

ITINERARY

Florida: Mangroves and Migrants

May 9 - 18, 2020



The endangered Florida Scrub-Jay is endemic to oak-scrub habitat in the state of Florida, and was only recently recognized as a distinct species. These intelligent birds have a cooperative breeding system, and live year-round in family groups. Although their habitat is highly fragmented, they are easy to see if you know where to look for them.

Photograph by guide Doug Gochfeld.

We include here information for those interested in the 2020 Field Guides Florida: Mangroves and Migrants tour:

- a general introduction to the tour
- a description of the birding areas to be visited on the tour
- an abbreviated daily itinerary with some indication of the nature of each day's birding outings

Those who register for the tour will be sent this additional material:

- an annotated list of the birds recorded on a previous year's Field Guides trip to the area, with comments by guide(s) on notable species or sightings
- a detailed information bulletin with important logistical information and answers to questions regarding accommodations, air arrangements, clothing, currency, customs and immigration, documents, health precautions, and personal items
- a reading list
- a Field Guides checklist for preparing and keeping track of the birds we see on the tour
- after the conclusion of the tour, a list of birds seen on the tour

Florida is one of the more interesting places to bird in the country at most times of the year, and springtime adds yet another dimension to its greatness. This is the time of year when waves of birds are coming through Florida en route to their breeding grounds to the north, while many of Florida's breeders are at the peak of their nesting activity. South Florida is also the northern limit of the ranges of quite a few species that otherwise don't reach the continental United States, including Antillean Nighthawk, Mangrove Cuckoo, White-crowned Pigeon, and Black-whiskered Vireo. We will target these tropical specialties during our time in the southern part of the state.

A highlight of the tour, of course, will be a day trip to the Dry Tortugas. We will have a few hours on the open ocean looking for warm-water birds such as Audubon's Shearwater, and we could even get lucky with something like an elegant White-tailed Tropicbird. The crossing also offers great opportunities for spotting sea turtles, and there is a potential for other warm-water fauna as well. Once we get out to Fort Jefferson on Garden Key, it will be bird mayhem, with tens of thousands of Brown Noddies and Sooty Terns, and hundreds of Magnificent Frigatebirds. We will bask in the spectacle of huge numbers of breeding seabirds while we parse through them looking for the uncommon Bridled Tern and the very rare Black Noddy. If we can pull ourselves away from that spectacle, we will also get to search the areas around the fort for landbird migrants that use the Tortugas as a critical oasis on their northward journey.

During the rest of our time in the state, we will survey a variety of habitats for species such as Red-cockaded Woodpecker in the longleaf pine flatwoods, Snowy and Wilson's plovers along the sandy beaches and tidal mudflats of the west coast, Fulvous Whistling-Ducks, Snail Kites and Limpkins in the apple-snail-rich wetlands of the Orlando area, and the endemic Florida Scrub-Jay in remnant patches of scrub habitat.

Whether it's spring migrants pouring through the oases of South Florida, the chance of a wayward vagrant from the West Indies, watching the pine flatwoods come to life as the sun rises, or taking in the spectacle of huge breeding colonies of terns, frigatebirds, or storks, this tour has something for everyone.



A small number of Bridled Terns nest at Fort Jefferson in the Dry Tortugas, which is the only place in the ABA area where these lovely birds breed. Photograph by participant Doug Clarke.

A little background and history:

Florida has benefited greatly from the foresight of a handful of environmental pioneers such as Marjorie Stoneman Douglas, Jay Norwood "Ding" Darling, and Richard Archbold. Through her groundbreaking work, "The Everglades: River of Grass", Douglas opened the eyes of many to the plight of "that worthless slough" that blankets and nourishes the southern part of the state. Without the Everglades, South Florida could not exist as we know it. Pulitzer Prize winner "Ding" Darling captured the hearts of millions with his gripping cartoons and renderings of the slaughter of the "Key Deer", a diminutive and distinctive population of White-tailed Deer found only on the Florida Keys. His work helped to create public awareness of the need for more conservation efforts in the Keys. Without the efforts of the Archbold Biological Station, founded by Richard Archbold, the Florida Scrub-Jay might not have become the object of conservation measures to sustain its small population—one we still find today in the sandy scrub forests that persist in central Florida.

