

South Florida: Everglades & More!

With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



April 29 – May 4, 2019

With Florida Keys Extension

May 5 – 7

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Naturalist Journeys, LLC



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Find yourself faraway from Florida's bustling, tourist-packed theme parks on a Naturalist Journeys adventure that takes you deep into Florida's wild side.

Just barely above the Caribbean tropics, Florida's climate and geography isolate it from the rest of the country. Because of its geographically unique position, Florida is a crossroads between the temperate north and the sultry Caribbean south. Indeed, about a dozen bird species of West Indian origin reach the northern limits of their range here; many of these West Indian species live nowhere else in the United States. Our tour is timed for when spring migration is well underway, potentially augmenting our trip list with a wide variety of northbound, colorful warblers and charismatic waders.

On the main tour, we cover the southern third of the state in search of the many specialty birds on offer. We begin by experiencing the justifiably famous and unique Everglades National Park, otherwise known as the River of Grass, in search of a broad suite of specialties that include the critically endangered 'Cape Sable' Seaside Sparrow, the flamboyant Roseate Spoonbill, and the majestic Swallow-tailed Kite. We also spend time birding in Miami, a city with a decidedly Caribbean flair, in search of several exotics such as Spot-breasted Oriole, White-winged Parakeet, and Red-whiskered Bulbul, as well as native species like Mangrove Cuckoo and White-crowned Pigeon. On the last leg of the main tour, we visit a series of well-planned wetlands in Palm Beach, where nearly all the Florida wetland specialties occur: Wood Stork, Purple Gallinule, Limpkin, and so much more. We also visit oak-scrub for Florida's only endemic bird, the Florida Scrub-Jay, as well as threatened Florida pinelands for Red-cockaded Woodpecker.

With some luck, many of the sites we visit on this tour are alive with migrant songbirds, and there is always a chance for a vagrant from the Caribbean like a La Sagra's Flycatcher or Western Spindalis to show up. For those wanting even more, we this year's tour offers an optional extension to the Florida Keys and the Dry Tortugas, where tropical seabird colonies await and colorful songbirds abound. This is a great trip for keen birders.

Tour Highlights

- Bird the Miami-Ft. Lauderdale metro area for exotics from around the world, including Spot-breasted Oriole, Red-whiskered Bulbul, and White-winged Parakeet
- Immerse yourself in subtropical sawgrass prairies, cypress domes, tropical hardwood hammocks, pinelands, and mangrove swamps of Everglades National Park
- Target tropical bird species that occur nowhere else in the USA: Mangrove Cuckoo, Black-whiskered Vireo, White-crowned Pigeon, and more
- Visit the unique Florida pineland ecosystem as we seek Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Brown-headed Nuthatch, and Bachman's Sparrow

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- Wonder at the bustling heron and stork rookeries of Green Cay and Wakodahatchee Wetlands, where these birds display and nest at close range
- Observe Florida's only endemic bird, the charismatic Florida Scrub-Jay, in its native oak-scrub habitat
- On the extension, voyage to Dry Tortugas National Park for tropical seabird colonies and colorful migrant songbirds.

Tour Summary

6-Day / 5-Night Florida Birding Tour with Carlos Sanchez

\$1795 from Miami

Airport is Miami International (MIA)

Itinerary

Mon., Apr. 29 Arrivals

Welcome to Florida! May is a fantastic time to visit this southern state — migrants pour through the region to augment resident bird numbers. Additionally, breeding bird specialties have arrived from their winter homes in the Caribbean and beyond.

You arrive today at Miami International Airport. Once the group has gathered, we enjoy a welcome dinner with an orientation before we depart on our birding adventure in the morning.

Accommodations south of Miami at Kendall (D)

Tues., Apr. 30 Everglades National Park

Published in 1947, Marjory Stoneman Douglas' *The Everglades: River of Grass* highlighted the uniqueness of the Everglades. Lying at the southern tip of the state, the Everglades is a vast subtropical sawgrass prairie broken only by cypress domes, tropical hardwood hammocks, pinelands, and mangrove swamps. There is nowhere else in the United States with such a decidedly tropical suite of habitats.

Throughout the day we work along the length of the main park road that terminates in Flamingo, exploring

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these various habitats for several birds difficult or impossible to see anywhere else in the country like 'Cape Sable' Seaside Sparrow and Shiny Cowbird. American Crocodile and West Indian Manatee are possible at the marina in Flamingo. There is also an optional birding session after dark to look for Eastern Screech-Owl, Barn Owl, and Chuck-will's-widow.

