

Kite Tales



Summer 2014 Volume 6 Issue 3

Is it Fall yet?

It's been a long hot summer here in Florida and most people avoid being outdoors at this time of year, but do not despair, respite is not that far away—fall is just around the corner! Really? Yes, believe it or not fall has arrived, at least from the birds' perspective. By late July, shorebirds, swallows, martins, kites and songbirds are starting to head south for the tropics. As fall progresses into August, thousands of shorebirds start arriving in Florida; large flocks of sandpipers can be found on our beaches, mudflats and flooded fields. By September, the floodgates will be open and millions of songbirds will head south.

Visit Florida's migrant traps to see as many as 25 species of wood-warbler, tanagers, grosbeaks, cuckoos, buntings, vireos and flycatchers.

In this issue of *Kite Tales*, we showcase four wonderful Great



Black-and-white Warbler by Andy Wraithmell, FWC.

Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail (GFBWT) sites renowned for the quality of birding they provide during fall migration. Check out our regular feature, "Experience the Trail," which shares our readers' photographs. The Florida Keys Birding & Wildlife Festival is also highlighted (registration is now open!).

We hope you have had a great summer and are able to get out and enjoy the wonderful birds and wildlife that Florida has to offer during the fall season.

Happy trails!

—Office of Public Access and Wildlife Viewing



Visit our Facebook page at facebook.com/floridabirdingtrail



Featured Trail Sites (Fall Migration)

Panhandle Section

Gulf Islands National Seashore: Fort Pickens Area

This migratory hotspot is not to be missed in spring and fall, as tired migrants make landfall after long flights. Batteries Langdon and Worth are both good stops for migrants; closely check flowering oaks. Please respect closed areas protecting nesting birds: the beach here is prime for breeding Snowy Plovers and Least Terns spring through fall. Black Terns are ubiquitous in summer and early fall. By far, the fort and surrounding trails offer this site's most exciting birding. In open areas surrounding the fortifications, watch for sentinel flycatchers on any minor promontory. Gray Kingbirds breed here and Scissor-tailed Flycatchers are occasional in fall and winter. The trails on the fort's bayside can be extraordinary for migrant

songbirds like Tennessee, Cape May and Magnolia Warblers and more. Morning is not necessarily the best time to see these birds; long-term sighting logs from dedicated local birders indicate these migrants can make landfall in early afternoon. Migrating raptors cruise the dune line in October and April. Rarities such as Groove-billed Ani, Sage Thrasher and Green-tailed Towhee have been recorded. Loaner optics and field guides are available. Fort Pickens Road is prone to storm-related closures; check road conditions at the park website prior to departure.

West Section

Fort De Soto County Park

One of the most popular birding and outdoor recreation locales in Florida, this county park and GFBWT gateway site is on every wildlife watcher's to-do list. A staggering 325-plus species of birds have been sighted here. The park consists of five interconnected keys with mangroves, wetlands,

hardwood/palm hammocks, mudflats and nearly 3 miles of sandy beach. Upon entering the park, continue south past the campground to the T-intersection on Mullet Key. Turn left (east) here, then immediately turn right to reach the visitor center. Stop here to check the recent sightings log (add your own when you're done), and pick up a park map and bird finding guide/checklist. You can also pick up loaner binoculars if you need them. Fort De Soto is legendary amongst birders for its spectacular offerings during migration, especially in spring when songbirds crossing the Gulf of Mexico make landfall. Vireos, thrushes, cuckoos, orioles, tanagers, flycatchers, grosbeaks, buntings and warblers (41 species) may drop in almost anywhere in the park (especially during a fallout), but if you have limited time you will certainly want to concentrate on one of these three hotspots: the East Beach Woods, the mulberry trees just east of the Bay Pier and the Arrowhead Picnic Area near North Beach (wander the marked and unmarked trails north and south of this picnic area as well). The fig trees and the wooded patch beside the visitor center are also worth checking for songbirds, and the paved 0.4-mile Barrier-Free Nature Trail (ADA-compliant, with rest areas and benches) makes this spot easy to explore. The park is also a superb location to see and photograph wading birds and shorebirds throughout the year. Roseate Spoonbills and Reddish Egrets feed on the



Least Tern incubating eggs. Photo by FWC.