These progressive thinkers and activists raised public awareness and helped rescue endangered habitats and species in serious danger of being lost. We'll take advantage of the work of these and many other environmentalists as we traverse the varied habitats and preserves of southern Florida.

About the Physical Requirements & Pace: The physical requirements of this tour are first and foremost an ability to tolerate heat and humidity. The tour will involve several long drives, which luckily will mostly be taking place in the heat of the day. Afternoons can be quite hot and unpleasant (and un-birdable!) at this time of year—fortunately we'll be making

those drives in air-conditioned vehicles! We will have **one boat trip**, which is a round-trip ferry between Key West and Fort Jefferson, and this could be rather bumpy. If you suffer from seasickness, you will want to prepare with appropriate medication beforehand (they typically have complimentary Bonine on the boat, if that's your drug of choice). During our tour, walks will mostly be fairly easy and on level terrain (Florida is very flat!). We will be getting out early just about every day to take advantage of the relatively cooler mornings, and we will likely be birding into the late afternoons as well. There will be at least one, and likely more, dusk or nighttime excursion to try and find nocturnal or crepuscular species.

About the Birding Areas



Miami area — Miami is host to many productive birding locations, though most of them are migrant hotspots that can be hopping with birds one day and dead the next. It also is at the northern end of the distributions of south Florida specialties such as Black-whiskered Vireo and Mangrove Cuckoo. We will likely use our limited birding time in the Miami area to target a couple of specialties or rarities, depending on what is being seen in the area at the time of our trip. We will also target at least one breeding colony of “West Indian” Cave Swallows. NOTE: we will NOT be making a concerted effort to find most of the introduced species around urban Miami such as Spot-breasted Oriole and Red-whiskered Bulbul. We will likely run into some, such as Gray-headed Swamphen and perhaps Egyptian Goose, but we won't focus on finding these. We can give good recommendations for local guides to help you look for these species before or after the trip.

Florida Keys — The Florida Keys, from Key Largo in the north to Key West in the south,

hold some excellent birding. In addition to several specialties that are absent from the rest of the USA, the Keys can be great for migration. We will spend our time here targeting species like Mangrove Cuckoo, Black-whiskered Vireo, White-crowned Pigeon, and Antillean Nighthawk, as well as birding migration hotspots like Fort Zachary Taylor Historic State Park, the Key West Botanical Gardens, and several other patches of habitat throughout the Keys.

Dry Tortugas — The Dry Tortugas are known to many birders as a place to try to connect with a migration fallout, or to look for Bahamian rarities, but their best attribute is a massive seabird colony. We will see thousands, possibly even tens of thousands, of Sooty Terns and Brown Noddies, and hundreds of Magnificent Frigatebirds. The Dry Tortugas also host the only Masked Booby breeding colony in the ABA area, and there is a reasonable chance to see Bridled Tern around Garden Key, as well as Brown Booby and Audubon's Shearwater en route. We even have a chance, if we're really lucky, to run into a tropicbird on the way, or find a very rare Black Noddy mixed in with its larger, browner congeners. Of course, while the seabird spectacle is a guaranteed highlight, we will also hope for some good migration activity. The number of migrant landbirds stopping here can be truly mindboggling, and even if there isn't a fallout, there are typically a few migrants around, so we'll explore the small area of appropriate habitat around Fort Jefferson, in addition to holding some seabird vigils.

Ft. Myers area — Our time here will depend on how much time we've spent birding en route from the Keys, or at Babcock-Webb during our morning there. We will visit a remnant patch of Florida scrub that is now intermixed through a suburban neighborhood, and we will try to get to a coastal location such as Marco Island to look for some shorebirds and waders. Some of the targets here will include Florida Scrub-Jay, Burrowing Owl, Reddish Egret, Wilson's Plover, perhaps a Snowy Plover, and whatever lingering shorebird migrants we turn up.

