

Birding Ecotours



USA – FLORIDA: PRIVATE TOUR REPORT

05 – 10 MAY 2023

By Luis Gles



*The stealthy **Bachman's Sparrow** is a special of pine savanna.*

Overview

This five-day custom tour of South Florida was designed to try to find some of Florida's most iconic birds for our Spanish client. The weather conditions were favorable for us; sunny all five days with nice winds from the south. We were able to get all the client's main target species and enjoy the spring migration in the most tropical region of the USA. The tour started in Miami on 6th May, where our client arrived from Europe, and ended at the same airport on the evening of the 10th May. We managed to travel around eight different counties in search of all these amazing birds.

On this tour, we connected with many exciting South Florida specials, such as **Bachman's Sparrow**, **Red-cockaded Woodpecker**, **Brown-headed Nuthatch**, **Smooth-billed Ani**, **Mangrove Cuckoo**, **Shiny Cowbird**, **La Sagra's Flycatcher**, **Bobolink**, multiple species of warblers including, **Prairie**, **Cape May**, **Magnolia**, **Blackpoll** and **Pine Warblers**, **Northern Waterthrush**, **Northern Parula**, along with **Fish Crow**, **Rose-breasted Grosbeak**, **Mitred Parakeet**, **Grey Kingbird**, **Black-whiskered Vireo**, **Florida Scrub Jay**, **Red-whiskered Bulbul**, **Dickcissel**, and **Antillean Nighthawk**. A total of 143 bird species were tallied in this fantastic clean-up trip.

Detailed Report

Day 1, 6th May 2023. Miami to the Gulf

With an early start, we headed north to one of the stormwater treatment areas (STAs) below Lake Okeechobee. STAs are constructed wetlands designed to aid in the Everglades' restoration. STAs remove phosphorus from runoff water by channeling it through shallow marshes filled with aquatic plants such as cattails. These plants absorb phosphorus from the water traveling through them, reducing the amount of nutrients reaching the Everglades or Lake Okeechobee. These wetlands have become prime habitat for a large diversity of resident and migratory birds. Our first stop along State Highway 27 provided us a good start. **Black-bellied** and **Fulvous Whistling Ducks**, **Blue-winged Teal**, **Mottled Duck**, **Sora**, **Limpkin**, **Purple Gallinule**, **Grey-headed Swamphen**, **Least Bittern**, **Anhinga**, **Solitary Sandpiper**, and **Roseate Spoonbill** all got the trip off to a good start.

Continuing our way to the edge of Lake Okeechobee at Tory Island Recreation area, after a delicious Mexican lunch in Belle Glade, we were able to see good numbers of **White Ibis**, **Anhinga**, **Double-crested Cormorant**, **Green Heron**, **Fish Crow**, and **Loggerhead Shrike**. We also saw a beautiful adult female **Snail Kite** that flew over us as we were about to leave the park. After another successful stop we started heading west towards Fort Myers. Before we got to the hotel, we connected with some important targets along the road, such as **Crested Caracara** and **Swallow-tailed Kite**. A neighborhood close to our hotel in Fort Myers gave us great views of **Florida Scrub Jay**, the only endemic bird species in Florida; a perfect way to end a fantastic first day of tour.

Day 2, 7th May 2023. Pine Forest and Gulf Birding

We started early to get to the Fred C. Babcock/Cecil M. Webb Wildlife Management Area in good time. The Florida slash pine forests here can often deliver specials not found elsewhere. We were lucky to see two **Red-cockaded Woodpeckers** as soon as we arrived. We enjoyed the birds for a long time before they disappeared into the pinelands. Following this amazing experience with this threatened species, we began our search for **Bachman's Sparrow** and **Brown-headed Nuthatch**. It was not an easy task, but we ended up enjoying a couple of singing **Bachman's Sparrow** and a pair of **Brown-headed Nuthatches** actively searching for food. After a successful morning and a delicious lunch, we were ready for more birding, this time along the Gulf of Mexico where we enjoyed some cute **Snowy** and **Wilson's Plovers**. While there we added **Least** and **Sandwich Terns**, **American Oystercatcher**, **Black-bellied** and **Semipalmated Plovers**, **Ruddy Turnstone**, **Sanderling**, **Common** and **Royal Terns**, **Least** and **Semipalmated Sandpipers**, **Black Skimmer**, and **Grey Kingbird** to our trip list. Continuing with more birding after an early dinner we enjoyed a beautiful sunset and added **Chimney Swift** and the Florida subspecies of **Burrowing Owl**.



