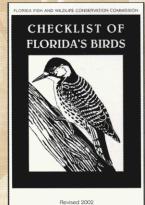
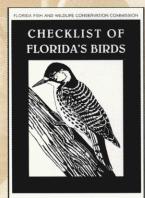
BIRDWATCHING IS FUN FOR ALL AGES

The whole family can enjoy birdwatching. Birding is easy and inexpensive, requiring little equipment, skill or physical fitness.

Use this guide to visit the many beautiful and unique natural areas in Florida that provide shelter and sustenance to hundreds of bird species. To help you keep track of this spectacular range of birdlife, be sure to pick up a Checklist of Florida's Birds. Available at official welcome centers, or request one online at:



www.floridaconservation.org



BIRDING FLORIDA

A GUIDE TO FLORIDA'S TOP BIRDING SPOTS



620 South Meridian Street TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA 32399







BIRDWATCHER'S PARADISE

lorida is a special place, a birder's paradise that provides year-round birdwatching opportunities. Our mild climate, geographic location and diverse habitats attract hundreds of bird species. More than 470 species occur here, including such sought-after sights as the rare Florida burrowing owl, Florida scrub-jay, snail kite and a wealth of wading birds. Whenever you visit, Florida birding has something to offer. Some species, like limpkins, occur here year-round, while others, like swallow-tailed kites and painted buntings come to Florida to raise their young in spring and summer. Other migratory species only pause to rest and feed before or after crossing the Gulf of Mexico in October and April.

GETTING STARTED

he sites featured in this guide represent some of the top birding spots in Florida. They were selected for their easy access and dependable birding. They are but a small sampling of the parks, preserves and natural areas where visitors can see the state's exceptional birdlife. The kind of birds you will see depends on the time of day and year, location and climate.

USING THIS GUIDE

se this guide to visit the many beautiful and unique natural areas in Florida that provide shelter and sustenance to hundreds of bird species. While days and hours of operation are listed, visitors are encouraged to call ahead before traveling to sites. To assist you in locating sites, a fold-out map is included in the back of this guide. Detailed maps are available at most of these sites.

1. GULF ISLANDS NATIONAL SEASHORE

Located at the tip of Santa Rosa Island, south of Pensacola, this park features beach, dune, coastal marsh, bayshore and scrubby upland habitats. The most dependable birding is found at the Fort Pickens area on Santa Rosa Island and the Naval Live Oaks area (visitor center and trail) located on the mainland near Gulf Breeze. At Fort Pickens, bird for migrant songbirds in the Battery Langdon and Battery Worth Picnic areas and along the trail that runs from the campground to the fort. At Naval Live Oaks, walk along Santa Rosa Sound for shorebirds.

Open year-round, fort and visitor center hours vary. 850-934-2600, www.nps.gov

2. ST. JOSEPH PENINSULA STATE PARK

Near Port St. Joe in the Florida panhandle, the Gulf of Mexico and St. Joseph Bay define the shoreline of this long and narrow state park. Tall dunes separate the beach from the inland pine flatwoods, sand pine scrub and wetland habitats. The northern end of the park is a 1,650-acre



wilderness zone. Two nature trails invite exploration. Park and bird at Eagle Harbor, a good vantage point for observing birds in the shallow bay. From March to April, brushy oaks in the campground and picnic areas are good for migrant songbirds. October is the best month to see raptors migrating up and down the peninsula. In the winter, gannets plunge offshore.

Open daily, 8 a.m. to sunset. 850-227-1327 www.floridastateparks.org

3. ST. GEORGE ISLAND STATE PARK

This narrow barrier island is surrounded by the Gulf of Mexico and Apalachicola Bay. About nine miles at the island's eastern end are designated as a state park, providing views of American oystercatchers year-round. In the spring, don't miss the Youth Camp – Boat Ramp area. It's a hotspot for migrant songbirds. In addition to beaches and dunes, the park protects salt marshes, small freshwater marshes and open pinewoods. Walk along the beach or take a three-hour, four-mile round trip hike along an unpaved road on the shallow bay side. The trail starts behind the campground.

Open daily, 8 a.m. to sunset. 850-927-2111 www.floridastateparks.org

4. OCHLOCKONEE RIVER STATE PARK

This peaceful park is situated at the confluence of the Ochlockonee and Dead rivers and Big Tide Creek, 10 miles from the Gulf coast. Longleaf pine flatwoods, oak thickets, marshes, and tidal river and creek provide productive birding. Easy walking trails through the pine flatwoods pass close by red-cockaded woodpecker cavity trees, which are marked with white bands. Rent a canoe for a quiet paddle



through tidal creeks. To view more extensive tracts of pine flatwoods and the world's largest population of red-cockaded woodpeckers, explore the nearby Apalachicola National Forest (call 850-926-3561 or 850-643-2282).