Fred C. Babcock/Cecil M. Webb WMA — Usually shortened to “Babcock-Webb”, this will be one of the highlight mornings of the trip, as we’ll spend dawn listening to the southern piney woods awaken. The star of the show this morning will be, we hope, Red-cockaded Woodpecker, and we also stand a reasonable chance of connecting with Bachman’s Sparrow, Brown-headed Nuthatch, and some of the more widespread denizens of the area, including Pine Warblers and Red-headed Woodpeckers, as well as the pale-eyed *alleni* subspecies of Eastern Towhee.

Wakodahatchee Wetlands— Wakodahatchee Wetlands is a man-made wetland in Delray Beach, north of Miami, that is sustained by reclaimed water. Over the 20 years the reserve has been open, it has become one of the premier destinations to see waterbirds up close and personal. A loop boardwalk will take us out over the marsh, through several islands of breeding waterbirds. The most conspicuous highlight will be the in-our-face Wood Stork colony that we’ll almost be able to touch, but there will also be breeding Least Bitterns, Tricolored Herons, Black-necked Stilts, and Purple Gallinules (in one of the best places to get smashing views of this species), among others. It’s also been one of the only sites in Florida where Neotropic Cormorant has been seen regularly over the past few years. It’s a special place.



The Florida population of Snail Kite is endangered because of modification of the wetlands upon which it depends. We’ll find these iconic birds in the wetlands near Orlando. Photograph by guide Doug Gochfeld.

Itinerary for Florida

Day 1, Sat, 9 May. Arrive in Miami. Meet at our hotel at 6:00 PM for dinner and orientation. Night in Miami.

Day 2, Sun, 10 May. Miami to Key West. Our first full day will see us driving down the Florida Keys, all the way to Key West. We have most of the day to make this 4-hour drive, so we will make multiple birding stops, potentially including our first attempts to see Mangrove Cuckoo, Black-whiskered Vireo, breeding Cave Swallows, and other South Florida denizens. We may have an opportunity to search for any known rarities along the route. If the weather is cooperative, we may take an evening outing to attempt to see (and hear!) Antillean Nighthawk. Night in Key West.

Day 3, Mon, 11 May. Birding the Lower Keys. We’ll bird our way down to Key West today, remaining flexible as weather and migration conditions warrant. One goal is Zachary Taylor State Park in Key West, and we may also hit some shorebird spots today, or search for species we may not have tracked down yet, like Mangrove Cuckoo, before retiring at a reasonable hour for a good night’s sleep before tomorrow’s boat ride. Night in Key West.

Day 4, Tue, 12 May. Dry Tortugas. We will wake up early for our day trip to Fort Jefferson on Garden Key in the Dry Tortugas. The boat ride takes about two hours, and conditions can vary from smooth as glass to quite choppy. The boat will be trying to get there as quickly as possible, rather than as comfortably as possible. We may see marine life such as Loggerhead Sea Turtle along the way and, if we’re lucky, Audubon’s Shearwater or other seabirds. Once at Fort Jefferson, we will have about 4 hours to explore and bird the fort. There is a colony of tens of thousands each of Sooty Tern and Brown Noddy, and hundreds of Magnificent Frigatebirds, and this spectacle will keep us entertained, even if the

migration action is slow. Migrant landbirds can be anywhere around the fort, and we will be searching all accessible corners for them. If you choose, there will be opportunities for other activities as well, such as taking a guided tour of the fort focusing on the history, rather than the birds. The boat ride back affords the same potential animal sightings as the ride out, and we should get back to Key West a bit after 5 PM. If we still haven't seen Antillean Nighthawk, we will have a second chance this evening, weather permitting. Night in Key West.

Day 5, Wed, 13 May. Key West to Homestead/Everglades. We will leave Key West early, and bird our way up the Keys, cleaning up local specialties we may not yet have connected with. We will likely arrive in the Homestead area around lunchtime, and then will likely head down into Everglades National Park, where we will enjoy one of the ecological icons of the United States, while hoping for some breeding waterbirds at close range, and perhaps even tracking down an American Crocodile, West Indian Manatee, or Shiny Cowbird if we're fortunate! Night in Homestead.