*The adorable **Brown-headed Nuthatch** was a major target for this trip.*

Day 3, 8th May 2023. More Gulf birding and transfer to Florida City

One of the top targets for our client was **Mangrove Cuckoo**, and getting an early start is crucial to seeing this shy species. We visited the Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge early where a great mangrove forest grows, the perfect habitat for our quarry. We eventually delighted in fantastic views of a **Mangrove Cuckoo**, and were happy to see a good push of migrants along the trail as well. These included **Northern Waterthrush**, **Northern Parula**, **Cape May**, **Blackpoll**, **Pine**, **Black-throated Blue** and **Palm Warblers**, **American Redstart**, **White-eyed**

Vireo, as well as many resident breeders such as **Yellow-crowned Night Heron**, **Black-crowned Night Heron**, **Green Heron**, **Osprey**, **Bald Eagle**, **Common Ground Dove**, and **Red-bellied** and **Pileated Woodpeckers**. After another successful morning on the west coast of Florida, we started driving southeast on State Road 41, also known as the Tamiami Trail.

Following another Mexican lunch, we continued birding around Homestead where, after 45 minutes of searching around the Homestead Airport, we found another Florida special, **Smooth-billed Ani** along with a flock of 180 **Bobolinks**, which was another top bird for our guest! We further added to our bird list with **Common Nighthawk**, **Wood Stork**, **Purple Martin**, **White-winged Dove**, **Common Yellowthroat**, **Shiny Cowbird**, and **White-Tailed Kite** all seen. We then took a break for dinner and headed back out again for owling in the Everglades, which was short-lived but productive. We had **Chuck-will's-widows**, our main target for the night, singing everywhere, as well as two **Eastern Screech Owls**, fully out in the open, providing great views.



*It is always a good day when one spots a **Mangrove Cuckoo** out in the open.*

Day 4, 9th May 2023. Birding the Florida Keys

After an early breakfast we began our drive south to the Keys. Our first stop was at Long Key State Park, where we connected with more Florida birds and migrants like **Reddish Egret**, **Brown Pelican**, **Least Tern**, **Clapper Rail**, **Great Crested Flycatcher**, **Black-whiskered Vireo**, **Ovenbird**, **Blue Grosbeak**, another **Mangrove Cuckoo** and the rare Cuban race of **American Kestrel**. Our next stop in Grassy Key provided new shorebirds to our list including **Short-billed Dowitcher**, **Willet**, **Black-necked Stilt**, **Spotted**, **Western** and **White-rumped Sandpipers**, and **Greater Yellowlegs**.

After our best lunch of the tour in Marathon, we continued heading west tallying more special birds like **Magnificent Frigatebird**, **Common Myna**, **Laughing Gull**, and **Least** and **Roseate**

Terns. Our search for target species took us to Key West, the southernmost town of continental USA. We could not miss Fort Zachary Taylor Historic State Park where we found multiple **White-crowned Pigeons**, some **Dickcissels**, and a late migrant **Sharp-shinned Hawk**, all of which were top targets for our guest. Before we ended the day and got back to the hotel, we headed northeast and decided to stop for a nice dinner. As we watched the sun go down, we enjoyed the **Antillean Nighthawk** display at the Marathon Airport.



The Florida Keys is the only place in the USA where one can find Antillean Nighthawk.

Day 5, 10th May 2023. Miami Birding

We started our final morning in search of **La Sagra's Flycatcher**; a Caribbean vagrant reported during the past few days at the edge of Biscayne National Park. After a 1.5-mile (2.5 kilometer) walk, we were able to hear the bird singing and tracked it down, eventually ending up with great views. Sightings of this Caribbean species have been increasing in South Florida for the past decade, but it is still tough to see here. Experiencing this range-restricted bird with the client, was a wonderful moment. While searching we also added more birds to our list including **Killdeer**, **Northern Cardinal**, **Northern Mockingbird**, **Blue Jay**, and **Cave Swallow** before our lunch break.

After lunch we spent some time urban birding around some of the oldest neighborhoods in Miami tallying some introduced species like **Scaly-breasted Munia**, **Monk Parakeet**, **Egyptian Goose**, **Muscovy Duck**, **Red-whiskered Bulbul**, **European Starling**, and **Yellow-chevroned, Mitred and Red-masked Parakeets**, with which we concluded this fantastic tour.

Bird List - Following IOC (12.1)

The following notation after species names is used to show conservation status following BirdLife International: VU = Vulnerable, NT = Near Threatened.