Open daily, 8 a.m. to sunset. 850-962-2771 www.floridastateparks.org



5. ST. MARKS NATIONAL WILDUFE REFLIGE

This large coastal refuge embraces extensive salt and brackish marshes, freshwater impoundments, rivers and creeks, hardwood swamps, pine flatwoods and pine/oak uplands. Impoundments host wading birds and shorebirds year-round, as well as winter populations of marbled godwits, snow geese and white pelicans. Purple gallinules can be seen year-round. The visitor center provides a good overview for first-time visitors. Purchase an interpretive driving guide here for Lighthouse Road, which runs for seven miles between the visitor center and the lighthouse on Apalachee Bay. The road provides many good birding spots. Four short trails also offer productive birding. Brown pelicans, cormorants, terns and gulls loaf year-round on remains of a pier near the lighthouse.

Open sunrise to sunset. 850-925-6121 www.recreation.gov

6. FORT CUNCH STATE PARK (GFBT GATEWAY SITE)

Fort Clinch is located at the north end of Amelia Island, Florida's northernmost Atlantic barrier island. Dominant habitats here include Atlantic beach, Cumberland Sound, the Amelia River and associated dune, salt marsh and coastal hammock. Painted buntings are colorful spring and summer visitors. Egans Creek marsh hosts waders such as wood storks, great egrets and great blue herons. Try the beach at the north end of the park for terns, gulls, skimmers, oystercatchers, plovers; the rock jetty is known for purple sandpipers in winter.

Open daily, 8 a.m. to sunset. 904-277-7274 www.floridastateparks.org

7. THE TALBOT ISLANDS STATE PARKS

Big Talbot and Little Talbot islands comprise the Talbot Islands State Parks, located approximately 17 miles north-

red ow

ourtesy of Florida State Parks

east of downtown Jacksonville. These coastal islands offer Atlantic beaches, tidal creeks, salt marshes, old dune ridges and coastal hammocks. Nature trails, canoe trails and campgrounds provide ample opportunity for birdwatching. For the best look at wading birds and shorebirds in the salt marsh, rent a canoe and paddle through a network of tidal creeks. Check coastal hammocks for spring and fall migrants and painted buntings in the spring and summer. Atlantic beaches like these are busy with raptors migrating down the dune line. Watch for peregrine falcons working shorebird flocks.

Open daily, 8 a.m. to sunset. 904-251-2320 www.floridastateparks.org

B. HUGUENOT MEMORIAL PARK

This busy beachside city park near the mouth of the St. Johns River is well known to birders for its concentrations of gulls, terns and shorebirds. The Atlantic Ocean beaches and sand spit near the Fort George Inlet are productive birding areas and important for nesting shorebirds. Visit early in the day to avoid crowds. Scan offshore for loons, red-breasted mergansers, horned grebes and northern gannets in winter.

Open daily, 8 a.m. to sunset. 904-251-3335 www.coj.net/jaxparks

9. GUANA RIVER WILDUFE MANAGEMENT AREA (WMA) AND STATE PARK.

Thirteen miles north of St. Augustine, this mix of ocean, dune, salt marsh, freshwater marsh, pine flatwoods, coastal hammock and brackish impoundment, attracts a diverse array of birdlife. Overlooks provide good views of the ocean and Guana Lake, the brackish impoundment where large flocks of migratory waterfowl congregate in the winter. The dam at the lake's southern end provides good views of the marsh and lake. This area is one of the best places in northeast Florida to observe peregrine falcons and other migratory raptors in October. During seasonal hunts on the WMA, visitors may drive into the site.

WMA open sunrise to sunset; State Park open daily, 8 a.m. to sunset. 352-732-1225, 904-825-5071 www.floridastateparks.org, www.floridaconservation.org

10. LOWER SUWANNEE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFLIGE

This site near the town of Cedar Key creates a rich mosaic of coastal habitats: open Gulf, offshore keys, tidal creeks, hardwood swamps and pine flatwoods. The Lower Suwannee NWR spans portions of both sides of the Suwannee River. Mud flats host great and snowy egrets,



white ibis, great blue, little blue, tricolored and night-herons. Good birdwatching vantage points on the south side of the river are located near the refuge headquarters (River Trail and Boardwalk), along the Dennis Creek Trail and from the platform at Shell Mound. The north side of the river features a pier at Salt Creek and an observation platform at Fishbone Creek.