The Wood Stork population is doing well in Florida, thanks to protection, and efforts to restore wetlands such as the Everglades. We'll have a chance to see these impressive birds at a breeding colony. Photograph by guide Doug Gochfeld.

Day 6, Thu, 14 May. Homestead/Everglades to Marco Island. Our morning itinerary will depend on how the previous day went and what is being seen locally, and at some point we will drive across Tamiami Trail, through the Big Cypress preserve, where Alligators will be abundant, arriving along the west coast of Florida around midday, with enough time to track down and enjoy the hilarious antics of Burrowing Owls before continuing north. Night in Fort Myers.

Day 7, Fri, 15 May. Babcock Webb & Ft. Myers. This morning, we will bird the southern piney woods of Babcock-Webb WMA. Our main prizes here are Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Brown-headed Nuthatch, and if we're lucky, Bachman's Sparrow. After we have enjoyed the pineywoods for the morning, we'll be able to look for some other regional specialties, most notably Florida Scrub-Jay. In addition to the Scrub-Jay, other specialties we may be able to look for are Short-tailed Hawk, Snowy Plover, and Wilson's Plover. Night in Fort Myers.

Day 8, Sat, 16 May. Ft. Myers to Palm Beach County. We will leave the morning's activity open, depending on local wetland conditions, weather, and what targets we still have left to see. After waking bright and early, we will either do some final birding on the west coast, or shoot straight to the east, either picking up some species we still haven't seen, or hastening onward to enjoy more birding north of Miami. We will end with an evening at the Wakodahatchee Wetlands, an absolute jewel where we will be able to see all kinds of breeding waterbirds, such as Wood Stork, Anhinga, Tricolored Heron, and very cooperative Purple Gallinules. This will also be one of our best shots for Least Bittern. Night in Boynton Beach.

Day 9, Sun, 17 May. Birding the West Palm Beach area. We'll spend the day birding between Palm Beach County and the Miami area, and the exact plan will depend on what we haven't seen, what has been recently seen in the area, and what the weather conditions allow. Depending on access, we may spend some of the morning at Arthur R. Marshall

Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, where more Snail Kites could be on the menu. We will have our farewell dinner tonight at a Miami restaurant. Night in Miami.

Day 10, Mon, 18 May. Departure Day. We will say *bon voyage* to Florida. You can book your passage home for any time today.

About Your Guides

Doug Gochfeld was born and raised in Brooklyn, NY, and his interest in birds was sparked at a young age, in part by his father. This interest soon spiraled into a full-blown obsession for Doug for a few years before he abruptly shelved it, in favor of baseball, for several adolescent years. He picked up his interest in birds again in College and once again became a dedicated/obsessed birder. For several years before starting to lead a full slate of tours for Field Guides in 2016, he traveled extensively as a working birder. These field jobs have included multiple seasons monitoring migration at the legendary migration hotspots of Cape May, New Jersey, and Eilat in Israel. He also guided on St. Paul Island, in Alaska's Pribilof Islands, for parts of four years.

"Doug's enthusiasm, skill and tenacity at finding birds is amazing. He clearly loves showing birds to people - be it a common or not so common bird". D. S. Colorado Grouse

Doug is a Leica Pro Staff member, and he has been a regular leader at birding festivals in Texas, Ohio, Florida, New Mexico, and Virginia. He has worked in Alaska, Suriname, and Brazil studying the breeding and wintering ecology of shorebirds, which hold a special place in his heart. His strongest interests in birding are migration, vagrancy, and patterns of distribution, and he's always excited to share his enthusiasm in, and knowledge of, these subjects and much more on his tours, whether close to home or halfway around the world.

A **second guide** will be added as tour size warrants.

Visit <https://fieldguides.com/guides> for Doug's complete tour schedule; just click on his photo.

