

1/20/23

We left for Florida on 1/10/23. There was a slight mist or fog, making the drive tiring on the eyes. Having moved to Waukesha last year, we expected a 30 min longer drive to Matt & Nicole's on the first day. But, we still made it to Mount Vernon on first tank of gas. On 1/11/23, while staying at Matt's, we visited Murfree Spring Wetlands, a reportedly popular birding area and photography area located at the corner of Maney and Broad streets in Murfreesboro. Although probably good during spring and fall migrations there was little to see at the time we were there.

We also visited Barfield Crescent Park. I took a very short walk along the cardinal trail and took a few photos of the landscape [photos 2023_01_11_001-13]. Needless to say, nothing was in bloom at the time. Anticipating a return to the area on the return trip from Florida, I bought a book on TN flowering plants (Wildflowers of Tennessee, the Ohio Valley and the Southern Appalachians edited by Dennis Horn and Tavia Cathcart (2018)). While at Matt's we noticed peculiar clumps of onions growing in his and several other yards. I hypothesized that the area was filled with soil from agricultural fields. After several overnights, we left Matt's onion fields and headed for the Celery Fields on 1/13/23.

After another overnight in Tifton, We finally entered Florida on January 14th. As we approached the welcoming center, I tried not to look for any birds, fearing that my first Florida birds marks for the trip might be a house sparrow, starling or turkey vulture. As we turned into the drive, I noticed some apparent ducks in the pond along the drive. They turned out to be hooded mergansers (a much more desirable first bird for the 2023 Florida trip). Starlings and house sparrow were also seen at the welcome center and snowy egret, cattle egret and turkey vulture were seen as we travelled on. With Kaczmareks back in Wisconsin, we had no free lodging in the New Port Richey area (No more Gray's, Starkeys, Green Key or the other birding spots in that area). So, we drove on to Sarasota, where we spent two nights.

On 1/15/23, we visited the Celery Fields. The feeders there were very productive. All of the common blackbirds were seen along with several painted buntings, both male and female. After a short wait, the Nanday conures (or parakeets, or whatever) came in. I counted nine at one time; Ann counted ten. As I left the feeder area, I was able to get photos of the parakeets free of the feeders.

The ponds were not as productive. Water levels at both the Palmer and Raymond ponds seemed low to me, although, having only visited the area once before, I probably didn't have an



accurate knowledge of what the normal would be. I couldn't find least bitterns but a Sora was found at the Palmer pond. I took several photos but shooting down from a boardwalk does not lend itself to great photography. Perhaps I should have tried to use flash. In all, twenty-four bird species were recorded for the morning. This would later figure large in the early bird count for 2023.

1/16/23 was the day to get a fix for my fakahabit. To my disappointment, the Big Cypress Bend boardwalk was closed and the area of new development to the east was not yet open. Apparently, from here say, hurricane Ian damaged some parts of the boardwalk and it was decided to close it down pending the new development. Somewhat withdrawn, I reversed direction and went to the TenK Marsh Trail. Water levels were high, as expected, and much of the shrubbery along the trail had been cut down to make it easier to see the birds. Twenty-nine bird species were recorded for the morning.

I went looking for my caracara at Six L's on 1/17/23. No luck with the caracara but I did see a snail kite there. There were also quite a few limpkins there. They were vociferous and I tried Merlin with some of their sounds; Merlin recognized them as laughing gulls. As I was returning to the condo,, I found a large accumulation of wading birds along Hy 41. Some mottled ducks were with them.

I recorded eighteen bird species at the Kirby-Storter Wayside Park on 1/19/23. Included was a great look at a Louisiana waterthrush, a perennial target for the location. Only two other warblers (black and white and palm) were seen. With the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk closed, this is likely to be the main location for finding warblers.

I headed to Eagle Lakes Park shortly after dawn on 1/20/23. On the way I saw MY crested caracara at the top of a tree just east of Six L's. It was alone as far as I could see—I still wonder about the fate of its mate. At Eagle Lakes I was amazed by the large areas of open water with few birds, even the long-legged waders. A birder that I met along the way said it has been that way ever since hurricane Ian and that other areas (notably Shark Valley) are similarly devoid of birds. I was able to manage a count of twenty eight birds for DB, but the list lacked snowy egrets, black-crowned night herons, black-bellied whistling ducks and a few other birds generally seen there. I was pleased, though to be able to walk around the two main lakes without a cane or walker. As I was completing the walk around the north lake, I ran into Jack Berninger and the Sunshiner and. I learned of the passing of Diane Johnson. Dick Johnson told me that they had seen an American bittern at the observation deck. I looked for it for quite a while as I left the area but was unable to find it.

There are those days, when birding, that you see many birds seldom seen at a location and the common birds don't appear to "up" the count for the morning. Such was the case on 1/21/23 as I birded the Turner River / Birdon Loop. I recorded 27 species but no common gallinule, no American coot, no red-shouldered hawk, etc. The grey catbird, white-eyed vireo and common yellowthroat recorded for the morning brought the 2023 trip list to sixty-four, the greatest number yet for this point in a Florida trip. Needless to say: the Celery Fields had much to do with this. The inclusion of the common yellowthroat is a credit to my hearing aids. Last year, when at Tram 2 of the Fakahatchee Strand with Doug, he heard a common yellowthroat and I couldn't hear it. That is when I realized how gab my hearing had become and was a major incentive to get the hearing aids. This morning I



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heard it loud and clear. One immature black-crowned night heron got his feathers all ruffled when I tried to take its picture. No much was in bloom along the loop but the climbing aster (*Symphyotrichum carolinianum*) seen at the H.P. Williams wayside was added to the database for this location.

1/27/23

On return from our normal Sunday breakfast and shopping I stopped at Six L's briefly. I was hoping to see a shorebird or two, possibly an avocet as Jack Berninger's group saw there last year. No luck with that, but I had a beautiful look at a snail kite as it flew nearby with its tail nicely spread, revealing the white rump. A few other birds were seen and entered in BD. Later, as I lay in the lanai, I heard a common ground dove. Merlin concurred. On 1/23/23

The northern caracara, wings fully spread, glided over my car at Six L's as I was on my way to Serenity Walk Park on 1/23/23. It was heavily overcast with somewhat threatening skies. Things were quiet as if "before the storm". After walking about half of the way along the trail, I hadn't seen much of interest. Few birds and no interesting plants were in bloom.

Finally, about half way along the trail, I saw a red-headed woodpecker, then another. This is always the main target bird for the park. Then the storm, really only a good rainfall, hit. I took shelter under a cabbage palm, only to see a wave of small songbirds fly through. With binoculars splashed with raindrops I was able to identify palm and pine warblers and an eastern bluebird. The only target bird left was the brown-headed nuthatch, which I didn't see.

The rain ended after only about 10 minutes and I continued my walk. Shortly, I came across an area with quite a few yellow-eyed grass (*Xyris* sp.) plants. I collected one for further study. Then a singular pitted stripeseed (*Piriqueta caroliniana*) and later a flax, probably Small's flax (*Linum carteri*) was found in bloom.

On the way back to the condo, I stopped at Six L's to look for the caracara. I thought I saw one sitting along the edge of the water in the flooded area. I took several photos, hoping that I could enlarge them for a positive identification. It didn't work; the bird at the water's edge could not be identified. There were several limpkins at Six L's and they were very vocal. Some of their calls could easily be confused with those of the sandhill crane. It made me wonder about marking the cranes by ear in areas where limpkins could be. There were also a few waders, but no snail kites were seen.

I used to enjoy getting into the Fakahatchee Strand at the crack of dawn. Now, with the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk closed and the entrance to Janes Scenic Drive gated, I don't get into the strand 'till 8 in the morning. By then, I've probably missed the best photo ops. There were three of us waiting for them to open the gates on 1/24/23. As I entered the drive, I found an eastern box turtle crossing the road. I did my duty, hustling it across the road, and then travelled on to Tram 2. I drove slowly, on the wrong side of the road, looking carefully in the ditch along the side. I barely touched the gas pedal for long stretches, letting the car advance from idling speed. There was a lot of water in the roadside ditches but my no interesting birds were found.

