

BIRDING ON FLORIDA'S GULF COAST

Mike Higginson

My wife and I decided to take a late-winter vacation, so we headed down to Sanibel Island and the Gulf Coast's cooling breezes. It was the end of March 2000 and although it was a bit early for migration, we were able to see resident birds in good form.

The beach in front of our cottage yielded immediate results. Common, Sandwich, and Royal Terns (pictured) rested there, facing the wind as Brown Pelicans dove for meals just offshore. Sanderlings scurried, Willets walked, Red Knots reddened into breeding plumage, Ruddy Turnstones turned stones, and one Black-bellied Plover plaintively pouted. On Sunday we rested, but Monday found us at Ding Darling Refuge on Sanibel looking for wading birds. Low tide is best, but one can't be too choosy on vacation when time is limited. The five-mile drive offered us good views of herons, egrets, and ibis. Of particular interest were the Reddish Egret and the White Ibis (pictured below), both Florida specialties.

Across from Ding Darling is the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation Nature Center. There is a museum, bookstore, nursery, butterfly garden, and four miles of trails crossing marshes, thickets, hammocks, and the Sanibel River. There is also an observation tower that is a good vantage point over the entire area. There were Ospreys flying to nests with fish dangling from their claws, three sets of Pileated Woodpeckers building nests, an Anhinga sunning himself, a calling Carolina Wren, Palm Warblers in the canopy, a White Ibis feeding, Blue-winged Teal and Common Moorhens swimming, and Tree Swallows and Purple Martins doing acrobatics overhead.

Wednesday found me on Fort Myers Beach in front of the Holiday Inn. Between the hotel and the ocean is an inland lagoon stretching the entire length of the property and extending to the tip of the island. It is perfect habitat for shorebirds, wading birds, terns, gulls, and skimmers. It is also the spot where I saw my only Wilson's Plover some 10 years earlier. It is a long walk, but I did see my plover and Black Skimmer, as well as American Oystercatcher, Caspian Tern, Whimbrel, and other species previously seen.

Later that morning, we went to Corkscrew Swamp and walked the two-mile boardwalk through a variety of habitats, including the largest old-growth stand of bald cypresses in Florida. There were White-eyed Vireos singing, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers hunting, Wood Storks and Swallow-tailed Kites circling in the sky, and Red-shouldered Hawks screaming. We had our first migrating warblers, the Black-and-White and Northern Parula. There was a scope on the boardwalk trained on a sleeping Barred Owl, and Green Heron and Black-crowned Night Heron perched

over a pond filled with alligators. A Ruby-throated Hummingbird sipping from flowers in the butterfly garden rounded off this trip to Corkscrew.

The rest of the week was spent on the beach, where I spotted a Snowy Plover and a Magnificent Frigatebird. One more trip was made, to Cape Coral to see a colony of Burrowing Owls. Sadly, all six of the owls were seen perched on For Sale signs, as a housing development is pushing the owls out of their nesting area. Just another indication that our environmental work is never done.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Wendy Murbach

One of the wonderful perks that you get from an Audubon membership is the chance to be a part of your local Audubon Chapter, South Shore Audubon Society.

You are automatically a valued member of this active and friendly chapter, so please come out to the next meeting at the Freeport Library from 8-10 P.M. on the second Tuesday of the month to hear what you can do to help preserve your local environment's health and viability, to hear about local issues that you can help to solve, and to see an interesting program.

Whether you are a beginning birder or someone with a large life list, you will enjoy our weekly Sunday bird walks led by Elliott Kutner, birder extraordinaire. Check out the special events that are mentioned in this *Skimmer*. Attend them yourself, and bring your family and friends too.

You are warmly invited to be an active participant in this vibrant all-volunteer organization comprised of persons who, like you, care about the earth we live on, about our local environment, and about the creatures that live alongside us.

Our new members since the last *Skimmer* are:

Baldwin	Carl F. Benson, Lafayette Mc Daniel
Bellmore	Mr. Charles Beck, Della Pezzuto
Bethpage	Karen Capineri, Mary Mertz
East Norwich	William Stone
Farmingdale	Margaret Corbett
Floral Park	Eileen Daly, Jeffrey Goldberg
Franklin Square	Alphonse D'Angelo
Freeport	Vincent Gennaci
Garden City	Ruth Rapp
Glen Oaks	Lorraine V. French
Hempstead	M. Intrater
Hewlett	Jeffrey E. Jacobson
Hicksville	Val Cutajar, Mrs. Marguerite M. Hisen, Mary Manning, Ronald Mirabile
Island Park	Michael Gutman
Long Beach	Prabhakar Hosangara, Martha L. Yorgey
Lynbrook	Marina Landwersiek
Malverne	Jacqueline Villa

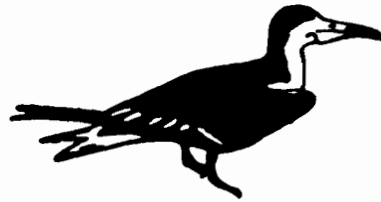


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