Financial Information

FEE: \$3550 from Miami

DEPOSIT: \$350 per person

FINAL PAYMENT DUE: January 10, 2020

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional): \$675

LIMIT: 14

Other Things You Need to Know

TOUR MANAGER: The manager for this tour is Christine Boilard. Christine will be happy to assist you in preparing for the tour. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call her!

ACCOMMODATIONS: We will stay in comfortable Holiday Inn Express-style accommodations in all areas throughout the tour.

AIR ARRANGEMENTS: Please plan to arrive at the Miami airport on Day 1 no later than 4:00 pm. You may depart at any time on Day 10.

Field Guides is a full-service travel agency and your tour manager will be happy to assist you with flights to join this tour. Field Guides does not charge a service fee for these services to clients booking a tour. However, we understand that tech-savvy clients often prefer to shop online or that you may wish to use mileage to purchase tickets. Regardless of which method you choose, your tour manager will be happy to provide assistance regarding ticket prices and schedules, along with rental cars and extra hotel nights as needed.

Please be sure to check with your tour manager prior to purchasing your ticket to make sure the flights you have chosen will work well with the tour itinerary and that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. Once purchased, most

airline tickets are non-refundable and carry a penalty to change. Field Guides cannot be responsible for these fees. **Also, it is imperative that we receive a copy of your comprehensive flight itinerary—including any and all flights not covered in the tour fee—so that we may track you in the event of missed connections, delays, or other mishaps.**

LUGGAGE: Please be aware that many airlines have recently modified their luggage policies and are charging additional fees for checked bags. Updates could easily occur before your departure, so you may wish to contact your airline to verify the policy. Additional charges for bags on any flights, whether these are covered by the tour fee or not, will be the client's responsibility.

TOUR INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS: The **tour fee** is \$3550 for one person in double occupancy from Miami. It includes all lodging from Day 1 through Day 9, all meals from dinner on Day 1 through breakfast on Day 10, all ground transportation, entrance fees, and the guide services of the tour leader(s). Tipping at group meals and for drivers, porters, and local guides is included in your tour fee and will be handled for the group by your Field Guides leader(s). However, if you would like to recognize your Field Guides leader(s) or any local guide(s) for exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are optional and not expected.

The above fee does not include your airfare to and from Miami, airport taxes, any checked or carry-on baggage charges imposed by the airlines, any alcoholic beverages, optional tips to local drivers, phone calls, laundry, or other items of a personal nature.

The **single supplement** for the tour is \$675. If you do not have a roommate but wish to share, we will try to pair you with a roommate from the tour; but if none is available, you will be billed for the single supplement. Our tour fees are based on double occupancy; one-half the cost of a double room is priced into the tour fee. The single supplement is calculated by taking the actual cost of a single room and subtracting one-half the cost of a double room (plus any applicable taxes).

TOUR LIMITS: Our limits are firm and we don't exceed the limit by one to accommodate a couple when only one space remains open. However, on occasion, we will send along a guide in training on a tour. In these cases, one seat in the van or bus will be taken by the guide in training. Our guides will have a rotation system within the vehicle so that clients share the inconvenience equally. We hope this minor inconvenience will be more than offset by the advantages of having another guide along.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, complete the Registration/Release and Indemnity form and return it with a **deposit of \$350** per person. If registering by phone, a deposit must be received within fourteen days, or the space will be released. **Full payment** of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to departure, or **by January 10, 2020. We will bill you for the final payment at either 120 days or when the tour has reached sufficient subscription to operate, whichever date comes later.** Since the cost of your trip insurance and airline tickets is generally non-refundable, please do not finalize these purchases until you have received final billing for the tour or have been advised that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate by your tour manager.

SMOKING: Almost all of our clients prefer a smoke-free environment. If you smoke, please be sensitive to the group and refrain from smoking at meals, in vehicles, and in proximity to the group on trails and elsewhere.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Refund of deposit and payment, less \$100 handling fee, will be made if cancellation is received up to 120 days before departure. If cancellation occurs between 119 and 70 days before the departure date, 50% of the tour fee is refundable. Thereafter, all deposits and payments are not refundable.