I haven't seen many plants in bloom so far this year. Almost all of the areas I've thus far visited had the more common invasives in bloom [Spanish needles (*Biden alba*), Mexican clover (*Richardia grandiflora*), one of the false buttonweed (*Spermacoce* sp), etc.]. Besides those seen at Serenity Walk Park yesterday, I did see string lilies (*Crinum americanum*) in bloom along Upper Wagonwheel Dr. on 1/21/23 and again today along Janes Scenic Drive. I also found a vanilla orchid (*Vanilla planifolia*) along the drive this morning but it was not in bloom.



The toothed rein orchid (*Habenaria odontopetela*) and St Andrew's cross (*Hypericum hypericoides*) were in bloom along Tram 2

Bladderworts, apparently the floating bladderwort (*Utricularia inflata*) were seen both along the drive and along the tram. The hand fern (*Staphylococcus epidermidis*) was also seen.

When we went to Tigertail Beach on 1/25/23. I was still reluctant to cross the lagoon even though my legs appear to be stronger than they were last year. The near side of the lagoon wasn't too bad, though. I saw six different species of shorebirds, all trip marks of course. I watched, and attempted to photograph several of them feeding. Wilson's plovers seemed to be after fiddler crabs as I had seen last year. They chased them mostly along the exposed shore. The willets appeared to be taking some kind of worm-like thing from the water; possibly some kind of leech. I couldn't quite identify what it was and my photos don't help much.



On several trip to Marco Island so far, I have yet to see the burrowing owl although Ann has seen them twice.

I drove through a light rain on my way to the Picayune Strand on 1/26/23. Most of the roadside ditches were wet but



with no standing water. It appears, though, that in the restoration of the area the powers that be selected the deeper areas of the ditches, perhaps where the culverts ran under the road, and created stone walls around those sections resulting in small ponds that held water even well into the dry season. These ponds concentrate fish as the rest of the ditches dry up and provide rich feeding areas for the long-legged wading birds. On this morning, it was the great egrets that appeared to be doing the feeding, although lots of wood storks were seen in the trees close by. Great egrets don't generally tolerate much disturbance but the water surface, boiling with the actively of jumping fish, on this morning, perhaps made them reluctant to leave the area, even in the event of mild disturbances. On this morning, I provided the mild disturbance and was able to

shoot off 137 photographs of them, many with fish in the birds' mouths. It was early and overcast. Shutter speeds were slow in spite of pushing the ASA to 1600. The photos were disappointing.

Only 10 birds species were recorded in BD for the morning. Eight of them were in the strand, including wild turkeys, a trip mark. A short detour along Brandy Lane, on the way out, produced the eastern bluebird and the kestrel, another trip mark.

As I turned onto the Triple G Loop, I saw a large number of pitted stripseed (*Piriqueta carolineana*). Most of the plants that I saw in bloom had already been recorded for the stand. I did add the wand goldenrod (*Solidago stricta*) to the list, though. The IRC does show it to be present in the Picayune State Forest.

It was a cool day on 1/27/23 so Ann and I decided to go to Tin City. I was hoping to get a gull species or two and perhaps a common rock dove. I was amazed when we got there; not a single bird was to be seen along the river. No gulls, no pelicans, no doves, no grackles; nothing. A couple house sparrows and a lonely boat-tailed grackle appeared to be waiting for the restaurants to open but that was it. On the way back to the condo we took a brief detour through Sugden Regional Park where I saw several American coots. I also saw a raft of diving ducks which I identified as lesser scaup based mostly on the shape of the heads. Back at the condo I checked [ebird](#) for the latest sightings at that hotspot. The last checklist submitted was by Jeff Olmstead on 1/25/23; It included lesser scaup.

2/5/23

I visited the TenK marsh trail again on 1/28/23. So did a considerable number of hunters. The gunshots were loud and I could smell the gunpowder in the air. I had planned on walking all of the way to the end but the close gunshots were quite unsettling and I decided to turn back at the second bench again. I recorded 20 bird species for the morning.

A couple of plants that were in bloom caught my attention of the way back to the car. One was clearly an aster [photos 2023_01_28_007-8]. It had about 20 ray flowers that were white with a slight suggestion of blue (more so after sitting in a plastic bag). The flower head was about 3/4" in diameter with yellow disk flowers. The phyllaries appeared hyaline with a green vein expanding to a solid green tip. The leaves were about 7/8" long x 1/4" wide. They were lanceolate and hairy, especially on the top surface. The leaves were alternate and somewhat ascending. There was one main central vein with netted lateral veins. The leaf edges were entire. The upper leaves had very small axillary leaves developing. The stems were about 1mm in diameter.

I used Wunderlin & Hansen (2011) [p.334; 1, 5, 6, 7, 8 — *Symphytotrichum. adnatum*] to identify the plant as the scale-leaf aster (*S. adnatum*).

The other plant was a shrub [photos 2023_01_28_001-6]. It wasn't in bloom but bore several round fruit which were yellowish green in color. They were about 1/4" in diameter with a short petiole. The leaves were ovate and opposite. They were thick and very glossy on the upper surface; duller below. The twigs were brown. I couldn't identify the plant but it appeared similar to the hop plum (*Ximenia americana*) of Nelson (1996). The IRC doesn't show this species for TenK although it is found throughout southern Florida according to the AFP.

Last year's first trip to Mackle Park was quite ducky, having produced redheads, mottled ducks and blue-winged teal). Not so this year; only mottled ducks were among the birds seen. I spent about 3 hours there on 1/3/23 while Ann was baking (basking) at the beach. I was hoping that a few magnificent frigatebirds would fly by. Unfortunately, none showed up.

The month ended with a drive to the Loop Road. I saw seventeen bird species along the road on 1/31/23. Nothing was new or especially photogenic. Quite a few alligators were out, especially after about 10A.M.; I guess they know the prime time for sunning. Spatterdock (*Nuphar advena*) was seen in bloom near the east end of the road and was added to the database for that location. The showy rattlebox (*Crotalaria spectabilis*) seems to have spread a lot around Pace's Dike [photos 2023_01_31_002-5] and a small unidentified pea [photos 2023_01_31_008-10], possibly the low rattlebox (*Crotalaria pumila*), was also prevalent there. Both of these species have been recorded for the general area of the loop road previously.

February 1st is one of the days to tabulate total birds seen for the trip, Unfortunately, I had to drive to Fort Meyers to get a shot of Advacin in my eye. Fortunately, I arrived early and waited for appointment at a picnic bench that was along the edge of a small pond. Ann spotted several Muscovy on the other side of the pond. This was species number 79 for the trip. Of course, this is the highest number ever seen by this date for any of the Florida trips; thanks to the Celery Fields. Now things will get a bit tougher, new species will be harder to get, although there are still several easy marks that I have yet to see.

That proved true the next day (2/2/23), when I added the killdeer and the barred owl to the trip list. The killdeer (3 of them) were seen just as I entered the park. They were along Janes Scenic Drive near the large pond across from the

park's office. Although they tried to illude my camera, I got reasonably decent photos of them. The owl was heard later as I walked Tram 7. When I pulled into the drive I saw both vultures (in segregated groups as they often are seen) and was then surprised to see a group of wild turkeys. The early morning sun washed them out a bit bit they were close enough for good shots. They were pretty bold, walking right between my car and that of another gawker.

I then drove European style, along the wrong side of the road, hoping to find something interesting in the water-filled ditches along the way. Nothing, neither fauna nor flora, was found. I parked at gate 7 and took a brief walk along the tram (This was more like a legs stretch than a hike). Since last year, they have put numbered posts at each of the culverts that pass under the trail. I walked to post 10 before returning to the car. In all, only 16 bird species were recorded. A *Carex*-type sedge was seen between posts 2 and 3. I need to go back to examine it more closely.



Having breakfast plans with Ann in Everglades City, I went briefly to the TenK marsh trail on 2/3/23. . I saw the usual mix of birds (26 in all) and was able to add the greater yellowlegs to the trip list. Then, as Ann and I were leaving for Everglades, we ran into Fred and Alyce Thompson. Fred was on the trail of a report of a western flycatcher at the POI when we saw them. We briefly compared out early experiences; both of us just arriving in the last few week. Then Ann and I were on our way to Everglades City. While there we took the usual tour of the area but couldn't find any shore-birds or yellow-crowned night herons. It was the breakfast, not the birding, that made the trip worthwhile.

Doug Drysdale stopped . by for a brief visit in the afternoon. While sitting along the edge of the road, waiting for him to arrive, I heard a brown thrasher and added it to the trip list.

