Berninger at Gator Hole (see notes for 2/28/14).



A tall, unbranched plant measuring 2&1/2—3' was also noted. This plant had sickle-shaped, opposite leaves measuring abt 3" x 3/16". It bore opposite flower heads on 1" petioles. The flower heads themselves were semi-circular. A close up of the photo taken suggests that the flower heads bloom from the middle and then at the edges. The spent flowers leave 5 parted calyx tubes behind. The small flowers are not clear in the photo but seem to be bilateral with purple speckling on the upper petals. This could be the musky mint (*Hyptis alata*). This plant has been id'd at this site before.

A tall thistle, not suggesting *Cirsium horridulus* was seen at several locations along the path. In fact, checking the photos in Hammer (2002) suggested neither that or the Nuttalls thistle (*Cirsium nuttallii*). The plant was 3-4' tall with very pretty pinkish flowers. The bracts which subtended the flower heads were about as long as the flower head itself but did not extend beyond the base of the flower. Most of the leaves were cauline. They were alternate and very prickly. The stem was not prickly and somewhat reddish. There are only two species of *Cirsium* shown by the AFP for Collier County, though, and using the key in Wunderlin & Hansen (2003) quickly id's the plant as *Cirsium horridulum* because of its "secondary involucre of spinescent bracts".

I continue to have uncertainties about the species of *Pluchea* that I see on my morning walks. One seen on this trail had reddish-maroon flower heads and alternate, distinctly toothed leaves that were hairy but not wooly. This was probably, again, the salt marsh fleabane (*Pluchea odorata*).

I examined only one plant of the Eriocaulaceae group in spite of the fact that I had planned on studying this group more

carefully. The basal leaves of this plant measured only 1" long while the stalks were abt a foot tall. The stalks were green, somewhat hairy and showed no tendency to be striped. The flower heads were abt 1/4" in diameter and only abt 1/8" high. The heads were creamy-brown with bracts abt 1mm wide. The heads were soft but regained their shaped when compressed.

A fleabane, possibly of the genus *Erigeron* was studied too. The plant was abt 18" tall with its larger leaves in a basal whorl and cauline leaves that diminished toward the plant's top. The stem and leaves were noticeably hairy. The flower head was 3/8" in diameter with many ligules that were only 1/8" long. The disk was bright yellow. The basal leaves did not suggest *E. quercifolius* to me but they may have still been developing. Only this species and *E. vernus* are listed for Collier County by the AFP and, according to its web site, this is clearly not *E. vernus*.

A plant id'd as Virginia buttonweed (*Diodea virginiana*) was seen with it's crawling, reddish stems with opposite leaves widest in the middle. The leaves measured 1&1/2" x 3/8" and the white flowers each had four pointed petals.



Some of this buttonweed was growing in a mat formed by a small, crawling plant with somewhat fleshy leaves and stems. The leaves measured 5/8" x 3/8" and were widest near the tip. It had small, white flowers with five petals. The petals easily detached from the flower as a tube with stamens attached. These were apparently of two sizes; two longer than the others. This could be the water hyssop (*Bacopa monnieri*) of Taylor (1992). Photos on the web site for the AFP do seem to confirm this and it is listed for Collier County. It was added to the plant database as such.



Another plant, apparently in the madder family, had extremely small flowers with five petals. The stem was again reddish and the leaves opposite, measuring 1&1/4" x 1/2". *Spermacoce assurgens* in Taylor (1992) but the petal number is wrong and the leaves might have been a bit wider. Taylor (1992) also suggests possibly one of the miterworts but I would have to examine the plant again to be sure.

Finally, I also saw one of the meadowbeauties. This was a beauty, indeed. Its leaves were opposite, measuring 5/8" x 3/16". Axillary buds in the leaf axils were active forming young leaves in the axils as well. The leaf edges and the stem were covered with long bristles. Each flower had one pistil below its drooping stamens. This was probably the pale meadowbeauty (*Rhexia mariana*).

Some of the graminoids were examined and photographed as well; two to be exact will be possibly id'd in the future:

One had a basal whorl of leaves with cauline leaves diminishing toward the top of the plant. The stalk of the plant was unbranched, solid and terminated with eight (or so) round flower heads. This may have been one of the rushes.

The other was a waist-high (2&1/2' x 3') sedge with a distinctly triangular stem. The leaves, shorter than the culm, were in a whorl.

Among the ferns seen were the swamp fern, bracken fern, Virginia chain fern and the true marsh fern. I noticed, again, that in the true marsh fern (*Thelypteris palustris*), the basal pinnules develop a bit faster than the more distal ones. This may be a good way to

id the plant quickly.

4/19/14

Yesterday (4/18/14) I dropped Ann off at Marco's South Beach and went on to Tigertail. I didn't want to walk across the lagoon and there were no birds to see on the near side. So, I went on to the Collier avenue bridge where I saw spotted sandpipers last year. I



didn't have any luck there either. Actually it might not be necessary to go out to the natural areas to see the wildlife. Things around the condo have been pretty entertaining lately. Yesterday, in the afternoon, we had more gator fights. You'd think these small gators would get out of our ponds but they keep becoming prey for the big guy (or is it guys). Beside the gator action, Ann saw a yellow rat snake outside the condo on 4/17/14 and I found it again yesterday afternoon when I was looking at the gators. This guy was about a yard or so long and looked more like the North Florida morph than the South Florida morph according to the photos in Bartlett & Bartlett (2003) although the text of this reference suggests that the stripe pattern varies among individuals. Although not recorded thoroughly, the bird activity has also been interesting. Ospreys are nesting on top of the motel and we commonly see them (or others) taking fish from the retention ponds and Ann sees a couple of eagles on one of the neighbor's roof when she walks Cooch in the mornings. Two, sometimes three, mottled ducks have been seen regularly as has an occasional swallow-tailed kite. Common ground doves have been seen a few times and long-legged waders, including great blue herons, great egrets, little blue herons and a tricolored heron, are common. We haven't heard the Chuck Will's-widow now for a couple of weeks but a loggerhead shrike is seen now and then. Maybe I'll just do my B&B from the condo; well, at least the birding part of it.



