



Southern Florida Winter Birding Getaway

February 3rd-12th, 2023

Cost: \$2,995.00 based on double occupancy

Join Sarett naturalists on a midwinter birding trip to sunny Southern Florida. Florida is home to a wide variety of birds including wading birds, shorebirds, seabirds, songbirds, and exotics. On this relaxed tour through Southern Florida, we will visit the world-Famous Everglades, the beautiful Keys, the central pine barrens, the remote Dry Tortugas National Park, and a few other birding hotspots.



Day 1 (Friday, February 3rd): The tour starts with pickup at Fort Lauderdale International Airport and transfer to our accommodations near the airport. As time permits, we will visit a few nearby birding locations like Wakodahatchee Wetlands, Easterlin Park, Hugh Taylor Birch SRA, Markham County Park, or Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport. Wakodahatchee Wetlands has a nice boardwalk system that winds through manmade wetlands. Here we will find a nice variety of wading birds like Great Blue Herons, Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Cattle Egret,

Little Blue Heron, Tricolored Heron, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, White Ibis, Glossy Ibis, Wood Stork, Roseate Spoonbill, Purple and Common Gallinules, along with Gray-headed Swamphen. Good numbers of ducks can be found here like Black-bellied Whistling Duck, Fulvous Whistling Duck, and Blue-winged Teal. Along with the ducks, we should see Anhinga and Double Crested Cormorants. We will even have a chance of finding a Neotropic Cormorant as they have nested here for the last couple of years. Osprey and Red-shouldered Hawks are usually around with a variety of songbirds. We should be able to find our first American Alligators of the trip as well.

Easterlin Park, will give us an opportunity to find Egyptian Geese, which are now established in Florida and countable on your ABA list. We should find a nice assortment of overwintering songbirds and resident birds like White-winged Dove, Boat-tailed Grackles, and Northern Mockingbirds. Hugh Taylor Birch SRA and Markham County Park will give us a chance to find Spot-breasted Orioles. Both parks have hosted rarities over the years like Western Spindalis, Key West Quail Dove, La Sagra's Flycatcher, and Bahama Mockingbird. In the evening, we will check the Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport for Burrowing Owls before returning to our hotel for the evening.



➤ **Night Fort Lauderdale** Comfort Inn Fort Lauderdale Airport South & Cruise Port

Day 2 (Saturday, February 4th): The greater Miami area is host to a variety of exotic species like Common Myna, Red-whiskered Bulbul, White-winged and Nanday Parakeets, Egyptian Goose, and Spot-breasted Oriole. We will spend the morning searching for these countable exotics as well as a

host of native species. The parks around Miami like Matheson Hammock Park or Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park harbor a surprising variety of birds including Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Boat-tailed Grackles, Northern Parulas, and other overwintering warblers, buntings, and thrushes. When planning out the morning, we will take into consideration the latest sightings of our target birds to determine where we will visit.

In the afternoon, we will head north to Green Cay Wetlands and Loxahatchee NWR to search for water birds. Both locations will provide great photographic opportunities. Green Cay Wetlands is an extensive boardwalk system through wetlands, much like the Wakodahatchee Wetlands. A variety of wading birds and water birds will be common. Loxahatchee NWR includes 145,000 acres of northern Everglades habitat. Near the visitor center, there is a boardwalk that winds its way through a bald cypress swamp, which should host a variety of birds including Pileated and Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Carolina Wren, Northern Mockingbird, Green Heron, Northern Waterthrush, and Red-shouldered Hawk. We will also take some time to explore the Marsh trail, which runs on top of dikes around a series of impoundments. Here we will see a variety of wading birds like Glossy Ibis, Limpkin, Great Egrets, Great Blue Heron, Purple and Common Gallinules. We will also need to keep an eye on the sky as we will have a chance to see Snail Kites, Short-tailed Hawks, Osprey, and Red-shouldered Hawks.

➤ Night **Port St. Lucie** Best Western Port St. Lucie



Day 3 (Sunday, February 5th): Today will be an early start as we travel north and west to Three Lakes Wildlife Management Area. Here we will look for Bachman's Sparrow, Red-cockaded Woodpecker, and Brown-headed Nuthatch, which are specialties of the pine forests of Florida. Red-cockaded Woodpecker is an endangered species. Other species that call the pine forest home are Pine and Yellow-throated Warblers, Eastern Towhee, Northern Bobwhite and Pileated Woodpecker.