I met Doug along Janes Scenic Drive in the early afternoon on 2/4/23. We took a short walk along Tran 02. I wanted to show him the toothed rein orchid (*Habenaria floribunda*) I had seen there during previous visits. We were able to find one plant in bloom. We also saw the nice specimens of hand fern (*Ophiodesma palmatum*) on the cabbage palm near the parked car. and got nice photos of them. The short walk turned out to be botanically interesting. Not counting the shrubby false buttonweed (*Spermacoce verticillate*] seen virtually everywhere and already on the list of plants seen along the tram, I added five more species, all in bloom at the time. These were coastal rosegentian (*Sebatia calycina*), bluebearts (*Buchnera americana*), showy milkwort (*Polygala grandiflora*), blue mistflower (*Conoclinium coelestinum*) and herb of gracé (*Bacopa monniera*),

Beggar ticks (*Bidens alba*) was also seen, of course, but Seek identified it as *Bidens pilosa*. According to the key for identifying species of the genus *Bidens* in Wunderlin & Hansen (2011), *B alba* would have radiate heads with the ligules of the ray flowers being 6-16mm long while *B Pilosa* would have discoid (or pseudoradiate) heads with tubular ray flowers 2-3mm long. Also, as these notes indicated years ago, *B. Pilosa* should not be found in this area. Seek may be in error here.

Another plant that Seek identified along the tram was the Cuban jute (*Sida rhombifolia*) [photos 2023_02_04_005-7]. This reminded me very much like the plant identified as wireweed (*Sida ulmifolia*), identified back in 2012 and again in 2016. Again referring to the keys in Wunderlin and Hansen (2011), the wireweed would have subsessile flowers, or at least flowers with peduncles less than a mm long while the flowers of the Cuban Jute would be on peduncles up to 4cm long. The IRC shows both of these plants to be present in the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park. I'm not sure that peduncle length was visible on Seek's photo and decided to stick with my original identification of wireweed and not add the Cuban Jute to the species list.

Also seen was the dwarf St. John's-wort which Seek identified as *Hypericum mutilum* [photos 2023_02_04_008-9]. Mats of this low growing plant with tiny yellow flowers was found in several areas along the tram. It was added to the database with the sighting at this location. Although the IRC does not show this plant for the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, the AFP does list it for Collier County.

Almost no animals were seen during our walk. Lots of small lubber grasshoppers were found at one point and a zebra longwing was seen. Few birds, seen or heard, and no mammals. We did see some bear scat right in the center of the tram at one point.

2/11/23

Shelly and Dan arrived late at night on 2/6/23. I visited the TenK Marsh Trail that morning in advance of their arrival. Doug had indicated that Gisela was pretty excited about seeing northern shovelers there the previous day and I wanted to see them and add them to the year's trip list. I saw them almost immediately when I got to the observation deck [photos 2023_02_06_018-20]. Later, as I was walking toward the second bench, a fellow that I met reported that he had also seen pintails there. I went back to the observation deck and, with help from another birder, spotted the birds. They were quite far away; in the open water near the distant mangroves. Had I not been told they were there and what they were. I probably would have missed them. I took several photos [photos 2023_02_06_016-17], hoping that enlarging them would reveal their field marks, but imagination played heavily in their identification. Overall, the birding that morning was pretty good. I recorded 30 species with the shovelers being a trip mark and the pintails being a new Florida mark.

There seems to be an abundance this year of the goldenrod identified previously as the wand goldenrod (*Solidago stricta*). Patches of it were seen scattered all along the trail [photo 2023_02_06_010]. Some of the plants were in bloom while others had plumes of their achenes. These clumps seem to suggest that it spreads by fairly short rhizomes.

The next morning (2/7/23) we took Shelly and Dan to the Clyde Butcher studio on Hy41. After viewing the photograph displays we walked through the wooded area in back of the building. Although I have walked there before, I was surprised at the number of non-native plants that were there. Near the drive was a beautiful milkweed [Photos 2023_02_07_002-7] which Seek identified as the tropical milkweed (*Asclepias curassavica*). The scarlet milkweed was listed as one of its alternate common names. This is consistent with the id in my database of identified Florida plants.



We stopped to walk the boardwalk at Kirby-Storter Roadside Park on our way back to the condo. The area was quite a bit dryer than on my previous visit. Arriving mid-day as we did, we didn't see many birds but the reptiles were about.

We, especially Shelly, spotted quite a few turtles including some very small ones. Dan found a couple of snakes, seemingly what I have been calling southern water snakes [photos 2023_02_07_009-11], entangled on a floating log. We wondered if their close proximity indicated mating activity.



Around the beginning of the boardwalk were large patches of a small yellow flowering plant which Seek identified as spreading sida (*Sida abutifolia*) [photo 2023_02_07_008]. Here we go again—see notes of 2/4/23. According to the key for the genus in Wunderlin & Hansen (2011), *S. abutifolia* would be separated from the other species I've considered (*S. ulmifolia* and *S. rhombifolia*) by having cordate or subcordate leaf bases while the leaf bases of the other two would be truncate or cuneate. The photo taken by Seek doesn't reveal this. I did note that the petioles of the plants being examined were very short, possibly absent. Thus the

plants would more like the wireweed. I simply added this information to the notes for *S. ulmifolia*. The IRC shows 5 species of *Sida* in the Big Cypress National Preserve, *Sida abutifolia* not being among them. There seems to be some very slight distinction among the species of *Sida*. Pending a more careful study, I will include all notes with those of wireweed (*Sida ulmifolia*).

We were off to the beach (Clam Pass) on 2/8/23. Evidence of hurricane damage and repair were obvious. The wooden stairs leading to the beach area were all new. Plumbing on the main deck was still nonfunctional. I walked the entire mangrove nature trail and the damage was extensive. Piles of broken-off shrubbery were found along the often interrupted path [photos 2023_02_08_002-3]. Not one bird was seen (alright, one brown pelican seen twice). No gulls, no shorebirds, no terns, no skimmers - all commonly seen there. Nothing! It's hard to believe that I have yet to see a gull this year. On the way back to the condo we stopped at Stans in Goodland for oysters. I certainly expected to see gulls there — not so. Where have they all gone?



A visit to the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary is mandatory during the Mumm visit. This year's was on 3/10/23. We spent about 3 hours on the boardwalk and I recorded a total of 18 bird species. These included 3 species new to this year's list (northern parula, yellow-crowned night heron, and, unbelievably, the pileated woodpecker). Gisela had seen three of the night herons on her previous visit, we saw 2. Dan reported 4 additional bird sightings which are not included in

my report to BD. I don't think I have ever visited Corkscrew before without taking more photos. The only ones that I took this time were of a the yellow-crowned night heron and an alligator covered with floating plants [photos 2023_02_08_002-7]. One can never have enough alligator pictures. Shelly and Dan left for home on 2/11/23; nice visit.

2/19/21

I drove along Shell Island Road on 2/13/23 and stopped to walk the Briggs Boardwalk. The water was as high as I ever remember seeing it there. It was present almost the entire way. I recorded only 13 species of birds, but I seldom see a lot of birds there, especially at high tide. I did add a loggerhead shrike to the trip list, though. It was perched on a wire along the road. I also saw a deer from the boardwalk and I updated the plant database for the location.



On 2/14/23, the TenK Marsh Trail gave me 24 bird species. Surprisingly, Killdeer, greater yellowlegs and several of the waders were seen in the flooded area at the beginning of the trail. When I got to the end of the channel, where it expands to the more open ponds near the observation tower, I spotted a reddish egret. It was not in a particularly photogenic position but it was a trip mark, one generally obtained at Tigertail beach. I had hoped to get some close-up photos of the northern shovelers and that occurred just beyond the tower. I had seen several of them from the tower but one was very close to the shore of the pond further down the trail. By

then the reddish egret had become active in that same area and I photographed it as well. The lighting not being conducive to photography (at least at my level of inexpertise) the photos did not turn out as well as I had hoped.

I got an early start, before dawn, for the Kirby-Storter Roadside Park on 2/15/23. When I exited my car at the parking lot, I tracked a bird sound to a suspected eastern meadowlark; a trip mark for the year. I saw a total of 15 bird species while at the park. Especially nice was a reasonably close view of a yellow-throated warbler. Some other birders that I met also reported a black-throated green warbler but I could not find the bird.