Open sunrise to sunset. 352-493-0238 www.recreation.gov

11. PAYNES PRAIRIE PRESERVE STATE PARK. (GFBT GATEWAY SITE)

Paynes Prairie is a broad basin south of Gainesville. A rim of pine flatwoods, hammocks and ponds surrounds the expanse of wet prairie and marsh. La Chua Trail (north side of prairie) and Bolen Bluff Trail (south side), and

visitor center and observation tower at the main entrance on U.S. 441. offer the best birdwatching. Ranger-led walks are conducted seasonally. Thousands of migratory sandhill cranes congregate here in the winter, joining the resident sandhill crane population. Look for northern harriers in the winter; Mississippi kites in the



sandhill crane

spring and summer. Summer breeders include red-winged

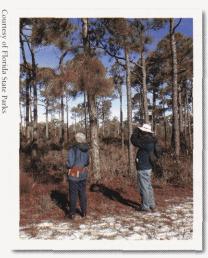
Photo: J. & K. Hollingsworth

blackbirds, least bitterns, purple gallinules, blue grosbeaks and indigo buntings.

Open daily, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. 352-466-3397 www.floridastateparks.org

12. OCALA NATIONAL FOREST

The oldest national forest east of the Mississippi River is home to Florida scrub-jays, limpkins, red-cockaded wood-peckers and other notable species. More than half of the forest is sandy scrub habitat of sand pine, scrub oaks and rare understory plants. Other habitats include sinkholes, springs, rivers, lakes and longleaf pine/sandhills habitats. Look for bald eagles and ospreys around the larger lakes; sandhill cranes in prairie areas and red-cockaded woodpeckers in the longleaf pine/sandhills (cavity trees are painted with a white



band). Rangers can direct visitors to other good areas. Stop at the Ranger District offices on SR 19 (352-669-3153) or SR 40 (352-625-2520) for maps and information on southern and northern parts of the forest, respectively.

Hours vary, call in advance. 850-523-8500 www.southernregion. fs.fed.us

13. LAKE WOODRUFF NATIONAL WILDUFE REFLIGE

Located 25 miles west of Daytona Beach, this refuge protects more than 21,000 acres adjacent to the St. Johns River and the Ocala National Forest. Lakes Woodruff and Dexter, freshwater marshes, hardwood swamps, uplands, streams, canals and impoundments await birders. The lakes may be reached by boat only; launch and rental facilities are located at nearby DeLeon Springs State Park or at private fish camps. For walkers or bicyclists, very productive birding is available along the refuge's six miles of trails that surround impounded pools, not far from parking areas. An observation tower provides a bird's-eye view. Bald eagles nest on the property in the spring, ospreys are seen year-round and swallow-tailed kites are spring and summer visitors. Shorebirds forage on mud flats exposed at low water levels. The uplands attract migratory warblers and nesting great-horned and barred owls.



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Open daily, 8 a.m. to sunset. 386-985-4673 www.recreation.gov

14. HONEYMOON ISLAND STATE PARK

This Gulf Coast barrier island is connected by a causeway to the mainland near Dunedin. Birders come to check the white sand beaches, mangrove shoreline, slash pine forest and interior lagoon for shorebirds, wading birds and trans-Gulf migrants. The park is a popular recreation spot, so visit early in the day and walk the two nature trails that navigate the mature slash pine forest and the edge of a sheltered lagoon. This park is an important wintering and nesting site for many shorebird species. Please respect all posted nesting areas.

Open daily, 8 a.m. to sunset. 727-469-5942 www.floridastateparks.org

15. FORT DE SOTO COUNTY PARK-(GFBT GATEWAY SITE)

This popular recreation site and renowned birding destination is on Mullet Key, an island south of St. Petersburg. Bordered by the Gulf of Mexico and Tampa Bay, the beaches, bayshore, mangroves, salt marsh and hardwood hammock attract spring migrants. The park is good yearround for roseate spoonbills and reddish egrets. Pick up a free bird checklist at the visitor center. It describes 17 good birding areas within the park. The oak hammock at the Arrowhead Family Picnic Area is considered to be one of the best sites for migrant warblers. Avian oddities sighted here in recent years include a Heermann's gull and an elegant tern.

Hours vary. 727-582-22<mark>67</mark> www.pinellascounty.org

(G. LAKE KISSIMMEE STATE PARK

Wet prairies, pine flatwoods, dense scrub and three lakes anchor this park - lakes Kissimmee (Florida's third largest), Rosalie and Tiger. Hiking trails and an observation tower provide birders with good views of the productive habitats. This is one of the best spots



bald eagle

in Florida to see eagles in the winter. The Gobbler Ridge hiking trail and the trails on Buster Island are especially rewarding. Florida scrub-jays are found along the edge of the road or along service roads near the ranger station. The lakes and lake edges are good for herons, egrets, bald eagles, snail kites and wintering ducks. Visit the picnic area for sandhill cranes and turkeys. Lucky visitors may see one of Florida's reintroduced whooping cranes.