This policy only applies to payments made to Field Guides for tour fees (and any services included in those fees). Airline tickets not included in the tour fee and purchased separately often carry penalties for cancellation or change, or are sometimes totally non-refundable. Additionally, if you take out trip insurance the cost of the insurance is not refundable so it is best to purchase the policy just prior to making full payment for the tour or at the time you purchase airline tickets, depending upon the airlines restrictions.

The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute in case of emergency another guide for the original one.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EMERGENCY INSURANCE: We strongly recommend you consider purchasing trip cancellation (including medical emergency) insurance to cover your investment in case of injury or illness to you or your

family prior to or during a trip. Because we must remit early (and substantial) tour deposits to our suppliers, we cannot offer any refund when cancellation occurs within 70 days of departure, and only a partial refund from 70 to 119 days prior to departure (see CANCELLATION POLICY). In addition, the Department of State strongly urges Americans to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and if it will cover emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation. US medical insurance plans seldom cover health costs incurred outside the United States unless supplemental coverage is purchased. Furthermore, US Medicare and Medicaid programs do not provide payment for medical services outside the United States.

When making a decision regarding health insurance, Americans should consider that many foreign doctors and hospitals require payment in cash prior to providing service and that a medical evacuation to the United States may cost well in excess of \$50,000. Uninsured travelers who require medical care overseas often face extreme difficulties. When consulting with your insurer prior to your trip, please ascertain whether payment will be made to the overseas healthcare provider or whether you will be reimbursed later for expenses that you incur.

US citizens will receive from us a brochure regarding optional tour cancellation/emergency medical insurance. Our agent, CSA, will insure for trip cancellation and interruption, medical coverage, travel delay, baggage loss and delay, 24-hour accident protection, and emergency medical transportation. If you purchase the insurance when making final payment for the tour, and cover all non-refundable parts of the trip (including any non-refundable flights), pre-existing conditions are covered. The CSA brochure includes a contact number; you may also purchase your CSA policy on-line by visiting our website at www.fieldguides.com/travelinsurance.htm and clicking the link to CSA. **Currently we are unable to offer CSA insurance policies to residents of New York and Hawaii.** We have had clients provide positive feedback after acquiring insurance with InsureMyTrip (www.insuremytrip.com) in the past, and would suggest that company as an alternative. Please let us know if you have any questions about this. Please note, once the insurance is purchased it is non-refundable, so please check with your tour manager prior to making the purchase to assure the tour will operate as scheduled. Citizens of other countries are urged to consult their insurance broker.

RESPONSIBILITY: For and in consideration of the opportunity to participate in the tour, each tour participant and each parent or legal guardian of a tour participant who is under 18 agrees to release, indemnify, and hold harmless Field Guides Incorporated, its agents, servants, employees, shareholders, officers, directors, attorneys, and contractors as more fully set forth in the Release and Indemnity Agreement on the reverse side of the registration form. Field Guides Incorporated acts only as an agent for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, or other means, and assumes no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity caused by defect in such vehicles or for any reason whatsoever, including the acts, defaults, or bankruptcies of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. Field Guides Incorporated accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. The tour participant shall bear all such losses and expenses. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely.

Participants should be in good health and should consult a physician before undertaking a tour. If you have questions about the physical requirements of a tour, please contact our office for further information. Participants should prepare for the tour by reading the detailed itinerary, the information bulletin, and other pertinent matter provided by Field Guides. Each participant is responsible for bringing appropriate clothing and equipment as recommended in our bulletins.

THE RECEIPT OF YOUR TOUR DEPOSIT SHALL BE DEEMED TO BE CONSENT TO THE ABOVE CONDITIONS. EACH TOUR PARTICIPANT AND EACH PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN OF A TOUR PARTICIPANT WHO IS UNDER 18 SHALL SIGN AND DELIVER THE RELEASE AND INDEMNITY AGREEMENT AT THE TIME OF REGISTRATION.

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