After leaving the park, I drove to Burn's Lake and took a short walk along the off-road trail. While there I updated the location field of the plant database for the location. This resulted in adding two species (blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium angustifolium*) and herb-of-grace (*Bacopa monnieri*)). I also found yellow butterwort (*Pinguicula lutea*), a plant not only new for the location but new to the database. Birds were not recorded for Burns Lake.

Ann's car was messaging "maintenance required" so Ann went to the beach and I went for an oil change on 2/16/23. While on the island (Marco) I drove along Bald Eagle Drive to several areas where I had access to the gulf. Still no gulls! Then I went to Mackle Park and waited until it was time to pick up Ann. Still no magnificent frigatebirds! I did get a passing glance at a burrowing owl, though, while driving along. I almost feel guilty for recording the bird, but a mark's a mark.

Over the years, Ann and I have often said that we wanted to walk the trail north of the entrance of Collier-Seminole State Park. We finally did so on 2/17/23. We managed

about 2 miles of the biking and hiking trail before my legs began to be a problem. We saw almost no birds along the way, too few to bother recording. But several white ibises provided a nice photo-opportunity. Botanically, though, the walk was pretty interesting. I updated the database for Collier-Seminole and, in addition, added two new plants to my

database of Florida plants. One of these, dogfennel (*Eupatorium capillifolium*) has often been seen at various sites but never identified. Seek id'd it without a problem and several web sites seemed to confirm the identification. The AFP indicated that the plant was widely distributed in the area. The other plant was camphorweed (*Heterotheca subaxillaris*). Seek identified this plant from what I considered a very bad photo. I entered this plant into the database with some reservation. Again, the AFP range map for this species included Collier County.



Seek also identified an obvious flatsedge as the tall flatsedge (*Cyperus erograstis*). According to the AFP, this species of flatsedge is found in Florida but only in the west-most part of the panhandle. The AFP lists 33 species of *Cyperus* for Collier County; way to many to identify by the photos on its web site alone. This plant remains unidentified to species.

With plans to go to the Everglades City Seafood Festival later in the day, I took a very brief walk along the TenK Marsh Trail on 2/18/23. In the limited time that I spent there, I saw all of the expected long-legged waders and other water birds and little else. A disappointing 18 birds were reported to BD. The seafood festival was also disappointing. The high point was a flock of white pelicans flying over, appropriately, at the time I was talking to a person at the booth for the park service.

2/27/23

We followed the usual Sunday routine on 2/19/23., After going to the market, though, we took a walk on the Briggs Boardwalk, now again under the management of the Rookery Bay Estuarine Research Center. It was late in the morning when we got there so I didn't really expect to find towhees. One of the volunteers that was manning the observation deck indicated that he had seen one earlier that day (about 8:30AM). On the way back to the condo we made one more stop at Six L's. I didn't see much of anything there. The open water area was completely dried up, a sign of the ensuing dry down in the area.

I drove the Turner River / Birdon loop again on Monday 2/20/23. Not long after turning off of Hy41, I saw a white bird in a tree. It turned out to be a swallow-tailed kite, the first for the year and trip mark #93. I also saw one of the big cypress fox squirrel crossing the road but I wasn't fast enough with my camera for a good shot. Pine pink (*Bletia purpurea*) was seen in bloom along the road.

My destination for the morning was actually the Windmill Prairie Tram. I hiked the tram for a while, getting further than I did last year. The water on the path was easy to get around, although my boots did get a bit wet and muddy. I saw a few more plants to add



to the database for the location. One of these was obviously an aster, most probably one of the genus *Symphyotrichum*. The flower head was slightly more than 1" in diameter with about 30 ray flowers. The disc flowers were yellow. The leaves were alternate and very long (3-4") and narrow (3/16"). The AFP lists 10 species of the genus *Symphyotrichum* for Collier County. Eliminating all of the others from the key in Wunderlin and Hansen (2011) [p.334: 1, 5, 6, 9, 13, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 27, 28 —*S. simmondsii*], I tentatively determined the plant to be *Simmonds aster* (*Symphyotrichum simmondsii*). That species is not shown by the IRC to be in the Big Cypress National Preserve.

I also found a plant that was very aster-like, but had a distinctly different arrangement of phyllaries. I have been calling this a false aster because it reminds me of plants found along the Kickapoo. Hammer (2014) shows the false aster as doll's daisy (*Boltonia diffusa*) but the photo has a distinctly blue tone. The plants that I am seeing have white ray flowers. According to Wunderlin and Hansen (2011) there are three species of *Boltonia* in Florida but two of them are rare. *B. diffusa* is the only common species listed. The distribution map on the web site of the AFP indicates that *B. diffusa* is well distributed in the state, including Collier County, while the other species, beside being rare, are restricted to northern counties. A web search for photos of *Boltonia diffusa* seems to support the id. This species was added to the database of Florida plants.

Afer I left the Windmill tram I continued my drive of the loop. Along Birdon Road I found some water dropwort. Previously identified as *Oxypolis filiformis*. This plant has been reassigned to a different genus and is now correctly called *Tiedemannia filiformis*. The plant database was updated accordingly. 25 bird species (3 of them from Windmill tram) were seen along the loop.

Jerry and Maryanne Kaczmarek joined us on 2/22/23, putting B&B aside for a few days.

I've heard about it, I've read about it, but I never experienced the red tide as I did when we took the Kaczmarek's to Loudermilk Park on 2/24/23. I wasn't even near the beach; I was sitting on the deck near the concession stand and I had an irritation in my throat that I couldn't cough away in spite of constant coughing. Jerry complained of the same thing when another guy explained that it was due to the red tide. Ann indicated that the beach itself had an accumulation of debris and apparent dead vegetation. Needless to say, we didn't stay long. I did see several ring-billed gulls fly by while we were there, though.

Kaczmarek's having left on 2/26/23, I headed to Janes Scenic Drive on the next morning (2/27/23). I saw a total of 22 bird species including, again, the wild turkey running down the middle of the road. Two deer also crossed the road in front of me. I wanted to examine the *Carex* sedge seen earlier on Tram 7 but the plant was past its blooming period; the only plants with perigynia containing achenea were found. Seek could not identify the plant, *Carex vexans* remains the tentative id.

Seek did identify a plant in bloom along Janes Scenic Drive near the gate for Tram 7 as the snow squarestem (*Melanthera nivea*). Last year's notes document the confusion regarding the species of *Melanthera* and Faey's Palafox (*Palafoxia feayi*). This plant, as *Malanthera nicea*, was added to the list of plants seen along the drive.



3/4/23

I went to the Picayune Strand State Park on 2/28/23. I drove along Sabal Palm Drive for a while and then a short distance along the Triple G Loop Road. I only saw 11 birds along the way, although they included a bald eagle, a trip mark (The eagle was actually seen along the residential part of Sabal Palm Drive, before I got to the park). Most of the ditches and culverts along the way were dry by this time, but a great egret and several wood storks in the road indicated one culvert boiling with fish. The terrestrial areas were also dry with a few dust-laden tickseed among the few plants in bloom.

Anytime I drive into the Picayune, the understood target bird is always the bobwhite. None were seen on this trip although I listened carefully and even had Merlin try to call them in. I met another birder at the Sabal Palm trailhead and he indicated that he had heard them from a distance just moments ago. I sat on a picnic bench for about 15-20 minutes with no luck.

On our way back from the market in Marco Island on 3/1/23, Ann and I spotted a large accumulation of wading birds just east of the TenK Marsh Trail on Hy41. Many of the common waders (great blue heron, little blue heron, great egret, snowy egret, white ibis, glossy ibis and roseate spoonbills) were in the group. The white birds were the large majority; only 1 or 2 herons were in the group. The spoonbills were obviously immature birds, being barely pink in color. These birds were quite a distance from the road. About an hour later I returned to find the birds much more numerous and closer to the road. By that time wood storks had joined the feeding frenzy. I assume that the drying of the pond had concentrated to fish.

The next morning (3/2/23), on my way to the TenK Marsh Trail, I noticed that the birds were gone; perhaps the fish too. I continued to the marsh trail and had a total of 17 species. Several spoonbills were feeding at quite a distance. Again, they all appeared to be young birds, perhaps this year's brood. They were barely pink in color. I was surprised to see the shovelers and the reddish egrets still there. I ran into Fred and Ethyl along the trail and discussed our recent birding experiences. Among other things, they explained exactly where they had seen the western kingbirds back at the condos.