Common Name	Scientific Name
Ducks, Geese, Swans (Anatidae)	
Black-bellied Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna autumnalis</i>
Fulvous Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna bicolor</i>
Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>
Muscovy Duck	<i>Cairina moschata</i>
Blue-winged Teal	<i>Spatula discors</i>
Mottled Duck	<i>Anas fulvigula</i>
New World Quail (Odontophoridae)	
Northern Bobwhite	<i>Colinus virginianus</i>
Nightjars (Caprimulgidae)	
Common Nighthawk	<i>Chordeiles minor</i>
Antillean Nighthawk	<i>Chordeiles gundlachii</i>
Chuck-will's-widow - NT	<i>Antrostomus carolinensis</i>
Swifts (Apodidae)	
Chimney Swift - VU	<i>Chaetura pelagica</i>
Cuckoos (Cuculidae)	
Smooth-billed Ani (Rarity)	<i>Crotophaga ani</i>
Mangrove Cuckoo	<i>Coccyzus minor</i>
Pigeons, Doves (Columbidae)	
Rock Dove (Pigeon)	<i>Columba livia</i>
White-crowned Pigeon - NT	<i>Patagioenas leucocephala</i>
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
Common Ground Dove	<i>Columbina passerina</i>
Mourning Dove	<i>Zenaida macroura</i>
White-winged Dove	<i>Zenaida asiatica</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Rails, Crakes & Coots (Rallidae)	
Clapper Rail	<i>Rallus crepitans</i>
Sora	<i>Porzana carolina</i>
Grey-headed Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio poliocephalus</i>
Purple Gallinule	<i>Porphyrio martinica</i>
Common Gallinule	<i>Gallinula galeata</i>
American Coot	<i>Fulica americana</i>
Cranes (Gruidae)	
Sandhill Crane	<i>Antigone canadensis</i>
Limpkin (Aramididae)	
Limpkin	<i>Aramus guarauna</i>
Oystercatchers (Haematopodidae)	
American Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus palliatus</i>
Stilts and Avocets (Recurvirostridae)	
Black-necked Stilt	<i>Himantopus mexicanus</i>
American Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra americana</i>
Plovers (Charadriidae)	
Grey (Black-bellied) Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
Semipalmated Plover	<i>Charadrius semipalmatus</i>
Wilson's Plover	<i>Charadrius wilsonia</i>
Killdeer	<i>Charadrius vociferus</i>
Snowy Plover - NT	<i>Charadrius nivosus</i>
Sandpipers, Snipes (Scolopacidae)	
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
Stilt Sandpiper	<i>Calidris himantopus</i>
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>
Least Sandpiper	<i>Calidris minutilla</i>
White-rumped Sandpiper	<i>Calidris fuscicollis</i>
Semipalmated Sandpiper - NT	<i>Calidris pusilla</i>
Western Sandpiper	<i>Calidris mauri</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Long-billed Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus scolopaceus</i>
Short-billed Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus griseus</i>
Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularius</i>
Solitary Sandpiper	<i>Tringa solitaria</i>
Willet	<i>Tringa semipalmata</i>
Greater Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>
Gulls, Terns, Skimmers (Laridae)	
Black Skimmer	<i>Rynchops niger</i>
Laughing Gull	<i>Leucophaeus atricilla</i>
Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>
Royal Tern	<i>Thalasseus maximus</i>
Cabot's (Sandwich) Tern	<i>Thalasseus acuflavidus</i>
Least Tern	<i>Sternula antillarum</i>
Roseate Tern	<i>Sterna dougallii</i>
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
Storks (Ciconiidae)	
Wood Stork	<i>Mycteria americana</i>
Frigatebirds (Fregatidae)	
Magnificent Frigatebird	<i>Fregata magnificens</i>
Cormorants and Shags (Phalacrocoracidae)	
Double-crested Cormorant	<i>Nannopterum auritum</i>
Aningas, Darters (Anhingidae)	
Anhinga	<i>Anhinga anhinga</i>
Ibises, Spoonbills (Threskiornithidae)	
American White Ibis	<i>Eudocimus albus</i>
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
Roseate Spoonbill	<i>Platalea ajaja</i>
Hérons, Bitterns (Ardeidae)	
Least Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus exilis</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
Yellow-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nyctanassa violacea</i>
Green Heron	<i>Butorides virescens</i>
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
Great Blue Heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
Reddish Egret - NT	<i>Egretta rufescens</i>
Tricolored Heron	<i>Egretta tricolor</i>
Little Blue Heron	<i>Egretta caerulea</i>
Snowy Egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>
Pelicans (Pelecanidae)	
Brown Pelican	<i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>
