

Trip Report — Florida 2025

April 26-May 5, 2025 with Doug Gochfeld & Sam Wilson



Babcock-Webb Wildlife Management area at sunrise. Photo by participant Chris Andrews.

South Florida is a vacation hub for many on the east coast, but the wildside of Florida is typically overlooked by vacationers and snowbirds. We birded many of the pock-marked reserves in developed area of the state, as well as the larger state and federally protected reserves like the world-famous Everglades, Babcock/Webb Wildlife Management area, and Dry Tortugas National Park in the Florida Keys.

We started our trip with a field breakfast at Blackpoint Marina outside Miami to try for Mangrove Cuckoo. Unfortunately, the cuckoos were quite uncooperative that morning, but we continued on to a few other patches of

mangroves and picked up Gray Kingbird, Pileated Woodpecker, Mottled Duck, and our first Limpkin. After moving up to Boyton Beach, we stopped at Green Cay Wetlands and Wakodahatchee Wetlands, two wetland reserves in Palm Beach County. These accessible urban wetlands were packed full of South Florida breeders. Delightful to see many baby Mottled Ducks, gallinules, and even a family of Least Bitterns learning how to climb around on the emergent reeds! Doug spotted a roosting Eastern Screech Owl, and shortly after we were treated to a Florida Softshell turtle, rarely seen out of the water, excavating potential nest holes in the palm forest.



Black-whiskered Vireo is a Florida specialty we saw well on several occasions in the Keys.
Photo by guide Sam Wilson.

Loxahatchee NWR was our first stop the next morning for a sunrise vigil. A gorgeous start to the day was punctuated by the sounds of the upper Everglades and watching hundreds of waders commuting from their roosts, including our estimate of about 190 Roseate Spoonbills. Our eastern Florida

exploration complete, we headed west across the agricultural region with large stormwater management areas just under the lip of the great Lake Okeechobee. We stopped at Sem-Chi Rice Mill and spent some time with a suite of shorebirds feeding in the flooded fields, including Black-necked Stilts, Black-bellied Plovers, Long-billed Dowitchers, a good showing of Stilt Sandpipers, and more. Further along, a known breeding colony of Cave Swallows adjacent to the highway was very active, allowing us close views and study. We capped the day on the outskirts of Ft. Myers at Harn's Marsh with some spectacular viewing of six Snail Kites hunting in a partially drained canal, flying directly over our heads on several occasions. Our first Swallow-tailed Kites of the trip made a graceful appearance as well.



A Common Gallinule mother feeds a young chick at Green Cay Wetlands. Photo by guide Sam Wilson.

The next morning was an early rise to get to the fantastic Babcock-Webb WMA, critical burn-dependent, upland pine habitat that has almost completely disappeared from South Florida. Predawn, we had several

Chuck-will's-widows flying in the spotlight near the entry area and Common Nighthawks flying around continuing their activities into the morning. We even watched one nighthawk land to roost on a pine after the sun broke the horizon. We aced the target birds specializing in southeastern pine forests, spotting the federally endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker near nestholes and getting fantastic views. We also had Red-headed Woodpecker, Brown-headed Nuthatches, Pine Warbler, a surprise Yellow-billed Cuckoo, and Bachman's Sparrows. These sparrows can be quite cryptic for most of the year when they are not singing, but we managed great open views of a pair above the saw palmettos. Late morning, we were able to turn up a few Florida Scrub-Jays in a neighborhood north of Ft. Myers, an interesting endemic far removed geographically from its Scrub-Jay cousins out west. It was nice to run into a couple of Gopher Tortoises having seen their recently excavated burrows around. Studies show they are a great keystone species; their burrows providing shelter for over 360 species.



Bachman's Sparrow is a tricky south-eastern pine forest bird we saw super well! Photo by participant Chris Andrews.

Everglades National Park was our destination after departing Ft. Myers, but we first stopped at Eagle Lakes Community park to see Bronzed Cowbird and an obligatory stop to see the unique Florida Burrowing Owl subspecies, on Marco Island. Marco is a surprising stronghold for these endearing creatures because of its notable lack of natural habitat, having been almost completely built out. The local populace has taken to providing yard space for these owls now that most vacant lots have been developed. Many people dig holes and provide perches in an attempt to attract the owls. Once a pair has set up shop, the burrow is roped off and protected by local and Florida Fish and Wildlife laws. Spring is a great time to see these owls when the owlets are popping up out of the burrows!