Accommodations south of Miami at Kendall (B,L,D)

Wed., May 1 Miami Metro Area

The nearly tropical climate and exotic vegetation of the Miami-Ft. Lauderdale metropolitan area offers a unique landscape of opportunity for a myriad of introduced bird species from all over the world. We spend the morning in Miami exploring this urban landscape in search of exotics such as Spot-breasted Oriole, White-winged Parakeet, Red-whiskered Bulbul, and Common Myna. However, introduced species are only a small fraction of the avifauna of Miami, a county which claims one of the longest bird lists east of the Mississippi River. Parks, preserves and even parking lots provide opportunities to see native species like Mangrove Cuckoo, White-crowned Pigeon, and Gray Kingbird.

In the afternoon, we visit migrant traps for both shorebirds and songbirds along the coast of Miami and Key Biscayne at sites like Crandon Park and Bill Baggs State Park — migrants that pass through the area in large numbers include Blackpoll, Cape May, Black-throated Blue, and Prairie Warbler and more.

Accommodations south of Miami at Kendall (B,L,D)

Thurs., May 2 Tamiami Trail | Green Cay | Wakodahatchee Wetlands

This morning, we travel along the road that skirts the northern edge of Everglades National Park — Tamiami Trail. Open sawgrass prairie north of the road regularly holds small numbers of Snail Kite in early spring, and we make several stops along the way to get good views of one. As we continue westward, the habitat quickly changes over to bald cypress forest. This unique forest hosts a variety of birds that reach the southern limit of their breeding range here: Northern Parula, Prothonotary Warbler, Red-eyed Vireo, and Ruby-throated Hummingbird. The trees are covered in a wide variety of bromeliads, orchids, and other epiphytic plants, making for a very picturesque and lush scene.

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After a delicious lunch in Miami, we head north to Green Cay and Wakodahatchee Wetlands, two artificially created wetlands that host nearly all of Florida's wetland specialties: Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Least Bittern, Limpkin, Gray-headed Swampphen, and Purple Gallinule. The rookeries at Wakodahatchee Wetlands should be very active at this time of year, providing excellent photo opportunities of nesting herons, egrets, ibises, and storks.

Accommodations at the Hampton Inn, Juno Beach (B,L,D)

Fri., May 3 Central Florida Specialties

We have an early start this morning to explore the pine flatwoods and oak-scrub communities just to the north. Three Lakes Wildlife Management Area hosts all the specialized pine flatwood specialties: Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Bachman's Sparrow, and Brown-headed Nuthatch. Roadside birding along the way is usually excellent, and we should be able to see Bald Eagle (often sitting on nests!), families of Sandhill Crane, scavenging Crested Caracara, and more. To the southeast, small scrub-oak preserves host Florida Scrub-Jay as we make our way back down to Juno Beach.

In the late afternoon, as time allows we visit a couple nearby sites in Palm Beach at a leisurely pace for migrant songbirds, shorebirds, and Nanday Parakeet. We have our farewell dinner tonight, full of memories and stories of great birds and places seen along the way.

Accommodations at the Hampton Inn, Juno Beach (B,L,D)

Sat., May 4 Departures or Florida Keys Extension

After some morning birding as we make our way back south, the main tour ends at Miami International Airport. Please schedule departing flights around noon or later. (B)

For those joining us on the Florida Keys extension (either continuing from the main tour or joining us at Miami International Airport), we transfer to our hotel in Homestead for the evening in anticipation of our road trip through the Florida Keys tomorrow.

Accommodations in Homestead (D)

Florida Keys Extension

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Sun., May 5 Florida Keys

After an early breakfast, we drive along Card Sound Road to Key Largo State Botanical Site, making a brief stop at a patch of mangroves along the way to see the Florida race of Prairie Warbler and the Cuban race of Yellow Warbler.

Once slated to become a housing development, Key Largo State Botanical Site protects one of the largest tracts of tropical hardwood hammock in Florida. It is also an important breeding ground for several key species on our tour, particularly the elusive Mangrove Cuckoo and vociferous Black-whiskered Vireo. After a delicious lunch, we keep our schedule open to accommodate for the presence (or absence) of migrant songbirds, shorebirds, or even chasing a Caribbean vagrant. Regardless of the status of migration, we visit a breeding colony of Roseate Tern in Marathon and stand vigil in the evening for Antillean Nighthawk in Key West.

