



# **SOUTH FLORIDA IN WINTER**

## **A bird-filled warm weather getaway**

### **February 18-24, 2020**

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**Guides: Josh Engel and Jacob Cooper**  
Maximum group size is 14 participants

IAS member price: \$2250 per person  
Non-member price: \$2350 per person  
Based on double occupancy  
**\$600 single supplement**

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To book this trip, visit [www.redhillbirding.com/bookingform](http://www.redhillbirding.com/bookingform)

Florida is the quintessential winter vacation destination. Warm weather, sunny skies, and beautiful coastline are all major selling points to those from colder climes, but, for birds, the area is truly epic. The wetlands that are everywhere are full of ibis, herons, egrets, gallinules, Anhinga, and other waterbirds, the shoreline is full of terns and shorebirds, and the woods and scrublands are full of wintering songbirds. We'll visit some of the country's top birding locations like Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge, Corkscrew Swamp, the Everglades, and the Florida Keys. We will certainly enjoy the bounty of birds and will search for specialties of the region, like Florida Scrub-Jay, Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Brown-headed Nuthatch, White-crowned Pigeon, Wood Stork, Roseate Spoonbill, Short-tailed Hawk, Limpkin, Snail Kite, Magnificent Frigatebird, the many exotic birds around Miami, and much more. This trip makes for a great bird-filled winter escape.

## ITINERARY

### **Day 1, Tue, Feb 18. Arrive to Fort Myers. Night Fort Myers.**

We will arrive to **Fort Myers** and gather at the group's hotel in the afternoon, allowing enough time to head out and look for Florida Scrub-Jay, a charismatic corvid that is only found in Florida and is on the endangered species list, as well as the Florida subspecies of Burrowing Owl, which is on the state endangered list. No doubt we'll see many other characteristic birds of Florida as well: Northern Mockingbird, Loggerhead Shrike, Boat-tailed Grackle, and Bald Eagle.

### **Day 2, Wed, Feb 19. Babcock-Webb WMA, Florida Scrub-Jay search, and Ding Darling NWR. Night Fort Myers.**

We will be up early to head to **Babcock-Webb Wildlife Management Area**, famous for its piney woods habitat and the birds that inhabit them. The three specialties, Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Bachman's Sparrow, and Brown-headed Nuthatch are never easy to find, but we will give them all a solid try. Regardless, there are always lots of birds here, including wintering songbirds like Yellow-throated and Prairie Warblers and Blue-headed Vireo and residents like Loggerhead Shrike, Common Ground-Dove, and Northern Bobwhite.

If we failed to see Florida Scrub-Jay the previous day, we will try again, before heading to **Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island** for the remainder of the day. Rightfully famous for its waterbirds, we should see hordes of waders, shorebirds, terns, and others. We also will find southern wetland and coastal birds like Tricolored Heron, Reddish Egret, Snowy Egret, White Ibis, Roseate Spoonbill, Wood Stork, Mottled Duck, and Royal Tern. If we're lucky, we may find Clapper Rail as well. Shorebirds will also be plentiful, including Wilson's, Snowy, and Black-bellied Plovers, Willet, Red Knot, and Marbled Godwit. We'll make an effort to see Manatees here and it's a great spot to watch the sun set over the Gulf of Mexico on a warm winter evening.

### **Day 3, Thu, Feb 20. Corkscrew Swamp and through the Everglades. Night: Homestead.**

**Corkscrew Swamp** is a wonderful mixture of woodlands and wetlands with a bird list that matches the excellent habitat. In the wetlands we will look for Anhinga, Limpkin, Purple Gallinule, and Yellow-crowned Night-Heron. In the woods we'll keep an eye out for Red-shouldered Hawk, Barred Owl, Pileated Woodpecker, and maybe even a Painted Bunting. Wintering songbirds can be numerous here, including more than 10 species of warblers, like Ovenbird, Yellow-throated Warbler, and Northern Parula.