We stopped at Big Cypress National Preserve to see some close up gators before making our way across the glades to Homestead. Our evening excursion was quite fruitful in the ag fields near the Everglades Park entrance, with a rare Shiny Cowbird, Eastern Meadowlarks, and a nice flock of about 250 Bobolinks in their full breeding dress. Continuing on in beautiful light along Research Road in the park, we observed many shorebirds and waders. As the sun fell, Common Nighthawks and Chuck-wills-widows announced their presence.



A pretty wild seen unfolded at a local park near the northern Everglades, with American Crows raiding Starling nests! Photo by guide Sam Wilson.

One of the specialties of Everglades National Park is the Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow; the only road accessible sites are on the park road out to Flamingo. We hit the right spots and eventually got two in scopes for nice viewing. Paurotis Pond surprised us with 7 White-crowned Pigeons, typically much more common in the keys. Flamingo campground marks the end of the road and we were able to do some good birding and wildlife watching there. The highlight for many was very close West Indian Manatees off the docks at the marina and a Great White Heron (South Florida form of Great Blue Heron).

Onward to the keys we had lunch on the water on Key Largo, and traveled the overseas highway, stopping for shorebirds, migrating Broad-winged Hawks, Magnificent Frigatebirds and Reddish Egrets.



Guides and participants alike were excited to see a couple of young Least Bitterns creeping around in a wetland reed bed. Typically, these birds are pretty cryptic! Photo by guide Sam Wilson.

Key West is an amazing historical and cultural destination itself, but the birding can also be fantastic on the lower keys during migration. Ft. Zachery Historic Park is a has been active since before the Civil War, and now helps to provide some critical habitat for weary migrants. We had a little more than a dozen warblers, Black-whiskered Vireos, Gray Kingbirds, White-crowned Pigeons, and some really nice flyby Roseate Terns over the beachfront. The afternoon at the Botanic Gardens caught us up with a few more warblers. We would have been remiss not to exploit the excellent food in the keys, having lunch at a famous Cuban place and dinners with excellent seafood fare.

That evening we drove a short distance to Boca Chica Key and enjoyed the evening light on shorebirds like Wilson's Plover, Short-billed Dowitcher, Willets, and White-rumped Sandpipers. After dark, we had several calling Antillean Nighthawks, another nice trip target in the books.



Migrant warblers were in abundance at Ft. Zachery Taylor State Park in Key West. Photo by participant Lou Fleischhauer.

The penultimate day, we took the Yankee Freedom out 70 miles further away west from Key West to a birding hotspot everyone should visit at least once in their lifetime, Dry Tortugas National Park. The ocean crossing wasn't very notable but we did start seeing some tropical terns as we reached the halfway mark. Upon landing we were greeted by the chattering terns of three tropical species; Bridled Tern, Sooty Tern, and Brown Noddy, though the latter two made up the vast majority of the colonies on Bush Key. The terns at this location are protected by fencing, but so accustomed to people you can walk right up to them which makes for a really intimate experience. During the 4 hour tour of the island, we also had a variety of migrant warblers coming to the only water source on the island, shorebirds, hawks, and three species of Booby! We capped off a walk to the top of the fort with nice views of a North American rarity, a Black Noddy, our fourth tropical tern for the island!



An evening at Boca Chica Key was highlighted by a nice variety of shorebirds at close range. Short-billed Dowitchers are the more typical dowitcher in coastal habitats. Photo by guide Sam Wilson.

We would like to thank all the participants on this great trip for sticking through some hot Florida spring weather and the occasional downpour! Great seafood, turquoise waters, and quirky Key West, rounds out this quirky coastal gem of the south.