New World Vultures (Cathartidae)	
Black Vulture	<i>Coragyps atratus</i>
Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>
Ospreys (Pandionidae)	
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
Kites, Hawks, Eagles (Accipitridae)	
White-tailed Kite	<i>Elanus leucurus</i>
Swallow-tailed Kite	<i>Elanoides forficatus</i>
Sharp-shinned Hawk	<i>Accipiter striatus</i>
Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>
Snail Kite	<i>Rostrhamus sociabilis</i>
Red-shouldered Hawk	<i>Buteo lineatus</i>
Owls (Strigidae)	
Eastern Screech Owl	<i>Megascops asio</i>
Burrowing Owl	<i>Athene cunicularia</i>
Kingfishers (Alcedinidae)	
Belted Kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle alcyon</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Woodpeckers (Picidae)	
Red-bellied Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes carolinus</i>
Red-cockaded Woodpecker - NT	<i>Leuconotopicus borealis</i>
Northern Flicker	<i>Colaptes auratus</i>
Pileated Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus pileatus</i>
Caracaras, Falcons (Falconidae)	
Northern Crested Caracara	<i>Caracara cheriway</i>
American Kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>
African & New World Parrots (Psittacidae)	
Red-masked Parakeet	<i>Psittacara erythrogenyus</i>
Mitred Parakeet	<i>Psittacara mitratus</i>
Monk Parakeet	<i>Myiopsitta monachus</i>
Yellow-chevroned Parakeet	<i>Brotogeris chiriri</i>
Tyrant Flycatchers (Tyrannidae)	
Eastern Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus tyrannus</i>
Grey Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus dominicensis</i>
Great Crested Flycatcher	<i>Myiarchus crinitus</i>
La Sagra's Flycatcher (Rarity)	<i>Myiarchus sagrae</i>
Shrikes (Laniidae)	
Loggerhead Shrike - NT	<i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>
Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis (Vireonidae)	
White-eyed Vireo	<i>Vireo griseus</i>
Black-whiskered Vireo	<i>Vireo altiloquus</i>
Crows, Jays, and Magpies (Corvidae)	
Blue Jay	<i>Cyanocitta cristata</i>
Florida Scrub Jay (Endemic) - VU	<i>Aphelocoma coerulescens</i>
American Crow	<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>
Fish Crow	<i>Corvus ossifragus</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Bulbuls (Pycnonotidae)	
Red-whiskered Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>
Swallows (Hirundinidae)	
Purple Martin	<i>Progne subis</i>
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Cave Swallow	<i>Petrochelidon fulva</i>
Nuthatches (Sittidae)	
Brown-headed Nuthatch	<i>Sitta pusilla</i>
Mockingbirds, Thrashers (Mimidae)	
Northern Mockingbird	<i>Catherpes mexicanus</i>
Starlings, Rhabdornis (Sturnidae)	
Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
Common (European) Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
Thrushes (Turdidae)	
Eastern Bluebird	<i>Sialia sialis</i>
Old World Sparrows, Snowfinches (Passeridae)	
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Waxbills, Munias & Allies (Estrildidae)	
Scaly-breasted Munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>
New World Sparrows (Passerellidae)	
Bachman's Sparrow - NT	<i>Peucaea aestivalis</i>
Eastern Towhee	<i>Pipilo erythrophthalmus</i>
Oropendolas, Orioles, Blackbirds (Icteridae)	
Bobolink	<i>Dolichonyx oryzivorus</i>
Eastern Meadowlark - NT	<i>Sturnella magna</i>
Red-winged Blackbird	<i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>
Shiny Cowbird	<i>Molothrus bonariensis</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Common Grackle - NT	<i>Quiscalus quiscula</i>
Boat-tailed Grackle	<i>Quiscalus major</i>
New World Warblers (Parulidae)	
Ovenbird	<i>Seiurus aurocapilla</i>
Northern Waterthrush	<i>Parkesia noveboracensis</i>
Black-and-white Warbler	<i>Mniotilta varia</i>
Common Yellowthroat	<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>
American Redstart	<i>Setophaga ruticilla</i>
Cape May Warbler	<i>Setophaga tigrina</i>
Northern Parula	<i>Setophaga americana</i>
Blackpoll Warbler NT	<i>Setophaga striata</i>
Black-throated Blue Warbler	<i>Setophaga caerulescens</i>
Palm Warbler	<i>Setophaga palmarum</i>
Pine Warbler	<i>Setophaga pinus</i>
Prairie Warbler	<i>Setophaga discolor</i>
Cardinals & Allies (Cardinalidae)	
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	<i>Pheucticus ludovicianus</i>
Northern Cardinal	<i>Cardinalis cardinalis</i>
Dickcissel	<i>Spiza americana</i>
Blue Grosbeak	<i>Passerina caerulea</i>
Total Seen	143