We'll then head east across the **Everglades**, stopping en route to look for Black-bellied Whistling Duck, and keeping a careful eye out for Snail Kite along the way. We'll break up the drive with an airboat ride into the swamps, which isn't just an excellent way to experience the Everglades but is also a great way to see Snail Kite. We're likely to see Limpkin and Boat-tailed

Grackle today as well. We'll stop on our way to Homestead to look for Burrowing Owl if we haven't seen it yet (and possibly White-tailed Kite), and arrive in the evening to our hotel.

**Day 4, Fri, Feb 21. Everglades and Homestead area. Night: Homestead.**

We'll spend the day birding the road through **Everglades National Park** to Flamingo. Wetland birds will be abundant, including White Ibis, Wood Stork, and many herons, egrets, and other waders, including the white morph of Great Blue Heron. We'll keep an eye on the marsh edges for King Rail, Sora, and Common Gallinule. And we'll keep an eye towards the sky for raptors, which could include Short-tailed Hawk along with the more expected Bald Eagle, Osprey, Red-shouldered Hawk, Northern Harrier, and Black Vulture. As we hit the coast, we'll look for Black Skimmer and Royal, Sandwich, Caspian, and Gull-billed Terns. We may get lucky with a Magnificent Frigatebird sailing overhead or a wintering Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, or even Smooth-billed Ani or Shiny Cowbird if they are being seen in the area. We'll search among the Tree Swallows for a wintering Cave Swallow and will try for the endangered Cape Sable subspecies of Seaside Sparrow.

Returning to Homestead in the afternoon, we'll visit the Atlantic coast to try for the rare Mangrove Cuckoo. We should also come across Fish Crow, White-winged Dove, and Boat-tailed Grackle and perhaps will find a Lesser Black-backed Gull with the more common Laughing, Ring-billed, and Herring Gulls.

**Day 5, Sat, Feb 22. Florida Keys. Night: Florida Keys.**

Today we'll set out over the causeway into the captivating **Florida Keys**. We'll have a good chance to see Magnificent Frigatebird as we cruise the keys and will stop in at various parks and beaches to see what we can find. We have a good chance to see White-crowned Pigeon here too. We'll also look for wintering songbirds, which could include Painted Bunting and Yellow-throated, Blue-headed, and White-eyed Vireos, and wintering shorebirds, including Piping Plover and Ruddy Turnstone. As we get to Key West, we are likely to see one of the strangest of introduced species, Red Junglefowl (widely known around the world as "chicken").

**Day 6, Sun, Feb 23. Keys to Miami. Night: Miami.**

We'll turn back around this morning and return to the mainland. If any vagrants are being seen in the area – perhaps a LaSagra's Flycatcher or Key West Quail-Dove – we will take some time to try and track them down. We might make another attempt for Mangrove Cuckoo or coastal waterbirds on our way, depending on how prior days have gone. Working our way to **Miami**, we will have some time at the end of the day to look for some of the many introduced species that call Miami home. This includes a list of species from all over the globe, including Egyptian Goose, Common Myna, Indian Peafowl, Red-whiskered Bulbul, Spot-breasted Oriole, Scaly-breasted Munia, Gray-headed Swamphen, and various parrots, including Black-headed, Nanday, White-winged, Mitred, and Monk Parakeets. We may very well bump into random other exotics as well, for example even a Chestnut-fronted or Blue-and-yellow Macaw.

**Day 7, Mon, Feb 24. Miami birding and departure.**

We will have a final morning in the Miami area to track down any of the exotic species that we haven't seen yet before a mid-day departure from the Miami Airport.

**IMPORTANT INFORMATION****Contact and registration information**

The Red Hill Birding **tour manager** for this trip is Nathan Goldberg. To sign up, each participant should complete the [booking form](http://www.redhillbirding.com/bookingform) (www.redhillbirding.com/bookingform). Once we receive the form, we will send you information about paying the trip deposit. If you have any questions before registering, please contact Josh or Nathan at [info@redhillbirding.com](mailto:info@redhillbirding.com).