You can see my complete trip report on eBird at this link: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/443882>

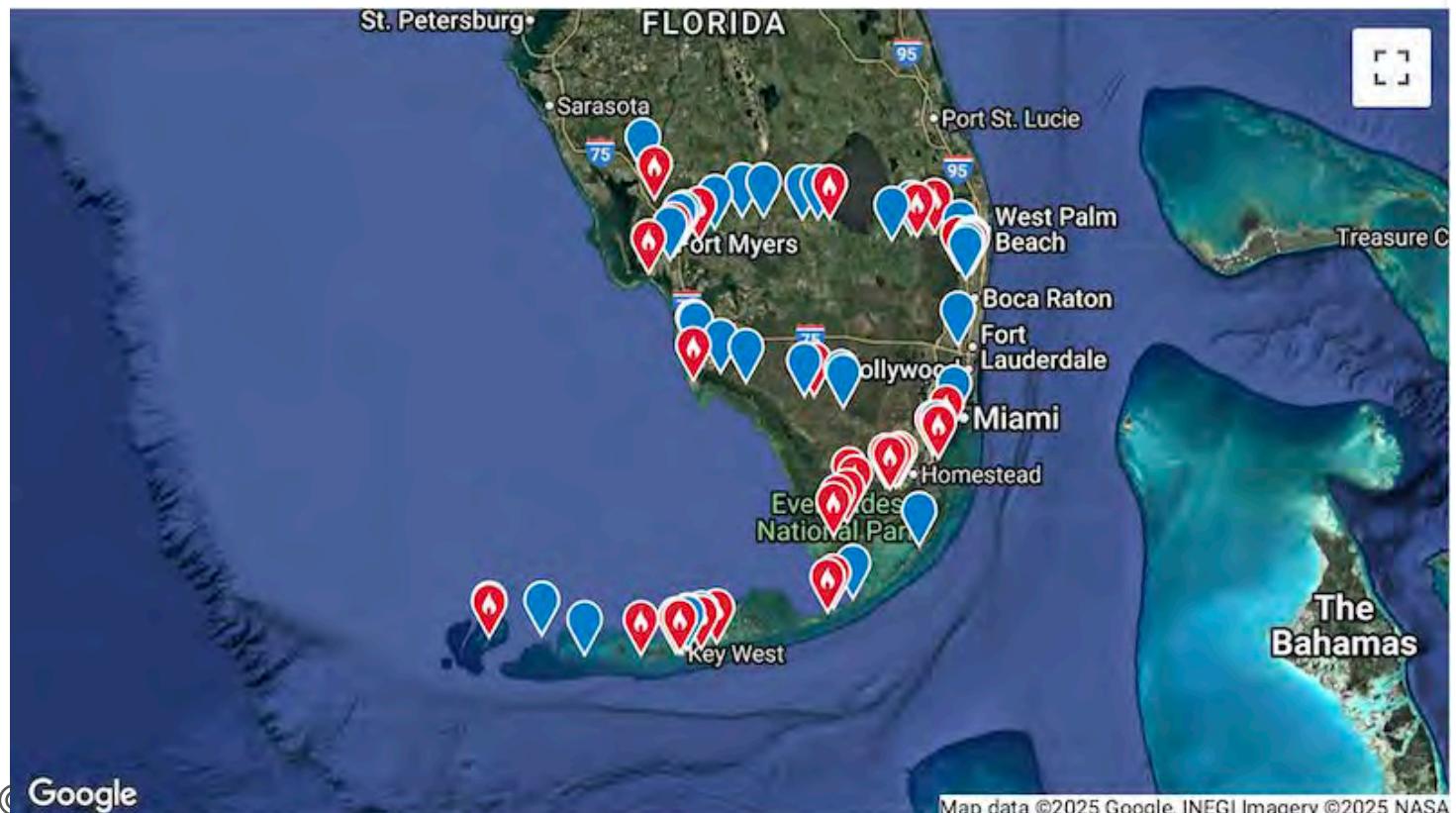
You can download a combined PDF of this page and the eBird report at this link: <https://fieldguides.com/triplists/fla25TRIPLIST.pdf>

-- Sam Wilson



Field Guides Birding Tours—Florida, 2025 (with Doug Gochfeld and Sam Wilson)

27 Apr – 4 May 2025 (8 days) Link-only



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Florida, United States

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162

Species Observed

72

Checklists

LIFERS  2 

Species Observed

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78	Black-bellied Whistling-Duck	<i>Dendrocygna autumnalis</i>	 6
4	Fulvous Whistling-Duck	<i>Dendrocygna bicolor</i>	 1
4	Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i> *	 2
10	Muscovy Duck	<i>Cairina moschata</i> *	 3
13	Wood Duck	<i>Aix sponsa</i>	 2
38	Mottled Duck	<i>Anas fulvigula</i>	 10
6	Northern Bobwhite	<i>Colinus virginianus</i>	 1
47	Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i> *	 5
44	White-crowned Pigeon	<i>Patagioenas leucocephala</i>	 6