Accommodations in Key West (B,L,D)

Mon., May 6 Dry Tortugas National Park

Seventy miles west of Key West, the Dry Tortugas consists of a series of tiny coralline islands surrounded by the shimmering aquamarine waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Among birders, these islands are particularly famous for having the only nesting colonies of Brown Noddy, Sooty Tern, Magnificent Frigatebird, and Masked Booby in the contiguous United States. We reach these islands via the Yankee Freedom II catamaran as a day trip.

Upon arrival at Garden Key, we have about four hours to enjoy the cacophony and bustle of activity from the seabird colonies on nearby Bush Key, as well as marvel at impressive Fort Jefferson, the largest masonry structure in the Western Hemisphere. Due to the isolation of these islands from any land, the parade grounds of this grand fort function as a welcoming oasis for exhausted migratory songbirds, including warblers, cuckoos, flycatchers, vireos, tanagers, and buntings. On our return to Key West, we make sure to stop at nearby Hospital Key to see the colony of Masked Booby.

Accommodations in Key West (B,L,D)

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Tues., May 7 Key West | Departures

We spend the morning in Key West, visiting well known migrant songbird hotspots such as Fort Zachary Taylor State Park and the Key West Botanical Garden. These hotspots are often just as good or even better for migratory birds than Dry Tortugas National Park itself! Outstanding records include Loggerhead Kingbird, Cuban Vireo, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Western Spindalis, and more. This is a flexible morning so that we can chase any reported rarities, and we keep ourselves wired to any special sightings. As we drive north back to Miami, we also make a stop at the National Key Deer Refuge to see the miniature and endemic Key Deer, the smallest subspecies of White-tailed Deer.

Please schedule your flights out of Miami International Airport after 6:00 PM when the tour ends. (B,L)



Guide Carlos Sanchez

Born in Miami, Florida, Carlos has had a fascination with wildlife since childhood. In college he began to bird in earnest throughout Florida, South America, and even Australia. Currently, Carlos sits on the board of the Tropical Audubon Society, is a regular contributor to the birding blog 10,000 Birds, and leads local tours through his company, EcoAvian Tours. He has also been a resident guide at lodges in both Ecuador and Brazil.

Cost of the Journey

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Please note, starting in January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the main journey is \$1795 DBL / \$2095 SGL, based on double occupancy, from Miami, FL (MIA). Cost of the extension is \$1995 DBL / \$1935 SGL based on 6 people (with less than 6, there will be a \$100 - \$300 surcharge). This cost includes: accommodations for five nights, most meals as specified in the itinerary

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(B=breakfast, L=lunch, D=dinner), airport welcome and transfer or hotel shuttle, land transportation during the journey, professional guide services, park and other entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses.

Cost does not include: round-trip airfare to and from Miami, items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone, drinks from the bar, and gratuities for luggage handling or personal services. With fewer than 6 participants, a small-group surcharge (typically \$100 – \$300 per participant) may apply, or we may request that you pick up the cost of a few additional dinners in lieu of this surcharge.

Travel Information

The arrival airport for this tour is Miami International Airport (MIA) in Miami, FL. Please plan to arrive in Miami no later than 3:00 PM on April 29. Please plan on departures after noon on May 4 or after 8:00 PM on May 7 if you opt for the extension.

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Photo Credits

Florida Scrub Jay, Carlos Sanchez (CS); Mangrove Cuckoo, CS; Black Skimmers, CS; Key Deer Buck, Naturalist Journeys Stock (NJS); American Alligator, Rob Colyer (RC); Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake, CS; Red-whiskered Bulbul, CS; Purple Gallinule, CS; Prairie Warbler, CS; American Crocodile, Greg Smith (GS); White-winged Parakeet, CS; Common Myna, CS; Everglades Birding, NJS; Great Blue Heron, RC; Eastern Screech Owl, GS; West Indian Manatee, CS; Cape May Warbler, CS; Black-throated Green Warbler, CS; White-crowned Pigeon, CS; Limpkin, Sandy Sorkin (SS); Bald Eagle, SS; Crested Caracara, GS; Florida Scrub Jay, CS; Bachman's Sparrow, NJS; Fort Jefferson, NJS; Magnificent Frigatebirds, NJS; Mangrove Cuckoo, CS; Key Deer, NJS; Black-whiskered Vireo, Peg Abbott; Loggerhead Kingbird, Doug Greenberg (DG); Western Spindalis, Woody Wheeler; Cuban Vireo, DG; Fork-tailed Flycatcher, NJS; Black Vulture, SS; Red-masked Parakeet, CS; Great Egret, NJS; American Oyster Catcher, CS; Bahama Mockingbird, CS; Barred Owl, CS; Wood Storks, CS.