Roseate Spoonbill. Photo by FWC.

flats, and both night-herons hunt for fish and crabs in the wetlands and mangroves. Wintering shorebirds like peeps, Dunlin and Spotted Sandpiper line the shore, and Snowy and Wilson's Plovers feed along the wrackline all year long. Upland, White-rumped and Buff-breasted Sandpipers and American Golden-Plover can turn up in spring and/or fall; Marbled Godwit, Whimbrel and Long-billed Curlew may be present any month. Numerous gulls and terns loaf in the sun on the beaches and by the piers; Least Tern colonies breed on the beach and floating nest platforms constructed just for them by park staff. Wintering sparrows such as Swamp, Nelson's, Saltmarsh and White-crowned can be found, and oddities show up here with some frequency, including American Flamingo, Elegant Tern,

Heerman's Gull, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Kirtland's Warbler, Lazuli Bunting and Bananaquit. Loggerhead Sea Turtles nest on the beaches from April to September. Butterfly, dragonfly and damselfly watchers have Mangrove Skipper, Ceraunus Blue, Cassius Blue, Obscure Skipper, Seaside Dragonlet, Variegated Meadowhawk (very rare) and Citrine Forktail to chase.

Although the park can

be busy at times (weekdays are best), birding here often will surely boost your county, state and life list.

East Section

Guana River WMA
Guana River Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is an excellent birding destination. More rustic and wild than its neighbor to the south,

it offers 15 miles of hiking trails through flatwoods, oak hammocks, scrub, freshwater wetlands and brackish marshes. Two viewing towers, one on Capo Creek and one on Lake Ponte Vedra, give good vantages of duck populations, for which the area is known, as well as egrets and herons. In winter, Nelson's and Saltmarsh Sparrows occur in the marsh by the Capo Creek tower. In late summer, Roseate Spoonbill, Wood Stork and other wading birds are numerous around the Big and Little Savannah impoundments (be sure to check the interpretive overlook at Big Savannah Pond). During seasonal hunts, birders can drive in with automobiles, making the area significantly more accessible. Simply check in at the check station for a drive-in pass. At other times, birders need to park at the dam (last chance for restrooms on the south side) and hike or bike in, veering right on the west side of the dam and heading north into

Cont. on last page



Prairie Warbler by Andy Wraithmell, FWC.

They're Birding Trail Approved!



Purchase new GFBWT approved binoculars and a portion of the sale will support the trail program and conservation projects.

Offered through a partnership with Opticron USA.

Opticron's T3 Trailfinder 8 X 42 is the most popular birding trail approved binocular, which is no surprise to us as it is the perfect all-round birding trail binocular for watching birds and wildlife in Florida's wooded habitats.



opticron
www.opticronusa.com

You can order birding trail approved binoculars today from the Wildlife Foundation of Florida:

wildlifefoundationofflorida.com/birding

OR in person at these locations:

Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary,
Naples. 239-348-9151

Delray Camera Shop,
561-278-3331

Gumbo Limbo Nature Center,
Boca Raton. 561-544-8605

Hobe Sound Nature Reserve,
772-546-2067

Opticron USA is staffed by a small but dedicated team of professional optics experts who stock, demonstrate and sell their equipment.

opticronusa.com/Pages/dealers.html



MyFWC.com

Welcome to the 16th Annual Florida Keys Birding & Wildlife Festival

Each day, the festival offers morning birding trips, expert-led workshops and interesting evening presentations. Participants also have a variety of other awesome options like kayaking and boating ecotours, butterfly and natural history walks to choose from. Locations are throughout the Florida Keys, from Key Largo to Key West and beyond.