91	Eurasian Collared-Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	*	►	27
5	Common Ground Dove	<i>Columbina passerina</i>		►	4
22	White-winged Dove	<i>Zenaida asiatica</i>		►	8
127	Mourning Dove	<i>Zenaida macroura</i>		►	28
3	Yellow-billed Cuckoo	<i>Coccyzus americanus</i>		►	3
26	Common Nighthawk	<i>Chordeiles minor</i>		►	5
6	Antillean Nighthawk	<i>Chordeiles gundlachii</i>	✓	►	1
13	Chuck-will's-widow	<i>Antrostomus carolinensis</i>		►	2
5	Chimney Swift	<i>Chaetura pelasgica</i>		►	4
5	Clapper Rail	<i>Rallus crepitans</i>		►	2
203	Common Gallinule	<i>Gallinula galeata</i>		►	6
26	American Coot	<i>Fulica americana</i>		►	4
7	Purple Gallinule	<i>Porphyrio martinica</i>		►	4
14	Gray-headed Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio poliocephalus</i>	*	►	3
8	Limpkin	<i>Aramus guarauna</i>		►	5
7	Sandhill Crane	<i>Antigone canadensis</i>		►	3
74	Black-necked Stilt	<i>Himantopus mexicanus</i>		►	4
25	American Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra americana</i>		►	1
8	American Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus palliatus</i>		►	1
129	Black-bellied Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>		►	6

23	Killdeer <i>Charadrius vociferus</i>	►  11
75	Semipalmated Plover <i>Charadrius semipalmatus</i>	►  4
6	Wilson's Plover <i>Anarhynchus wilsonia</i>	►  1
48	Short-billed Dowitcher <i>Limnodromus griseus</i>	►  3
60	Long-billed Dowitcher <i>Limnodromus scolopaceus</i>	►  1
4	Spotted Sandpiper <i>Actitis macularius</i>	►  2
13	Solitary Sandpiper <i>Tringa solitaria</i>	►  6
95	Lesser Yellowlegs <i>Tringa flavipes</i>	►  2
7	Willet <i>Tringa semipalmata</i>	►  4
8	Greater Yellowlegs <i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>	►  3
80	Ruddy Turnstone <i>Arenaria interpres</i>	►  3
40	Stilt Sandpiper <i>Calidris himantopus</i>	►  1
8	Sanderling <i>Calidris alba</i>	►  3
3	Dunlin <i>Calidris alpina</i>	►  1
2	White-rumped Sandpiper <i>Calidris fuscicollis</i>	►  1
280	Least Sandpiper <i>Calidris minutilla</i>	►  6
22	Semipalmated Sandpiper <i>Calidris pusilla</i>	►  2
179	Laughing Gull <i>Leucophaeus atricilla</i>	►  18
1	American Herring Gull <i>Larus smithsonianus</i>	►  1
715	Brown Noddy <i>Anous stolidus</i>	►  2

2	Black Noddy <i>Anous minutus</i>	►  1
1159	Sooty Tern <i>Onychoprion fuscatus</i>	►  3
12	Bridled Tern <i>Onychoprion anaethetus</i> 	►  3
109	Least Tern <i>Sternula antillarum</i>	►  9
1	Gull-billed Tern <i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>	►  1
2	Caspian Tern <i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	►  1
12	Roseate Tern <i>Sterna dougallii</i>	►  2
1	Sandwich Tern <i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	►  1
13	Royal Tern <i>Thalasseus maximus</i>	►  9
6	Pied-billed Grebe <i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>	►  4
16	Sargasso Shearwater <i>Puffinus lherminieri</i>	►  2
712	Wood Stork <i>Mycteria americana</i>	►  11
831	Magnificent Frigatebird <i>Fregata magnificens</i>	►  12
1	Red-footed Booby <i>Sula sula</i>	►  1
1	Brown Booby <i>Sula leucogaster</i>	►  1
125	Masked Booby <i>Sula dactylatra</i>	►  2
84	Anhinga <i>Anhinga anhinga</i>	►  13
118	Double-crested Cormorant <i>Nannopterum auritum</i>	►  13
209	White Ibis <i>Eudocimus albus</i>	►  28
77	Glossy Ibis <i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	►  9