On the way back to the condos, as I passed the clearing where all the birds had accumulated yesterday, I noticed that a few birds (15-20) were there again. Only great egrets were recognized as I drove by. When I got to the condos I drove directly to where Fred had directed me. There they were, several (at least 2) western kingbirds. While I was looking at the kingbirds, Eric Bauer appeared. Having heard a lot about him from several of our mutual acquaintances, I had long wanted to meet him. We discussed our experiences in the area for a while. As we talked, he indicated that a yellow-throated vireo was also being seen in the same area as the kingbirds and that the painted bunting were apparently being attracted to a nearby bird feeder. I'll need to check that area regularly.



Eric also told me that the water flow through the area of the Dan House Prairie had been altered and that the whole prairie was under water. He was not able to find any of the orchids that had been found there in the past. Knowing that the Sunshiners were planning to meet there later in the month, I decided to check out the area in advance of their visit. I hiked down Union Road, with my folding chair on my back, on 2/3/23. Several new culverts had been put in and it was obvious that the area had recently been flooded. Most of the ground showed signs of the recent flooding; periphyton had accumulated on the ground and its height in the vegetation suggested that at least a foot or so of water had been there. Along the way I spotted 2 deer out in the prairie. Then, a bit further along, I saw a group of 6 deer. They watched me carefully but continued their morning browsing.

When I got to the area where I usually enter the prairie I set up my chair and watched the deer for a while. I was amazed at how bold they were; some coming within 15-20 feet of where I was sitting. They seemed to be checking me out. One, that I trained my binoculars on, seemed to be eating the periphyton. In spite of the barrage of shotgun fire from the nearby gun club, the deer apparently recognized that I wasn't carrying and were comfortable with my presence. So comfortable, in fact, that several of them decided to lie down close by. A truly amazing deer experience!

The only plant that I found blooming was the herb-of-grace (*Bacopa monnieri*). It did appear, though, that other plants were emerging and that, by the time of the Berninger visit, a nicer variety of herbaceous plants could be in bloom. In any event, I found the area relatively dry, enough so to support me sitting on my chair.

Back to TenK on 3/4/23. On my way to the marsh trail I noticed a small accumulation of wading birds (mostly great egrets) in that area just to the east. Apparently a few fish remained. The marsh trail itself was great! All of the waders, including 2 reddish egrets, were seen. There were more northern shovelers than before, at least 4 males and an abundance of females. I don't recall them ever sticking around this long, the reddish egrets either. Try as I did, though, I am still not satisfied with my photos of the shovelers. On my way out of the marsh trail, I met and talked with Dick Johnson.

When I returned from TenK, Ann and I drove into Everglades City for breakfast. Afterwards we drove the usual route, looking for oystercatchers and other shorebirds. No luck. Still no gulls! On our way back we saw a swallow-tailed kite. Soon we'll be seeing them on an almost daily basis.

3/12/23

It turned out that my comments of 3/4/23 were prophetic; swallow-tail kites are now being seen commonly almost every time we're out for any length of time.

I went to Eagle Lakes on 3/6/23. I finally saw the black-bellied whistling ducks for the year. They seemed more abundant than I have seen in the past. I also saw black skimmers there for another trip mark. According to BD, this was the first time that I've seen them at Eagle Lakes. While I was there I met Chris Haden, president of Collier County Audubon Society. He was very informative and told me about the Merritt Pump Station, a hotspot that I must check out.

I had not seen the crested caracara for quite a while. On my way back from Eagle Lakes I drove the length of Six L's Farm Road to see if it was in that area. Also, Fred had been told that scissor-tailed flycatchers could be found along that road. Fred indicated that he had never seen them there and, in spite of this drive, neither have I. The caracara wasn't seen either but I did spot it in its usual treetop on 3/8/23.

Matt and Nicole joined us on 3/6/23. Matt and I went to the TenK marsh trail the next morning (3/7/23). Based on my experience of 3/4/23, I promised Matt a great morning, based on my experiences of 3/4/23. Terrible morning! What a surprise. The BD entries for the morning dropped from 29 (for 3/4/23) to 14 for this morning. We didn't see the reddish egrets but Matt did spot the northern shovelers back in the mangroves.

B&B was largely put on hold while they were with us. Matt tried a little fishing as I stood ready with camera and Seek to fish watch. Unfortunately, no luck. Matt and Nicole left on 3/10/23.

While driving on hy41 on 3/10/23, I noticed a large number of ducks in a pond just east of the TenK marsh trail. I hoped that it would include some migrating ducks not on this year's list. I quickly pulled over and got the spotting scope out. Unfortunately, all of the ducks were either blue-winged teal or



northern shovelers. There were 10-12 males shovelers and many females. Again, I have never seen this many shovelers this area.

3/15/23

I had received a couple of emails from Susan Rein telling me of several birds she had been seeing in the area. On 3/11/23 I decided to drive to the area of the old hotel and the gun club to see what I could find. Not much! Fairly decent photos of turkey vultures were the highlight of the morning. Near the area where the hotel had been raised, Seek identified a flowering bush as the jungle flame (*Ixora coccinea*). As it turned out, this non-native plant was probably a part of the landscape plan for the hotel.

The drying of the area has changed the conditions of the TenK marsh trail considerably. As the water disappears you hear the people complaining that the birds are disappearing. I guess they don't appreciate shorebirds. Neither do I; I am totally frustrated by them. Recent ebird checklists for the hotspot included both of the dowitchers and stilt sandpipers among the other shorebirds present. I thought I had seen dowitchers on my last visit to the area but I didn't include them in my report to BD.



On 3/14/23 I decided to check it out. On my way to Marco, for my monthly blood draw, I stopped and walked to the area just beyond the observation tower. Both yellowlegs were there and Merlin helped me distinguish the calls of the two. There were many dowitchers. The ebird checklists of both Nicholas Lechmanek and George Eschenbach (both among Collier County's 10 top birders) indicated that both the long-billed and short-billed were present the day before and the day that I was there. My understanding is that they can only be distinguished reliably by their call. I didn't hear them and their calls didn't register with Merlin. Because of the inland location, I marked them, somewhat guiltily, as the long-billed (perhaps influenced by the need of trip marks). I looked carefully for the stilt sandpiper and found a bird fitting its description. Another birder seemed to confirm the identification and I marked the bird with a bit of uncertainty. Uncertainty of my birding skills is always evident with shorebirds.

3/22/23

In visited TenK Marsh Trail again on 3/16/23. This time I got there at sunrise and was still only the second car in the lot. The marsh trail seems to be getting as popular as Shark Valley; Loads of birders and bird photographers are there in the morning hours with casual hikers later in the day. I found 25 species of birds to record in BD. Among them were both of the yellowlegs. I also saw dowitchers which I recorded as the long-billed species. Merlin agreed and registered the call. There were hundreds of tree swallows swarming above the shorebirds. I had seen them in January and wondered if I had seen them in both directions of their migration.

Nolte's came for a visit on 3/16/23 and left on 3/21/23. Needless to say, there was no B&B during that period of time. Because of some tire problems, I was reluctant to travel long distances so I wound up at TenK again on 3/21/23. This time 23 bird species were seen. Amazingly, northern shovelers were still there in abundance. In previous years I was lucky to see 1 or 2 of them for the whole Florida stay. This year many of them have been seen consistently since February 6. This is truly the year of the shoveler. I thought I had been seeing the American coot and the pied-billed grebe unusually late also but, according to BD I've seen the coot as late as 4/24 and the grebe as late as 4/16. Pranty (2005) suggests that both of them are uncommon (present in small amounts) in the area but "can sometimes be found with some effort in appropriate habitat" during the summer months.

Otters have been seen on both of these trips. I did not see them on the 3/16 visit to TenK but a woman near me did see them. I did see them on the 3/21 visit. I saw one crossing the trail before bench 2 and then I saw another (or, possibly



the same one) swimming in the area. A fellow who I have met there several times got really great shots of them; one close up showing the face of one of the otters who had feathers around its mouth.