The 16th annual festival features our All-Star lineup: Rafael Galvez (Victor Emmanuel Nature Tours) and the Florida Keys Hawkwatch Team, Jeff Bouton (Leica Sports Optics), Andy Wraithmell (Great Florida Birding & Wildlife Trail), Elsa Alvear (National Park Service), Mark Hedden (Keys Audubon), Carlos Sanchez (Ecoavian Tours), Angel and Mariel Abreu (Nature is Awesome Tours) and David Simpson (Birding with David Simpson).

On average, more than 20,000 birds of prey migrate through the Florida Keys each fall, and more Peregrine Falcons have been observed here than anywhere else in the world. As many as 651 were spotted in a single day; spotters counted 3,836 during a single season. This is a must see event for birding enthusiasts! The Florida Keys Hawkwatch welcomes citizen scientists at their base at Curry Hammock State Park during the entire festival.



Florida Keys hawkwatch



Peregrine Falcon

Combine the raptors with migrating songbirds, rare endemic bird and wildlife species and our beautiful tropical habitats, and you have

the ingredients for a fantastic outdoor adventure!

Featured trip:

All-day, Sunday, September 28th boat trip to Dry Tortugas National Park with Mark Hedden of Florida Keys Audubon. If you have never been to the Dry Tortugas, this is something for your bucket list. During the 2013 trip, participants saw 56 species of birds including Sooty Terns, Masked Boobys, Brown Boobys, and more. Check out Mark's blog report for the complete list. boneisland.com/dry-tortugas-trip-report/

Reddish Egret © Tom Dunkerton.



FLORIDA KEYS
BIRDING &
WILDLIFE
FESTIVAL



September 23 - 28, 2014
Witness our Spectacular Fall Migration
KeysBirdingFest.org

Experience the Trail

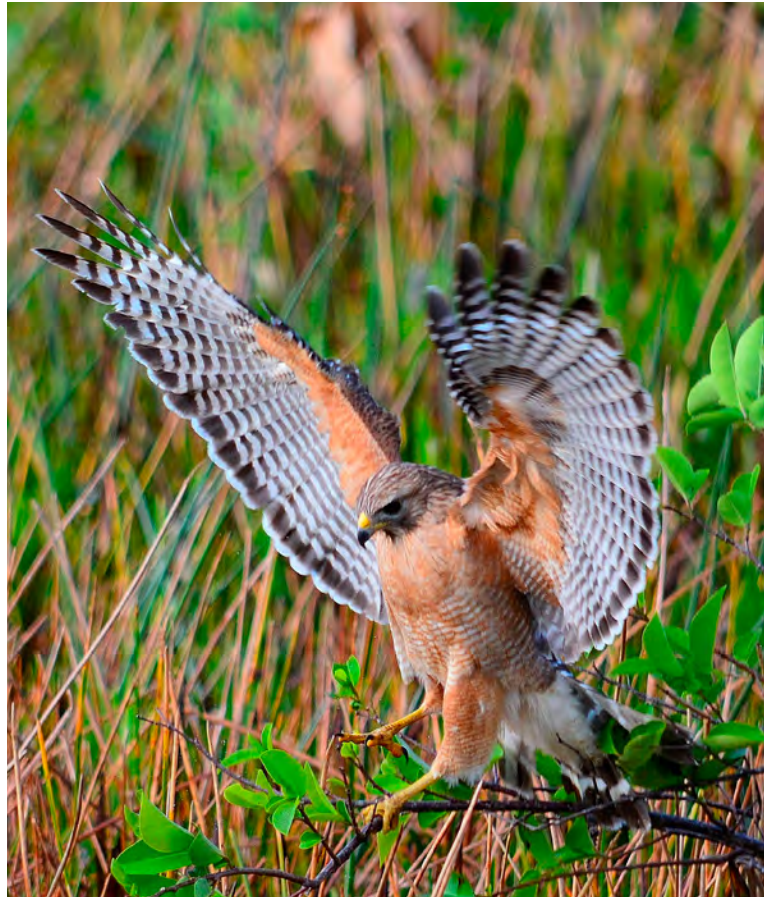
Thanks to all the photographers who contributed to this month's **Experience the Trail!**



Top - Least Tern by Danny Sauvageau.