215	Roseate Spoonbill <i>Platalea ajaja</i>	►  3
6	Least Bittern <i>Botaurus exilis</i>	►  2
2	Yellow-crowned Night Heron <i>Nyctanassa violacea</i>	►  2
33	Black-crowned Night Heron <i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	►  4
47	Little Blue Heron <i>Egretta caerulea</i>	►  10
63	Tricolored Heron <i>Egretta tricolor</i>	►  12
3	Reddish Egret <i>Egretta rufescens</i>	►  2
54	Snowy Egret <i>Egretta thula</i>	►  11
36	Green Heron <i>Butorides virescens</i>	►  15
65	Western Cattle-Egret <i>Ardea ibis</i>	►  11
90	Great Egret <i>Ardea alba</i>	►  16
30	Great Blue Heron <i>Ardea herodias</i>	►  14
1	American White Pelican <i>Pelecanus erythrorhynchos</i>	►  1
38	Brown Pelican <i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>	►  9
40	Black Vulture <i>Coragyps atratus</i>	►  7
87	Turkey Vulture <i>Cathartes aura</i>	►  23
34	Osprey <i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	►  17
17	Swallow-tailed Kite <i>Elanoides forficatus</i>	►  12
3	Sharp-shinned Hawk <i>Accipiter striatus</i>	►  1
6	Bald Eagle <i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	►  4

6	Snail Kite <i>Rostrhamus sociabilis</i>	►  1
6	Broad-winged Hawk <i>Buteo platypterus</i>	►  2
13	Red-shouldered Hawk <i>Buteo lineatus</i>	►  11
1	Red-tailed Hawk <i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	►  1
1	Eastern Screech-Owl <i>Megascops asio</i>	►  1
5	Burrowing Owl <i>Athene cunicularia</i>	►  1
2	Red-headed Woodpecker <i>Melanerpes erythrocephalus</i>	►  1
42	Red-bellied Woodpecker <i>Melanerpes carolinus</i>	►  18
6	Downy Woodpecker <i>Dryobates pubescens</i>	►  4
4	Red-cockaded Woodpecker <i>Leuconotopicus borealis</i>	►  1
8	Pileated Woodpecker <i>Dryocopus pileatus</i>	►  7
12	Northern Flicker <i>Colaptes auratus</i>	►  6
2	Crested Caracara <i>Caracara plancus</i>	►  2
2	Merlin <i>Falco columbarius</i>	►  1
10	Monk Parakeet <i>Myiopsitta monachus</i> *	►  1
29	Great Crested Flycatcher <i>Myiarchus crinitus</i>	►  12
1	Eastern Kingbird <i>Tyrannus tyrannus</i>	►  1
32	Gray Kingbird <i>Tyrannus dominicensis</i>	►  10
1	Scissor-tailed Flycatcher <i>Tyrannus forficatus</i>	►  1
12	White-eyed Vireo <i>Vireo griseus</i>	►  5

7	Black-whiskered Vireo <i>Vireo altiloquus</i>	▶  2
13	Loggerhead Shrike <i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>	▶  7
38	Blue Jay <i>Cyanocitta cristata</i>	▶  10
3	Florida Scrub-Jay <i>Aphelocoma coerulescens</i>	▶  1
41	American Crow <i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>	▶  6
44	Fish Crow <i>Corvus ossifragus</i>	▶  18
2	Tufted Titmouse <i>Baeolophus bicolor</i>	▶  1
256	Tree Swallow <i>Tachycineta bicolor</i>	▶  7
142	Purple Martin <i>Progne subis</i>	▶  5
2	Northern Rough-winged Swallow <i>Stelgidopteryx serripennis</i>	▶  1
24	Barn Swallow <i>Hirundo rustica</i>	▶  7
75	Cave Swallow <i>Petrochelidon fulva</i>	▶  2
1	Brown-headed Nuthatch <i>Sitta pusilla</i>	▶  1
2	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher <i>Polioptila caerulea</i>	▶  2
6	Carolina Wren <i>Thryothorus ludovicianus</i>	▶  3
50	European Starling <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> *	▶  14
14	Common Myna <i>Acridotheres tristis</i> *	▶  6
1	Gray Catbird <i>Dumetella carolinensis</i>	▶  1
1	Brown Thrasher <i>Toxostoma rufum</i>	▶  1
84	Northern Mockingbird <i>Mimus polyglottos</i>	▶  28