During the last 2 trips to TenK I also looked at the aster earlier tentatively identified as a lilylike *Symphytotrichum* species. I am still not confident in my identification of this plant as the scaleleaf aster (*S. adnatum*). It's leaves were 1&1/2" long, hairy and opposite with small leaves developing in the leaf axils. The receptacle was tall with phyllaries that were mostly green. It's more likely the rice button aster (*S. dumosum*) of Hammer (2014)

3/27/23

I went to Eagle Lakes again on 3/23/23. It seemed like a convention of birders. I ran into Chris Hadden again, this time with Jeff (Wahl?). Several other birders and photographers were also there. The water level had dropped considerably since the last time I was there but the birding was good. I found 36 species. Not surprisingly, Chris' report to ebird included several that I had not seen. I did see both the

bronzed and brown-headed cowbirds and several black-necked stilts. My list to BD included most of the long-legged waders along with the black skimmers and a few common song birds. The bronzed cowbird, always a target there, was trip mark #104, dropping me a bit behind last year at this time. On the way out I passed a particularly photogenic loggerhead shrike.

TenK Marsh Trail got my attention again on 3/24/23. When I got there it appeared that the water level had risen a bit from the last time I was there. Recent ebird checklists indicated several more shorebird species than I had seen during my recent visits. I got there at the crack of dawn (literally) to find a lot of wading birds that had possibly roosted there overnight. The group included most of the herons, roseate spoonbills and white pelicans.



No wood storks were there. In fact, they hadn't been seen for a while. As has been the case lately, most of the spoonbills that I saw appeared to be first year birds, judging by their slight pink coloring. There was one, though, that appeared more mature [photos 2023_03_24_010-28] . Although the lighting was poor, it did pose for a few photos.



In all, it was a decent morning; 26 species were listed in BD. But I didn't see many of the shorebirds that I was hoping for. Both yellow-legs were there as were many long-billed dowitchers and least sandpipers. I also thought several of the shorebirds were possibly stilt sandpipers. I took several really bad photos of them and, when I manipulated the photos [photos 2023_03_24_060-64] in a variety of ways, they seemed to confirm the identification. So, actually there were 27 species

At Tigertail Beach, on 3/25/23, I finally got my semipalmated plover and a gull that surely was laughing at how long it took me to find it. Those two marks got me to trip mark #107 for the year. Ann reported a lot of disturbance to the beach area across the lagoon so the chances of other new bird sightings at that location are in doubt.

We drove to Cambier Park later that day. Given the time of day, we didn't see much. Recent ebird checklists for the park included several potential trip marks and even one life mark (western tanager). In spite of that, I'm not sure I'd venture to the area again, especially during the busy rush hour.

I had not seen the caracara in the Six L's area for a while but it showed up again as we were heading out for our Sunday routine at about 8:30AM on 3/26/23. Also, swallowtail kites had not been seen in recent days until the one marked at Tigertail on 3/25. We did have 2 female (or immature) wild turkeys walk past the lanai one afternoon and we also saw one walking along Newport Dr. one morning. Our resident red-shouldered hawk has come back to its perch on the rain gutter next door and has recently been sitting on the closest lamp pole (lit) at dusk.

While at Eagle Lakes the other morning, I asked Chris Hadden if the Merritt Pump station would be a good birding destination at this time of the year. He suggested that it would be good at any time of the year and that both bitterns would likely be there as well as the sora and other interesting birds. Although recent ebird reports didn't include any of these, I ventured out to the hotspot on 3/27/23. With over an hour to drive, I left before dawn and got there about 8 O'clock. I walked the complete loop and found none of the aforementioned birds. Included with the 26 species that I did see, though, was a marsh wren, a trip mark. I heard the bird calling from the cattails and recognized it immediately as a wren. Merlin confirmed it as the marsh wren.



Much of the circular trail was paved with bricks that had large holes in them, possibly to allow drainage. Curiously, many of these holes contained the shells of apple snails, some of them pretty large (probably not native). I suppose that they may have settled there from flood waters but, seeing both limpkins and a snail kite in the area, I wondered if one of them might put the snails there to restrict their movement while feeding on them.



Vultures are supposed to be carrion feeders. But, while walking the ledge, I observed a turtle being harassed by both a turkey and several black vultures [Photos 2023_03_27_003-5]. They eventually upended the turtle and one of the black vultures was pecking at the exposed parts of the turtle's underside. I don't know if it eventually killed the turtle.

As I was returning to my car I met a couple from Eagle Watch. They were looking for an Eagle's nest that had been reported to be there. I remember that Chris Hadden had mentioned it also. I hadn't seen any eagles. Two swallow-tail kites flew over the drive shortly outside of the pump station.

4/1/23

When I went to TenK on the morning of 3/27/23, there were hundreds of waders at the beginning of the Oil Pad Trail, to the left (east) as you exit the short wooden bridge from the parking lot. The group was made up mostly of great and snowy egrets but a few spoonbills and an occasional great blue heron were also seen. Many flew away as people, myself included, walked nearby and were photographing them but when I left, a couple of hours later, a considerable number were still present.

My frustration with shorebirds continues. I watched several [Youtube](#) videos the last several nights and they make it seem pretty easy to identify them but, the real world is more difficult. On this morning I was again trying to find a stilt sandpiper among the shorebirds that were reasonably close. I took photos of several birds and manipulated them as in the past; they were more likely lesser yellowlegs. Groups of smaller shorebirds were further out. The peculiar feeding habits of the dowitchers (presumably long-billed) made them recognizable but I couldn't begin to recognize most of them with binoculars. Recent [ebird](#) checklists for the marsh trail included black-bellied plover, sanderling, dunlin, least and western sandpipers and the willet. Perhaps I should try bringing the scope again.

A fairly heavy fog was lifting when I arrived at the TenK Marsh Trail again on 3/29/23. This time the large accumulation of wading birds was on the west side of Oil Pad Trail, near the observation tower. Although the birds were in close proximity with one another, aggressive territorial displays were common, especially among the snowy egrets. Some of the longer-legged shorebirds were fairly close but many of the smaller ones (including least sandpipers) were at distant mud flats. Needless to say, I had my usual debate with myself about lesser yellowlegs vs. stilt sandpipers. Both sides won, but with little confidence. Yesterday I saw a common gallinule chick wondering in the water below the observation deck. Today, two chicks were following an adult in more open water. The highlight of the morning was my sighting of an adult male green-winged teal with an apparent female, trip mark #109.

On these last two mornings, as I was walking to and from the second bench, I noticed several more of the plants earlier identified as the rice button aster (*S. dumosum*). All of the plants were in the same general area, just past bench 1. They could possibly be coming from long rhizomes.

With the tire problems behind, Ann and I dove north to Alva on 3/30/23. I pulled up at the former White property and immediately saw several male indigo buntings at the feeders. A couple of male painted buntings were also there as well as quite a few females of both species. As I scanned the tree directly in front of the house, I saw a white-winged dove. Those two were the targets for that part of the trip. The new owner of the property was about to cut the lawn and came over to the car to talk a bit. Apparently a friend of the former owner, he informed me of his recent death. It's great that the new owner is carrying on the tradition and that the spot is back on the itinerary.

From there we drove to Harns Marsh where the good luck continued. I got reasonably close views of a snail kite and also saw a purple gallinule along the shore. I walked to the second bend and back. At one point I could see quite a pile of apple snail shells on the opposite edge of the cattails. Several limpkins were also seen. but the best part was just before the first bend. That's where I spotted the grey swampphen and also the least bittern that was marked for the day. The trip north was well worthwhile; we celebrated with orange/vanilla twist ice cream cones at Sunburst.



Recent [ebird](#) checklists for the Kirby Storter Roadside Park have continued to list several warblers. So, with high hopes, I went there on 3/31/23. My hopes were fulfilled; an American redstart and a northern waterthrush, two more trip marks. The large alligator highway was just a mud trail but I did see a nest of about 10 baby alligators as I got to the open water at the end of the boardwalk (this was actually pointed out by a Canadian couple that I met). Mom alligator wasn't in site but I am sure I was in her site.

We went to visit Jim and Lisa Flanagan on 4/2/23 and stayed until 4/5/23. On the way there we stopped at the Celery Fields for a couple of hours. It was about high noon when we got there, obviously not the best time for birding. There

was little activity at the feeders except for a few blackbirds and Nanday Parakeets. Unfortunately, some of the electronic notes for the visit were lost so the BD entry was not complete. There were three cranes (two adult and one young) along the edge of the Raymond pond, though, and they were glad to have their portraits taken. Attracted by its call, I saw a northern rough winged swallow as I left the pond. This was a trip mark; the first time I recorded it in Florida since 2011.