Open daily, 8 a.m. to sunset. 863-696-1112 www.floridastateparks.org

IF. JOE OVERSTREET LANDING

This small county park on the east side of Lake Kissimmee is a productive birding site. Reach it by turning off of SR 523 (Canoe Creek Road) onto unpaved Joe Overstreet Road, about 20 miles south of St. Cloud. Check roadside pastures and prairies along the way for crested caracaras, turkeys and sandhill and whooping cranes. At the lake, scan the shoreline for cranes and shorebirds. This is a good spot for viewing bald eagles, snail kites, limpkins, purple gallinules and wintering ducks.

Open sunrise to sunset.

18. MERRITT ISLAND NATIONAL WILDUFE REFUGE (GFBT GATEWAY SITE)

Wintering waterfowl are abundant at this premiere birding area of marshes and uplands surrounding Indian River and Mosquito Lagoon. Take the one-way 6.3-mile long Black Point Wildlife Drive. The Drive's mudflats are crowded with shorebirds and ducks in winter, but in any month, count on wood storks, roseate spoonbills, black-necked stilts, egrets, herons and many other wading birds. Stop

near the start of the Cruickshank Trail and climb the observation tower. Also, look for scrub-jays on telephone wires and posts alongside local roads.

Hours vary, call in advance. 321-861-0667 www.recreation.gov

19. MYAKKA RIVER STATE PARK

This large park near Sarasota features 12 miles of the Myakka River, lush oak-palm hammocks, two lakes, extensive river marsh, pine flatwoods and one of the largest tracts of dry prairie in southwest Florida. Bird species are diverse and abundant here, such as resident white ibis, great and little blue herons, great and snowy egrets, limpkins and tricolored herons. To explore this park, visitors may choose the seven-mile scenic drive or one of the many hiking, bicycling and horseback trails. Two concessionaires offer airboat or tram tours. Rental cabins, canoes and bicycles also are available. Beginning birdwatching classes and guided walks are offered seasonally. Don't miss the unique tree canopy walkway and 70-foot tower.

Open daily, 8 a.m. to sunset. 941-361-6511 www.floridastateparks.org



red-shouldered hawk

20. HIGHLANDS HAMMOCK STATE PARK

One of Florida's oldest state parks protects old-growth hardwood forest, a cypress swamp, pine flatwoods, sand pine scrub, bayheads and marshes. Located four miles west of Sebring in central Florida, the park offers a paved loop road for cars, bikes or pedestrians, horse trails and nine nature trails. Look for year-round favorites such as wild turkeys, pileated woodpeckers, red-tailed hawks, wood storks, anhingas and little blue herons. Boardwalks

take visitors through bay and cypress swamps. Ranger-led tram tours are available.

Open daily, 8 a.m. to sunset. 863-386-6094 www.floridastateparks.org

21. JONATHAN DICKINSON STATE PARK

Many Florida habitats are represented in this extensive park: pine flatwoods, sand pine scrub, freshwater creeks, cypress and mangrove wetlands and the Loxahatchee National Wild and Scenic River. The park features four nature trails and a bicycle trail. Trails through the unique scrub community are located off the entrance station parking lot and at Hobe Mountain, where an observation platform is located. Florida scrub-jays are a special treat here. The pine forest is home to numerous woodpecker species, northern bobwhites and pine warblers. Try a seasonal nature walk or explore the river; the park concession offers canoe rentals and rides on the 44-passenger Loxahatchee Queen II.

Open daily, 8 a.m. to sunset. 561-546-2771 www.floridastateparks.org

22. J.N. DING DARUNG NATIONAL WILDUFE REFUGE

Located on the north side of Sanibel Island, about 15 miles southwest of Fort Myers, this refuge attracts hundreds of birds and birders. It is an area of mangrove islands, mud flats, open water, hardwood hammocks and brackish impoundments. A visitor center and a choice of travel options make for easy exploration. Choose from



double-crested cormorant & egrets

several walking and paddling trails, or opt for the auto tour (a five-mile drive), interpretive tram tour or



roseate spoonbill

naturalist-led tour. Visitors are bound to see year-round favorites such as ospreys, brown pelicans, roseate spoonbills, reddish egrets and other wading birds.