4	Eastern Bluebird <i>Sialia sialis</i>	►  1
17	House Sparrow <i>Passer domesticus</i> *	►  5
3	Bachman's Sparrow <i>Peucaea aestivalis</i>	►  1
2	Seaside Sparrow <i>Ammospiza maritima</i>	►  1
1	Savannah Sparrow <i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>	►  1
3	Eastern Towhee <i>Pipilo erythrophthalmus</i>	►  2
252	Bobolink <i>Dolichonyx oryzivorus</i>	►  2
40	Eastern Meadowlark <i>Sturnella magna</i>	►  5
286	Red-winged Blackbird <i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>	►  24
1	Shiny Cowbird <i>Molothrus bonariensis</i>	►  1
2	Bronzed Cowbird <i>Molothrus aeneus</i>	►  2
21	Brown-headed Cowbird <i>Molothrus ater</i>	►  5
65	Common Grackle <i>Quiscalus quiscula</i>	►  18
232	Boat-tailed Grackle <i>Quiscalus major</i>	►  29
2	Ovenbird <i>Seiurus aurocapilla</i>	►  2
7	Northern Waterthrush <i>Parkesia noveboracensis</i>	►  4
9	Black-and-white Warbler <i>Mniotilla varia</i>	►  3
16	Common Yellowthroat <i>Geothlypis trichas</i>	►  6
1	Hooded Warbler <i>Setophaga citrina</i>	►  1
52	American Redstart <i>Setophaga ruticilla</i>	►  5

39	Cape May Warbler	<i>Setophaga tigrina</i>	▶	5
22	Northern Parula	<i>Setophaga americana</i>	▶	6
3	Magnolia Warbler	<i>Setophaga magnolia</i>	▶	2
18	Blackpoll Warbler	<i>Setophaga striata</i>	▶	4
17	Black-throated Blue Warbler	<i>Setophaga caerulescens</i>	▶	3
23	Palm Warbler	<i>Setophaga palmarum</i>	▶	3
3	Pine Warbler	<i>Setophaga pinus</i>	▶	2
4	Yellow-rumped Warbler	<i>Setophaga coronata</i>	▶	3
9	Prairie Warbler	<i>Setophaga discolor</i>	▶	7
67	Northern Cardinal	<i>Cardinalis cardinalis</i>	▶	22
2	Indigo Bunting	<i>Passerina cyanea</i>	▶	2

EXOTIC: PROVISIONAL

16	Indian Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>	✳	▶	1
5	Red Junglefowl	<i>Gallus gallus</i>	✳	▶	2

EXOTIC: ESCAPEE

2	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✳	▶	1
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ADDITIONAL TAXA

1	Mallard/Mottled Duck	<i>Anas platyrhynchos/fulvigula</i>	▶	1
2	nighthawk sp.	<i>Chordeiles sp.</i>	▶	1
8	Short-billed/Long-billed Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus griseus/scolopaceus</i>	▶	1

13	Lesser/Greater Yellowlegs <i>Tringa flavipes/melanoleuca</i>	►  1
2	Sooty/Bridled Tern <i>Onychoprion fuscatus/anaethetus</i>	►  1
1	Common/Arctic Tern <i>Sterna hirundo/paradisaea</i>	►  1
10	tern sp. <i>Sterninae sp.</i>	►  1
1	booby sp. <i>Sula sp.</i>	►  1
8	heron sp. <i>Ardeidae sp.</i>	►  1
25	white egret sp. <i>Egretta/Ardea sp.</i>	►  3
8	crow sp. <i>Corvus sp. (crow sp.)</i>	►  3
80	swallow sp. <i>Hirundinidae sp.</i>	►  3
1	blackbird sp. <i>Icteridae sp.</i>	►  1
9	new world warbler sp. <i>Parulidae sp.</i>	►  2
1	bird sp. <i>Aves sp.</i>	►  1