Right - Red-shouldered Hawk by Marilyne Strazzerri.

Bottom right - Black Skimmer family by Lyn Spence.



Contact Us:

Anne Glick, section leader
Anne.Glick@MyFWC.com
850-922-0664

Mark Kiser, trail coordinator
Mark.Kiser@MyFWC.com
850-488-9478

Andy Wraithmell, wildlife
viewing program specialist
Andy.Wraithmell@MyFWC.com
850-488-9453

Michael Overstreet,
publications
Michael.Overstreet@MyFWC.com
850-488-8755





Left - Green Heron with young by Barry Ault.

Bottom left - Tricolored Heron by Marilyn Flanagan.

Bottom right - Swallow-tailed Kite by Larry Crovo.



Have a picture to contribute to this quarterly feature? Send a high resolution jpeg (1MB or larger) to Wildlifeviewing@myfwc.com by October 15th, 2014 for inclusion in our winter issue, and include where you took the picture and a short caption. Native Florida wildlife only please! We can feature up to six images per issue; all unused images will be kept on file for future issues.

Featured Trail Sites - Cont. from pg. 3
 the WMA. Watch for migratory songbirds in the hammocks as well as owls and woodpeckers. From the bird blind at Diego Pond, spy on ducks, shorebirds and wading birds as they feed on crabs, fish and invertebrates in the brackish water. Bring plenty of water, food, bug repellent and lace up your hiking shoes. This site makes you work for your birds, but the rewards are well worth it.

South Section

Curry Hammock State Park

This coastal park offers rockland hammock and beach viewing of waders and shorebirds, much like other sites in the Keys. However, of particular interest to birders is the yearly hawk watch conducted here. Between mid-September and early November, you can join in the official raptor count for the Keys! This world renowned hawk watch holds the single day Peregrine Falcon record. On October 10th, 2012, 651 Peregrine Falcons migrated south past the hawk watch! A visit during the first two weeks of October is a must for Peregrine enthusiasts. Rangers and volunteers offer educational contacts for visitors, while counting off the thousands of buteos, accipiters, falcons and eagles that pass by the viewing area each fall. This site offers a one-of-a-kind experience during this particular season. A nature trail on the bay side takes visitors through a tropical hardwood hammock. This is also an excellent site for White-crowned Pigeons, and kayaking around the mangrove-covered islands is very popular.

Birding Trail Merchandise

Trail Guides in the palm of your hand

The Great Florida Birding & Wildlife Trail now fits in the palm of your hand! This 2 GB flash drive is perfect for the traveling birder and wildlife viewer. It comes loaded with all four GFBWT guidebooks and Bird Watching Basics, and has plenty of extra storage room. Get yours today and start planning your next Florida birding and wildlife adventure!



Mike Hunter, FWC

Kite T-Shirt

Adorning this new GFBWT t-shirt are two majestic Swallow-tailed Kites soaring above the Peace River. This shirt is the first in a new "Wild About Florida" series. Don't miss out on this one! Color: Sky Blue. You can order the flash drive or t-shirt at wildlifeFlorida.com/catalog/18.



Mark Kiser, FWC

facebook



MyGFBT - Our Facebook page has 5,800 fans, who enjoy regular features such as Species Spotlight, Fans Photo Albums, Trail News and Trail Site of the Week. Visit our page and click the Like icon to receive MyGFBT posts on your Facebook wall.

facebook.com/floridabirdingtrail

twitter



MyGFBT - As of writing we are over 2,400 followers on twitter. Follow MyGFBT for tweets on conservation news, trail news, anecdotes, birding news and more. twitter.com/mygfbt

Help us keep Kite Tales aloft.

Please consider sending a tax-deductible donation to the Wildlife Foundation of Florida on behalf of the Great Florida Birding & Wildlife Trail.



Please make checks (in U.S. funds only) to the Wildlife Foundation of Florida, with "GFBWT/Kite Tales" written in the memo section of your check. Please send to:

Wildlife Foundation of Florida
Attention: GFBWT
 P.O. Box 6181
 Tallahassee, FL 32314-6181