Hours vary. 239-472-1100 www.recreation.gov

23. CORYSCREW SWAMP SANCTUARY

Located near Naples, this National Audubon Society site fea-

tures the world's largest remaining oldgrowth bald cypress forest. Lush ferns, orchids and wildflowers adorn the forest, and provide excellent looks at native birdlife. There is something to see in every season. The largest colony of wood storks in the United States nests here in late winter while summer features hundreds of roosting swallow-



tailed kites. A two-mile boardwalk navigates this subtropical site and passes close by bird nesting and roosting locations. Start at the visitor center and pick up a self-guiding tour pamphlet.

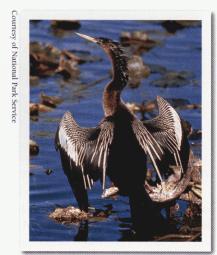
Open 8 a.m. to 7:30 p.m (Apr 12 to Nov 30), 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. (Dec to Apr 11). 239-348-9151 www.audubon.org

American white pelicans

24. ARTHUR R. MARSHAU LOXAHATCHEE NATIONAL WILDUFE REFUGE

Start at the visitor center at this refuge, which is considered to be a part of the northern Everglades, and enjoy the bird-

life associated with the freshwater impoundments, marshes and cypress swamp. Common year-round birds here include herons, egrets, rails, common moorhens, American coots, purple gallinules, smoothbilled anis, limpkins, ibises, wood storks. anhingas, vultures, ospreys and redshouldered hawks. Observation towers. bicycle and hiking



anhinga

trails and a 5.5-mile canoe trail enhance the viewing experience.

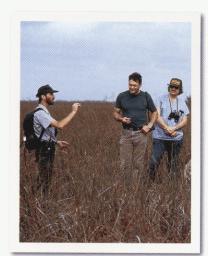
Open sunrise to sunset. 561-732-3684; 561-734-8303 (Visitor Center) www.recreation.gov

25. EVERGLADES NATIONAL PARK

Occupying more than 1 million acres at the southern tip of Florida, this vast wetland system supports diverse birdlife. The extensive freshwater sloughs, sawgrass and cypress prairies, bays, estuaries, mangrove islands and tropical hardwood hammocks can be explored in a variety of ways. The park offers varied tours and numerous trails. Though they may be seen year-round, large numbers of egrets, herons,



American alligator



BIRDING TIPS

- Most birding sites listed in this guide offer free entry or have minimal entrance fees.
- The sites' visitors centers offer a wealth of information on the property, and some offer guided tours.
- Birding can be more rewarding with a birdwatching guide, available at most book stores.
- Visiting hours can vary; always call ahead.
- Take along water, sunscreen and bug spray.

FOLD OUT FOR MAP

ibises, wood storks and roseate spoon-bills are often concentrated in small ponds in the winter. The diversity of wintering birds and reduced number of biting insects make October through April the most pleasant for birding.

Hours vary. 305-242-7700 www.nps.gov



great egrets & roseate spoonbill

26. DRY TORTUGAS NATIONAL PARK

This unique park is located in the Gulf of Mexico, 70 miles west of Key West. The small islands and coral reefs are famous for their unique and diverse bird and marine life. Some of the keys are off-limits during the nesting season. Seabird species that regularly nest here include the magnificent frigatebird, masked booby, sooty tern, and brown noddy. The white-tailed tropic bird, brown and red-footed boobies, black noddy and roseate tern are occasionally sighted. Springtime fallouts and trans-gulf migrants make this park a popular destination for bird tours in April. Throughout the year, individuals can access the park by ferry from Key West by plane or boat.

Open during daylight hours. 305-242-7700 www.nps.gov



sooty & bridled terns

LOOKING FOR MORE?

Try the Great Florida Birding Trail (GFBT), a 2,000-mile driving tour of more than 400 birding locations. From

beaches to lost-in-time wetlands, explore Florida's diverse habitat, wildlife and local flavor.

THE CREAT FLORIDA BIRDING TRAIL COMMEMORATION COMMEMORATION COMMEMORATION COMMEMORATION Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

HOW IT WORKS

The GFBT is made up of four sections, and each section contains "clusters" of birdwatching sites. Each site is carefully reviewed and selected based on quality of habitat, wildlife and educational value. The East Section, Jacksonville to Cocoa Beach, is open. The entire GFBT should be com-

plete by 2006. Each site will be marked by highway signs bearing the Trail's logo. Visit floridabirding-trail.com or call 850-488-8755 for updates and to obtain a guide. The guide includes site descriptions and bird sightings, optimal visiting times for every site, directions and a map of each cluster.

WHAT'S A GATEWAY?

Gateways are hubs for birding information and offer amenities such as staffed visitor centers, information kiosks and loaner optics.



wood storks

