

## FLORIDA TIPS FOR MARK COLLER – FOR APRIL 2000

The Key Areas for anyone visiting Florida are;

Gulf Coast – Longboat Key and Myakka State Park, Sanibel Island, Corkscrew Swamp, Tamiami Trail from Ochopee to the Homestead Turn off. Everglades National Park to Flamingo. The Keys to at least Marathon. Central Highlands HWY70 / 27 crossroads north to Highlands Hammock and then to Kissimmee and Merritt Island / Space Centre.

Visit all these and you should have a good chance of seeing most of the birds of Florida.

Photography of Herons in particular is best at Sanibel and the Everglades NP ponds maybe Mrazek will be the best though it does vary from year to year.

**ANHINGA** – Really hard to miss at Ding Darling Refuge on Sanibel Island – see Fort Myers

Ditto **ALL HERONS AND EGRETS**

Especially:-

**Yellow Crowned Night Heron** – mainly near the reserve exit in the mangroves – seriously tame down to 10 feet here – seemingly less accessible elsewhere though they occur widely.

**Reddish Egret** is a bird of the wide open flats where it is too distant for photography – occasionally you may find one close in or at the lakes after high tide on the beaches which give the best photo opportunities. The one in my article was such at Longboat Key north of Sarasota . This beach is excellent for photography as there are slacks at the back of the beach where there are lots of waders , terns , skimmers etc all amazingly tame.

**American Bittern** – can be good in roadside ditches out to Myakka State Park – inland from Sarasota and also at the board walk at Long Pine Key in the Everglades National Park both these sites are important for other species also e.g. Swallow tailed Kite and Short tailed Hawk among others.

**Wood Stork** – not hard to see – but not easy to find on the ground – sometimes at the Everglades ‘ponds’ e.g. Mrazek Pond, West Lake and Nine Mile Pond – seems to prefer south Florida. Try to do these ponds in a weekday as at weekends they are more populated with people which does put the birds off a little. Again views easily down to 20 feet.

**White Ibis** – Hard to miss but best photographic views might be at Sanibel Island or at Space Centre – however they are particularly common – along with other things – at Corkscrew Swamp near North Naples south of Sanibel – this is also Burrowing Owl and Painted Bunting country and worth visiting.

**Roseate Spoonbill** – best bet could be the Everglades ‘ponds’ where occasionally very tame – too close for a 300mm lens! But they occur all along the gulf coast.

**Swallow tailed Kite** – Myakka State Park, Corkscrew Swamp and Highlands Hammock State Park.

Usually high at the first two but lower at the latter site.

**Snail Kite** – I would say that the best site is between OCHOPEE and the first air boat ride station going east on the Hwy 41 across the Big Cypress Preserve – I have seen them to the north of this road hunting over the grassy wastes every time. Further on towards Miami there is the Miccosukee Restaurant. There are in fact 2 of them but opposite the one on the south side of the road is also a good spot. The water level is critical however and if the levels are too low the views will be distant at best.

**Short tailed Hawk** – A bit of an Everglades Nat Park speciality and can be seen anywhere from the entrance to Flamingo – with a good slice of luck however.

**Crested Caracara** – From Kissimmee down to HWY 70 south on highway 27 is what passes for prairie in Florida and this central strip is called the highlands. The grassy farm fields are home to Burrowing Owls, Sandhill Cranes and Caracaras. Caracaras are best at the junction with the 70 and 27 if you cruise for about 10 miles east and west on the 70 from the junction. Sandhills are also obvious from this road towards arcadia if present – they will have young in April.. Caracara also occurs at Kissimmee State Park.

**Sandhill Crane** – hard to miss at Moss Park just North of Kissimmee where they breed – as does Bald Eagle – Moss Park is on hwy15 OFF the Beeline Highway to Merritt Island

**LIMPKIN** – can be missed but try Lake Tohopekaliga –Southport campground boat ramp (South side of the lake) close to Kissimmee on MACK OVERSTREET ROAD 531. The spur road to the west shore of the lake has breeding Bald Eagles, Cranes, Bluebirds and Carolina Wrens to name but a few. Another certain site for Limpkin is Myakka State Park near Sarasota on the gulf side. They can be just about anywhere but

on the drive through there is a bridge over a wide (100yds) of water – try the banks on the far side – beware alligators and Cottonmouth Snakes at the shoreline – they have huge ones here. Failing that there is also on this road an obvious line of tall pylons carrying electricity across the road. You can park and walk under the line of the wires to the left for 300yds until you come to a lake – this is also a good spot for Limpkin – you may find them in the trees but usually they are quite vocal. Also along the Tamiami trail at the grassy edges of the big swamp

**Wilson's Plover** – easy at Longboat Key NW of Sarasota.

**Black Skimmer** – ditto and at Flamingo and Merritt Island.

**Barred Owl**- Highlands Hammock – Corkscrew Swamp- where ask wardens for directions to nest- apparently these birds are so stupid that they can be touched!

**Pileated Pecker** – Corkscrew Swamp is best.

**Florida Scrub Jay – I stuggled last time!** Best bet is the area around the entrance to Highlands Hammock state park.

**Painted Bunting** – usually these like feeders they used to be at the Corkscrew Swamp feeders at the site entrance gates

**Burrowing Owl**- apparently not as common as they were – used to see them somewhere on Marathon Golf Course – The Sombrero Course drive around the perimeter fence stopping occasionally to scan the fairways. They used to nest on highway 1 in the car park of Marathon Airport but this has now been redeveloped. They also occur around the 721 Cow House Road near Lake Placid which is just north of the area for the Caracaras and Sandhills – look for the Prairie Dog Towns where they live. There is usually a pair near Corkscrew Swamp and you may be able to get the site from the wardens there.

If you go down to Marathon be sure to look out for **Scissor tailed Flycatcher** there aren't many of them but they used to rest on the wires above the main road HWY 1 not far from the airport entrance though I suspect they may have moved – however this was the 'traditional' site.

**Magnificent Frigate** – these may be encountered on the Gulf coast south of Sanibel. I have usually seen them in the evening – for some unknown reason – perhaps they roost in the mangroves. They are a certainty on the Dry Tortugas and if you look at the right time of day to the north of the keys. I would say you have a reasonable chance of seeing them in April.

**White crowned Pigeon** – everglades national park - Flamingo

**Smooth billed Ani** – used to be at the Fruit and Spice Park but most of this area was flattened by Hurricane Andrew – as were several excellent sites that were in the Lanes Guide. I have no current site for these at all. They are awful looking things – like a black cuckoo – which is what they are. Try Sanibel's Bailey Tract – where you might also see Frigates in the evening!

**Mangrove Cuckoo** – difficult, secretive and restricted to very thick mangroves where people cannot get. You need to be in somewhere like No Name Key or the Snake Bight Trail – Flamingo at dawn with a tape but you are going at the right time. Wrap up well for the Snake Bight the mosquitos are astonishing and very very hungry!!

HAVE A GOOD TRIP  
RICHARD.