Our next stop is nearby Lake Kissimmee where we will have chances to find Snail Kites, Limpkin, Bald Eagle, Crested Caracara, Sandhill Crane, and possibly Wild Turkey. After enjoying the birds of Lake Kissimmee, we will head west to the Tampa area with a stop at Lettuce Lake Conservation Park to look for Prothonotary Warbler, Yellow-throated Warblers, and other overwintering warblers, we will keep our eyes out for Swallow-tailed Kites, Short-tailed Hawks, Osprey and any other birds that might be around the lake.

➤ Night **Tampa** Sleep Inn & Suites Tampa South

Day 4 (Monday, February 6th): In the morning, we will head over to Fort De Soto Park, which consists of 1,136 acres made up of five interconnected islands. The park has a variety of habitat types, which makes it attractive to a wide variety of birds. In fact, over 328 species of birds have been seen at Ft. de Soto. On the beaches we should find terns, gulls, shorebirds, including Wilson Plovers. Other birds we will keep an eye out for are Reddish Egret and Nanday Parakeets, which are an exotic species that is now countable on the ABA list.

In the afternoon, we will visit a location known as The Celery Fields just outside of Fruitville, Florida. It consists of open marshlands, deep ponds, shallow pools and canals. The park contains two boardwalks, which are excellent for wildlife viewing. Here we will look for Marsh and Sedge Wrens, Sora and Virginia Rails, Black-necked Stilts, Least Bittern, Limpkin, and Purple Gallinule to name a few. If we are lucky, we might find a Barn Owl roosting in one of the trees around the wetlands. We will make other birding stops as time permits.

- Night **Sarasota** Comport Inn & Suite Sarasota I75

Day 5 (Tuesday, February 7th): Oscar Scherer State Park is our first stop of the day. Here we will look for the resident Florida Scrub-Jays. The Florida Scrub-Jay is an endangered species and can only be found in Florida. After searching for the Scrub-jay we will head south and east making birding stops along the way. We will explore the Tamiami Trail along the Shark River Slough and the Shark River section of Everglades National Park. Here we will look for Snail Kites and a variety of water birds, which should provide endless photo opportunities. After a field lunch, we will explore the Big Cypress region, where we can admire the ancient bald cypress trees and look for Limpkins, Barred Owls, and Wood Storks.



- Night **Florida City** Travelodge by Wyndham Florida City

Day 6 (Wednesday, February 8th): We will spend the day birding in and around Everglades National Park. Our first stop of the day will be Frog Pond Water Management Area just outside of Everglades National Park. Over the last couple of years, there have been a nice variety of flycatchers hanging out in this area including Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Tropical Kingbird, and Western Kingbird. We will also keep an eye out for Smooth-billed Ani, Common-ground Dove, Painted Bunting, and Tri-colored Munia.

Once inside Everglades National Park, we will explore the pine forests, hardwood hammocks, and sawgrass prairie en route to the visitor center. In the sawgrass prairie, we will look for the threatened and distinct Cape Sable race of the Seaside Sparrow. In the drier uplands, we will look for Painted Buntings and Swallow-tailed Kites overhead. In the hardwood hammocks, we will look for overwintering warblers, and in the wetlands, we will look for egrets, herons, spoonbills, and anhingas.



If there are any recent reports of American Flamingos, we will hike the famous Snake Bite Trail to see if we can find them. Around the Flamingo Visitor Center, we will look for White-crowned Pigeon and carefully check any blackbird flocks for Shiny Cowbirds. Other wildlife around Flamingo could include American Crocodile, American Alligators, and threatened West Indian Manatee.

- Night **Florida City** Travelodge by Wyndham Florida City

Day 7 (Thursday, February 9): Today, we will explore the Florida Keys in search of any rare birds that might be hanging out for the winter. The keys stretch for more than 100 miles into the Gulf of Mexico and can host several rare birds from the Caribbean. Currently, there are a few Red-legged Honeycreepers that are being seen in the keys and other parts of Florida. If they are still around when we are in Florida, we will take time to look for them. A Western Spindalis was recently seen, and you never know when a Key-West Quail Dove or a Bahama Mockingbird might show up. The keys are also home to the Great White Heron, which is a white morph of the Great Blue Heron that may soon be split into its own species. Other birds we will look for are Roseate Tern, White-crowned Pigeon, Reddish Egret, and a variety of shorebirds. On the way to Key West, we will stop at Big Pine Key to do some birding with chances of seeing the small and endangered Key West Deer.