4/28/14

The grandkids have been here for the last week and Matt joined us on Friday (4/25/14). Needless to say serious birding was put on hold for most of that time but a couple of interesting things were noted. We all went to Marco's South Beach on Saturday (4/26/14) and I added a gull-billed tern to the trip list. This bird seemed quite a bit lighter color than the other gulls that were seen and had a totally black, somewhat thick, bill. I also noticed a slight black coloration of the forward wing edge. The next day, at Tigertail, we saw several tern species (royal, least, Forster's) as well as a magnificent frigate bird, or, as Matt called it, "a magnificent frickin' bird". I took the kids to the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk on 4/24/14. We didn't see very many birds but the lubber grasshoppers were in full force and one alligator was active at the end of the boardwalk. The kids also got to see quite a few burrowing owls in Marco and a gopher turtle on Hy 92 on the way back to the condo.

As we were returning from South Beach on Saturday I thought I saw a great white heron in the channel along Tomato Road. Matt and I went back to that area the next morning and did not see the bird along the channel. Coming back to the condo, though, we saw it, or another, in the flooded area south on Hy41 and east of Collier Seminole Park. We got a pretty good look at the bird with the binoculars before it spooked and flew away. We also took a short walk along the marsh trail at TenK. There still seemed to be quite a bit of water along the trail, certainly more than last year at this time. Few birds were seen, though, and the deer flies were nearly unbearable. We didn't walk very far before we decided to go back to the condo.

4/29/14

I drove to Mickey Dee's this morning to buy several of the Audubon iTouch apps that were on sale. Then I went to Shell Island Road and hiked the Briggs Boardwalk. A woman that I met there reported that she had seen red knots from the observation tower so I went there to check it out. I must admit that the shorebirding had been so poor this year that I had to convince myself that I was, indeed, seeing red knots but I did finally mark them for the trip. Relatively few other birds were seen but they were recorded in in BD.

5/4/14

After cleaning the condo and packing up, we left for an overnighter at Jim and Lisa Flanagan's on 4/30/14. On the way we stopped at the rest area south of the Sunshine bridge. Two plants attracted my attention there and I took a few photos to help with their later id. One of these appeared to be the puncture-vine (*Tribulus cistoides*) of Taylor (1992) and Hammer (2002). By the same references, the other plant appears to be wireweed (*Sida acuta*). Both plants were added to the plant list.



We left the Flanagan's on May 1st and spent the night in Locust grove. Then, on 5/2/14, we stopped at Patti's 1880 Settlement and the Land Between the Lakes on the way to Paducah. We drove through two of the northern areas, Moss Creek and Demumber's Bay Backcountry Area. There was construction going on at Demumber's Bay so we didn't spend much time there. At the Moss Creek area I noticed many red-flowered plants in bloom along the wooded hills. These immediately were suspected of being the scarlet lychnis and were later id'd as the fire-pink (*Sinene virginica*) with Chester & Ellis (2000). This was an especially nice area and Ann and I both thought it might be nice to come and explore it again on a later trip.

Later that evening (5/2/14), while I was walking with Cooch behind the hotel, I noticed an interesting white-flowering plant with obviously rectangular flower heads. The very small flowers had 5 petals with a slight

hint of purple. I remember seeing pictures of a wildflower with square flower heads in one of the Florida references but I have been unable to id the plant at this time.

We left for home on the morning of 5/3/14. Interestingly, we seemed to pass up the spring on the trip. When we passed through northern Florida, Georgia and parts of Tennessee and Kentucky, many of the trees were fully leafed out. As we drove through Illinois, however, it was apparent that the spring was still to arrive. Blooming spring beauties greeted us at the Post Oak rest station in Illinois but leaves on the trees were barely evident.

Summary

Each year's stay in Florida presents differences that make it hard to generalize about the experiences. Some folks say that the winter, here, was unusually wet this year while others indicate that this was more the norm and that previous years were unusually dry. In either event, the areas of southwest Florida that I frequent had a lot more standing water than in our previous experience and that seemed to have an effect on what I saw. Although I only missed last year's total species by seven birds, the birding experience was more different than the numbers indicate. The higher water levels in most areas seemed to disperse the birds more and large groups of white pelicans, roseate spoonbills and such were just not seen. TenK never quite dried up as it did last year. Shorebirds were really hard to find; not once were they found on the near side of the Tigertail lagoon. Also, compared to last year, we did little shelling and, when we did, few really neat shells were found. Although a yellow rat snake was added to the reptile list, no poisonous snakes were encountered. Mammal experiences belonged to Fred Townsend; I saw few, other than otters on one occasion and marsh rabbits fairly often. The alligator activity was probably the most noteworthy thing and I've got the photos to show it.