**Timing**

The trip will **begin at a 3pm at the Fort Myers hotel** on February 18 and will end at **11am at the Miami hotel** on February 24. Please book your departure from Miami **after 1pm**. Both hotels provide free airport shuttles. We will be birding in a single van with the guide driving, or two vans, each with a guide driving. **Please note that the trip starts and ends in different cities, starting in Fort Myers and ending in Miami**—there are plenty of non-stop flights between Chicago and both of these airports.

**Physical difficulty**

This trip is **physically easy**. Almost all of the birding will be done from roads, wide and flat trails, boardwalks, and other easily accessible locations. South Florida is one of the flattest places on the planet, so the walking is very easy. The birding is also generally quite easy, with open habitats, extensive wetlands, and fairly open woodlands.

**Pace**

The **pace** of the trip is **moderate**. We will take advantage of the typically lovely Florida weather and bird-filled hotspots and spend most of each day in the field. A typical day will have us eating an early breakfast at the hotel; heading into the field to take advantage of morning bird activity; lunch in the field or in a fast restaurant; back in the field for the afternoon; and finishing with time for a short rest before dinner.

**Price**

The price of the trip **for Illinois Audubon Society members is \$2250** and the single supplement is \$600. The **price for non-members is \$2350**. This price **includes** all meals (excluding alcoholic beverages) from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 7; all transportation and accommodation during that period; a Red Hill Birding guide (two guides with more than 8 participants); all park entrance fees; an airboat trip in the Everglades; and a bound checklist to keep track of sightings

during the trip. It **does not include** alcoholic beverages, travel insurance, optional activities, snacks, laundry, tips (apart from meals), or other items of a personal nature.

A deposit of \$500 per person and the submission of the [booking form](#) will secure your place on the trip. Upon receiving your booking form, we will send you deposit details. Final payment is due by October 19, 2019. We accept payment by check or through the apps Venmo or Zelle. Our trips are priced with a discount for paying by those methods; we can also accept credit card payments with a 3.1% processing fee.

### Hotels

Accommodations will all be in high-quality hotels or motels. Generally, there will be free wireless internet. We favor hotels that are convenient to our birding sites whenever possible. Our hotels in Fort Myers and Miami will have free airport shuttles to get you from the airport to the hotel in Fort Myers, and to the airport in Miami from the hotel on the final night.

### Photography

The **photographic opportunities** are **excellent**. The birds here tend to be tame, abundant, and photogenic. Although this is primarily a birding tour and we will not be making special accommodations for photographers, this is one of the best regions of the country for bird photography and any photographers in the group will go home with many excellent images.

### Weather

The weather in Florida in February is generally very mild and comfortable. The average high temperature is in the mid 70°s F and average low is in the mid 50°s F. If a cold front comes through, it can be surprisingly chilly. It is generally a dry time of year, though rain showers are possible. It is worth checking the weather forecast before departure.

### Packing considerations

You will generally want to wear comfortable, light-weight clothing. Long sleeves and long pants are recommended for sun and insect protection. A warm sweater or mid-weight jacket is useful for cool mornings or in case a cold front comes through while we are there.

In terms of gear, you will want to bring the usual binoculars, field guide, hat, camera, and other gear you are accustomed to going birding with. A reusable water bottle and, for coffee drinkers, a travel coffee mug, are useful to have along in the car during the day. You will want to bring sunscreen and insect repellent as well.

### Tipping

We aim to provide **exceptional service**, using guides that are knowledgeable, interesting, personable, and experienced. While tipping is never expected, if you feel that your guides went above and beyond, you are welcome to leave them a gratuity. Tips at restaurants are included in the cost of the tour.

### Travel insurance

We do not require travel insurance for trips in the US. However, we highly recommend buying it as it can protect you from unforeseen costs associated with missed, delayed, or canceled flights, sudden illness, medical evacuation, damaged equipment, or other unexpected issues. Red Hill Birding is not responsible for such costs, as laid out in our [Terms & Conditions](#). Note that in some circumstances, such as if you have preexisting medical conditions, travel insurance must be purchased within 1-2 weeks of paying the trip deposit.



*Florida Scrub-Jay photo by Arlene Koziol.*