- Night: **Key West** Double Tree by Hilton Grand Key

Day 8 (Friday, February 10th): Today will have an early start as we board the Yankee Freedom and head to Dry Tortuga National Park where we will spend the day. The park is located 70 miles west of Key West, these small, sandy islets lie at the heart of large seabird colonies and provide critical stopover areas for thousands of neotropical migrants. On the way to Garden Key, we will keep an eye out for Brown and Masked Boobies, Roseate Terns, Magnificent Frigatebirds, and Northern Gannets. Our time on Garden Key (about five hours) will be spent studying the large colonies of Sooty Terns, Brown Noddies, and Magnificent Frigatebirds. We will search the sparse vegetation in Fort Jefferson in hopes of finding a Caribbean rarity. The shoreline often holds a few shorebirds and Merlins, American Kestrels, and Peregrine Falcons occasionally hunt birds around the island. You will have the option to take a tour of historic Fort Jefferson, or you may elect to go snorkeling in the warm and clear waters around the island. After returning from our full day, we will relax in Key West.

- Night: **Key West** Double Tree by Hilton Grand Key

Day 9 (Saturday, February 11th): Our first birding stop of the day will be Ft. Zachary Taylor State Park to see what birds are around before saying goodbye to Key West. As we make our way north to Ft. Lauderdale, we will stop to look for any birds that we are missing from the trip list or any rarities that might pop up. Nearby keys we will visit include Bahia Honda State Park for waterbirds, and possibly Long Key and Big Pine Key for rarities.

- Night **Fort Lauderdale** Comfort Inn Fort Lauderdale Airport South & Cruise Port (191 SW 19th Ct.) (954) 771-4800

Day 10 (Sunday, February 12th): After some early morning birding, we will return to Ft. Lauderdale Airport for flights home.

Hotels:

- Friday, February 3rd: Comfort Inn Fort Lauderdale Airport South & Cruise Port (954) 771-4800
- Saturday, February 4th: Best Western Port St. Lucie (772) 878-7600
- Sunday, February 5th: Sleep Inn & Suites Tampa South (813) 831-4020
- Monday, February 6th: Comfort Inn & Suite Sarasota I75 (941) 342-8778
- Tuesday & Wednesday, February 7th & 8th: Travelodge by Wyndham Florida City (305) 482-1961
- Thursday & Friday, February 9th & 10th: Double Tree by Hilton Grand Key
- Saturday, February 11: Comfort Inn Fort Lauderdale Airport South & Cruise Port (954) 771-4800

Trip Cost: \$per person based on double occupancy for Sarett Nature Center Members. You must be a member of Sarett Nature Center to join this trip. Sarett membership is \$50/family or \$40/individual.

Deposit: A non-refundable deposit of \$150 is required to sign up and reserve your spot for this trip. Space is limited on this trip.

Final Payment Due: Your final payment of \$2,845.00 is due by January 12, 2023.

Single Supplement: An additional \$1,371.00 would be required.

Method of Payment: We accept in-person, over the phone and mailed deposits and payments. Send any checks to Sarett Nature Center, 2300 Benton Center Rd., Benton Harbor, MI 49022. Please include your phone number, email, and address to sign up for the trip.

Cancellation Policy:

Any refunds are subject to what is recoverable. *Travel Insurance is highly recommended.*

Responsibility: Sarett Nature Center reserves the right, at their sole discretion, to make any changes in the itinerary and hotels should that become necessary and is not responsible to any person for expenses, loss of time, money or happenings resulting from a change of tour scheduling. Sarett Nature Center reserves the right to accept, decline, or retain any person as a member of the tour, and is not responsible for any losses or damages of personal property, injuries, expenses, or damages incurred or claimed by any tour member.

Included in the cost:

- 9 nights lodging
- 7 continental breakfasts
- All ground transportation in Florida
- Park entry fees
- Boat trip to Dry Tortugas National Park via the Yankee Freedom
- Breakfast snack and lunch on the boat trip (included with your ticket)
- Guide services of Sarett Naturalists.

Not included: Airfare to and from Florida, meals, and items of a personal nature.

What to Bring: Binoculars, spotting scope (if you have one), camera, clothing, light jacket, rain gear, umbrella, swimsuit, beach towel, sunscreen, a bird book, money for items of a personal nature, snacks, a sense of adventure, cheerful attitude, and a willingness to have some fun.

Contact Information: Please include with your check, your e-mail address, phone numbers, and mailing address.

Group Size: 10 trip participants and 2 Sarett Naturalists.

Sarett Trip Leaders: Mike Mahler and Nate Fuller will be excited to have you along.

Questions: Please call Mike at Sarett at (269)-927-4832 or e-mail mikem@sarett.org