We then drove on to the Flanagan's. While we were there we spent much of our time sitting in their lanai , gabbing while watching the birds. Their lanai turned out to be a great place for birding. On 4/3/23 I added a ruby-throated hummingbird (visiting a cultivated *Ixora sp.*) to the trip list and also saw least terns over their retention pond that evening, another trip mark. Other unidentified terns were also there. Then, on 4/4/23, a tufted titmouse was added to the list.

Although it's always great to get trip marks, the most interesting birding experience involved the night herons. The first night that we were there, I thought I was hearing night herons at the edge of the pond. Because it was getting dark when we noticed them sitting on their neighbor's fence, we couldn't identify the species. They appeared to have somewhat of an upright posture which made my hopeful that they were the yellow-crowned species. We got a better look at them on the third evening; they turned out to clearly be black-crowned night herons. Each night several of them (10-12?) would come to the pond, apparently to feed. In the morning, when I was sitting there before dawn, they would singly fly away. They appeared to be flying toward the conservancy area across the street from Jim and Lisa's house.

On the morning of 4/4//23 I drove to the area, along the Big Mantatee bank where the cranes gathered each night. The cranes were all gone by the time I got there but a few shorebirds, yellowlegs and black-necked stilts, were there. That is where I saw the solitary sandpiper recorded for the day. It was another Florida trip mark for 2023. Later in the day, Jim drove us to Fort DeSoto Park and we walked the pier into the Gulf. All of the light poles, shelters and other fixtures along the way were covered with egrets and herons, apparently waiting for handouts and ruddy turnstones ran along the pier and nearby rocks picking up scraps. There were huge schools of sardines at several locations and some of the folks netting them offered some of them to us; We declined. Although I didn't see anything new at the park, we stopped for a beer and snacks at Pass-A-Grill where I saw my first rock pigeon for the trip. After just mentioning that I had not seen one yet, one was seen walking right at Ann's feet at the outside café.

We left Parrish on 4/5/23. Early that morning, Lisa heard a distant chuck-will's-widow. Even with my hearing aids in place, I couldn't hear it. Merlin was no help, it didn't hear it either; no mark.

4/12/23

I was back at the condo, on 4/5/23, and back at the TenK marsh trail on 4/6/23. Quite a difference from my last visit just a few days ago. Not one egret was seen. The water levels continued to decrease and most of the long-legged waders had been replaced by shorebirds. Only a few of them were identifiable, partly because of their distance and partly due to my inexperience. Interestingly, the shovelers were still there but I didn't see and of the teal, either blue- or green-winged. A river otter (possibly 2) was working the shallow water before the observation deck. I only saw one of the common gallinule chicks following its assumed mother.

It's that desperate time of the year again when I'm trying to increase the bird trip list and trip marks are getting difficult to get. With hopes of a northern bobwhite I went to the Picayune Strand on 4/8/23. The roadside ditches along Sabal Palm Drive were dry but a few puddles in the road suggested recent rain. There was a complete absence of wading birds. I drove to the Sabal Palm trailhead and parked at the picnic table near the kiosk. Then I heard a single "white" of the bobwhite call. I recognize it immediately and so did Merlin. I waited for possible additional calls but, although Merlin heard more of them, I did not.

Then I drove to the Triple G loop and a short distance along it, listening for more bobwhites; no luck. I returned to the trailhead and turned Merlin loose for long periods of time. I thought it had gone berserk when it registered the sound of a hairy woodpecker. I had never seen them in the area. But then I saw the larger cousin of the downy, with its more massive bill, in a nearby tree. Merlin tested my skepticism again by registering both the sound of the pileated woodpecker and the northern flicker. I have always been reluctant to mark these two based on just the calls because their calls are so similar. I had already seen the pileated woodpecker and doubted Merlin's ability to distinguish them from one another also. Then a flicker jumped right down to the parking area, right near my car. I was beginning to gain more confidence in Merlin.

Then Merlin tested that confidence to the limit, It heard both a ruby-crowned kinglet and a brown-headed nuthatch. Both of these would have been trip marks, the kinglet a Florida mark. I scanned the nearby trees carefully and listened to Merlin's recordings. Neither produced the birds and I did not include them in my list for the morning. But I left the area with three trip marks (northern bobwhite, northern flicker and hairy woodpecker). That brought my trip list to 125 birds to date, the most since 2016.

Having such luck with trip marks, I went searching the Briggs Boardwalk for the boardwalk the eastern towhee. Things were pretty quiet there and I had no luck with the towhee. Recent burns had charred much of the area below the boardwalk; I assume they were prescribed. On the way back to the condo I drove to the Frichey Road area. Although the gate was open, the area that I used to visit was posted. This is no longer a fruitful birding area.

Within the recent day, checklists for the TenK marsh trail included both American avocets and sora. So, I went to the trail at dawn on 4/11/23. Five avocets were seen in the area before the observation tower and more were seen just past it, upwards of a dozen in all. This was the first time I had seen them in Florida, in fact, the first sighting of them since seeing them in Texas in 2005. Although both teal and mottled ducks had been reported on ebird for the



previous day, I only saw northern shovelers, as I had on the trip before. I only walk to the second bridge on these visits. Perhaps they are being seen further along the trail or later in the day. My notes suggest that the shovelers are outlasting the blue-winged teal. It will be interesting to see what happens next year. BTW: no sora, sight or sound.

4/16/23

We haven't been going to either of the Marco beaches much this year. So, on 4/13/23, I dropped Ann at Marco's south beach and went on to Mackle Park to see if I could add a magnificent frigatebird to this year's trip list. A single frigatebird showed up at about 10:30AM. Although I waited another 1½ hours, no other frigatebirds arrived. While I waited, I took several photos of fish crows [photos 2023_04_13_009-11] in the hopes of contrasting them with the American crows in other photos.

On 4/14/23 Ann and I visited the Seminole museum (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki) in Clewiston, FL. We hadn't been there since 2010. After viewing the building exhibits we walked the boardwalk. The time of the day wasn't great for wildlife and only a few plants were in bloom, water hemlock (*Cicuta mexicana*) among them. I noticed that one tree had extensive growth of the invasive small leaf climbing fern (*Lygodium microphyllum*). Also, I was interested in seeing the soft-leaved airplant (*Tillandsia variabilis*) which I had seen there before. Unfortunately the sign for the plant was there but the plant must have died off. The road leading to the museum was prime caracara country and I had seen them on our previous trip. Unfortunately, though, none were seen this time. At least we weren't caught up in a cattle round-up.



The Turner River / Birdon Loop was dressed with a new layer of gravel since the 1st time I was there.

When I visited it on 4/15/23 the only washboarding was done along Wagonwheel Rd and a small section of Birdon Road. Few long-legged wading birds were seen; only a single great blue heron and one great egret. A small flock of snowy egrets (8-10) flew by at one point. Perhaps these are the residents, left when the masses migrated north.



I parked and hiked along the Windmill Prairie Trail. It was dryer than I had ever seen it and I could walk much further along without getting my feet wet. Seek identified a species of false foxglove as *Agalinis purpurea*. I have found false foxgloves before but have id'd them as *A. linifolia*, based on Hammer (2014). Since I haven't examined either of these plants sufficiently to distinguish them, I'll group all of them together until such examination.

Seek also identified a composite growing at the beginning of the trail as *Sphagneticola trilobata*. Seek referred to the plant as the trailing daisy. The identity of the plant was confirmed by Hammer (2014), who referred to it as the creeping oxeye. This plant was added to the database. Several other plants

that had not been seen on the trail before were added to update the locations field of the database.

A huge soft-shelled turtle (*Tryonix ferox*) was lying across the trail as I was leaving. It was very photo-cooperative but kept a careful eye on me.

I also stopped at a prairie along Birdon Road. It had a nice display of wildflowers but there was nothing I had not seen along the route before.

4/23/23

I woke up to the sight and sounds of a huge thunderstorm about 2:30AM on the morning of 4/17/23. I needed to go for a blood draw (INR) that morning but, on the way back to the condo, I stopped at TenK. The rain had brought back the high water levels; even both sides of the Oil Well Trail were again flooded. The high water had apparently driven out most of the shorebirds. Although I may have heard a greater yellowlegs, the only ones seen were the American avocets which numbered more than ten. After not seeing them in any of the previous Florida visits, now they were all over the place. A single little blue heron showed its first spring coloration with patches of blue beginning to show. A singular great egret and a tricolored heron were the only other birds of the heron family seen. But, I must admit to only walking as far as the first bench. No ducks were found, not even the shovelers that had been so prevalent for such a long time. I met a fellow who had been there the previous afternoon who couldn't believe the difference. Perhaps a later visit will reveal the return of some of the birds that haven't yet flown north.



The biting flies were ferocious, which is why I didn't go any further than the first bench. As I was leaving the marsh trail I found a much more interesting insect, a palmetto walkingstick (*Anisomorpha buprestoides*) on the railing of the bridge to the parking lot. The bug was identified with Allen et al (1998).

In spite of the absence of the large wading herons, Eagle Lakes produced 29 species of birds on 4/20/23. The skimmers were still there as were a few black-necked stilts. I was surprised not to find any American avocets, they being so plentiful at the TenK marsh trail. I found a couple species of ducks but I couldn't confidently identify any black-bellied whistling ducks. A brown thrasher checked me out from a nearby shrub. I saw several of the bronzed cowbirds and tried to get decent photos of them. An apparent male was seemingly displaying amorous behavior toward a couple of females but they wouldn't allow me to get close enough for decent photography.

On the way back to the condo I made a brief stop at the TenK marsh trail. By brief, I mean that I never even walked as far as the first bench. There were still upwards of a dozen American avocets in the deeper water. A couple of black-necked stilts and a single greater yellowlegs were the only other shorebirds seen. No ducks! Apparently the shovelers finally recognized the word "northern" in their name. Only 13 bird species were seen.

I noticed that much of the area in Serenity Walk Park had obviously been burned recently when I stopped there on 4/21/23. An abundance of dogfennel (*Eupatorium capillifolium*) and the pineland heliotrope (*Heliotropium polyphylla*) was growing in the charred soil. The target bird was the brown-headed nuthatch. I played its song with the Sibley app at several locations but was unable to attract the bird. Only a baker's dozen species were recorded in BD but it included was the red-headed woodpecker and eastern bluebird, always nice birds to see.

Seek was not very useful at the Sabal Palm hiking trail on 4/22/23. On my last visit to Sabal Palm Hiking Trail it had identified a number of birds that would have been trip marks if I had trusted the app. Among them was yester-



day's target at Serenity Walk Park, the brown-headed nuthatch. But, even with its help I only identified 10 birds to record in BD and none of these were trip marks. I had hoped to attract the brown-headed nuthatch by playing recordings of its call with the [Sibley Bird app](#) but it was to no avail, as was the case yesterday at Serenity Walk Park. But, with the birds not attracting my attention, I finally took time to examine some of the plants. The false aster (*Boltonia diffusa*) was in bloom throughout the area as was the pineland heliotrope. Seek gave me a scare when it identified this plant as *Euploca polyphylla*. I had listed this plant as *Heliotropium polyphylla* in the plant database. The AFP, though, indicated that the two names were synonymous, *Euploca polyphylla* being the accepted name. I changed the name in the database.

I saw several plants of the Rubiaceae family growing in areas where the ground was more moist. I was curious to see if they were Virginia buttonweed (*Diodia virginiana*), with two stamens, or poor joe (*Diodia teres*) with four. They appeared to be the former.

I was happy to relocate the potbelly airplant (*Tillandsia paucifolia*) that had been identified when I was with the Berninger group last year. For one reason or another, I failed to indicate its presence at Sabal Palm last year but added it to the location this year. I updated the location field of the plant database for this site. The only new species added for the site was the dwarf St. John's-wort (*Hypericum mutilum*). The Sabal Palm hiking trail has become one of my favorite locations for wildflowers.

With only a week left in our stay, I'm beginning to wonder if the marsh trail will totally dry before we leave. We've had a lot of rain in the general area lately. We drove to Everglades City on 4/23/23 and noticed that the fields along the way are as flooded as when we came. Quite a contrast to the usual conditions for this time of the year.



4/29/23

I have sorely missed my walks along the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk this year and, according to a ranger who opened the gate to Janes scenic Drive on 4/24/23, it will not be open in the near future. In spite of my comments above, only small amounts of water were found at a couple of the culverts under the road; most of the area was pretty dry. I drove to Gate 7 with a brief stop at Gate 2 to see my favorite hand fern (*Cheiroglossa palmata*) and at Gate 4.

I examined some of the plants at Gate 4; among them a wild petunia which [Seek](#) identified as the Mexican petunia (*Ruellia simplex*). According to the plant database, I had previously identified this plant along the Turner River / Birdon Loop on 4/29/21 and added it to the database at that time.

At gate 7 I examined a small bush with flowers resembling the snow squarestem (*Melanthera nivea*). [Seek](#) confirmed the identity as such. I think I had seen this plant along the tram in the past but never noticed it along the road before. It is undoubtedly the plant leading to the confusion between Feay's Palafox (*Palafoxia feayi*) and the snow squarestem (*Melanthera nivea*). The location field for each of these places was updated with the findings of this visit.

Only 16 bird species were found along the drive. Wild turkeys were again seen near the first pond. I heard a familiar bird call near gate 7 which I did not immediately recognize until [Merlin](#) reminded me of the call of the yellow-billed cuckoo. That brought back fond memories of my hikes along the Kickapoo where I often heard this bird. As I drove along Janes Scenic Drive to exit the park, I saw another Florida box turtle (*Terrapene carolina*) crossing the road. After many years of not seeing them at all, this was the third one I had seen this year.

Most probably my last trip to the Kirby Storter Roadside Park was on 4/26/23. Recent rains didn't seem to have affected the area much although the muddy areas had a pretty lush growth of grasses, knotweeds and other herbaceous plants. The footsteps along the alligator highway were barely visible and there was little open water, even at the end of the boardwalk. Since I got my hearing aids, I am finding that I have to learn the bird songs all over again. Seek helped bring the call of the red-eyed vireo back to my memory. I hadn't heard this bird in Florida since 2016. This year it was trip mark #129. I took some photos of the American crow to contrast it clearly with the photos of fish crows taken at Mackle Park on 4/13/23. In all, only 10 birds were recorded in BD for the morning.

One more visit to the TenK Marsh Trail on 4/27/23 revealed little difference from my last trip. There was almost nothing in birds. Two immature little blue herons, one tricolored heron, and many green herons were there. The shorebirds, even the avocets, were gone.

But Eagle Lakes, on 4/28/23, was a different story. I walked around the north lake and found a small flooded area where there must have been a lot of trapped fish. Lots of egrets (both great and snowy), little blue herons, tricolored herons, glossy ibises, a green heron and even a limpkin were in a feeding frenzy. I hadn't see a grouping like this in several weeks. By the time I got around the lake I had listed 31 species of birds. A walk around the second (middle) only produced 2 more.



I listed both night herons for the morning. Both of them were immature birds and were far off in the distance. I made the distinction mostly by their posture, the supposed yellow-crowned being much more upright than the black-crowned. Also, from the observation platform on the middle lake, I could see some small shorebirds. These were too distant for me to identify with binocular. I added the hempvine (*Mikania scandens*) to the plant database for this area.

When Ann and I went to Kelly's restaurant for dinner that night several rock doves were in and around the deck, a couple of them displaying apparent nuptial behavior. The

We left POI late morning on 4/30/23 and, with an overnight in Tifton, arrived at Matt and Nicole's home on 5/2/23. We stayed there for three nights in spite of the bedbug problem they had had. We experienced no problems. While we were there, Ann and I visited Barfield Crescent Park on 5/2/23. I was expecting a nice display of wildflowers and was anxious to learn to identify more of the Tennessee spring flora. I was quite disappointed, though. According to the unusually early, warm spring, most of the early bloom had already occurred. I saw very few plants in bloom and my photographic efforts were directed to landscapes. We left for home on 5/4/23.

Summary:

In many ways this was a very different Florida vacation. It was unusually hot. The Big Cypress Bend boardwalk was closed all winter so, although I spent time along Janes Scenic Drive, I really never got a fix on fakahabit. Because of red tide issues we didn't do much beaching. And, Other than a few great blue herons and a little blue heron walking the

hedges outside our bedroom window, there was little exciting bird activity in the area. We did not see much of Carmen and there was little activity in the channel

My caracara was seen early during our stay but not much later, but not lately and sighting limpkins along hy41 was a rare event. This is not to say that it was a bad year, though; just different. Given the count of 125, I'm ashamed to admit that it's the highest bird count since 2016, when I listed a trip count of 143.