The snowbirds are coming!

Winter is a great time of year for birding in Florida. Resident species are joined by snowbirds who are seeking refuge from the harsh Northern climate. For insect and fruit eating birds, the cold northern climate significantly reduces their food supplies. Here in Florida the winter is not as harsh, so many species of birds like the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker flock here and stay with us for several months. Their exodus south to Florida is triggered by changes in temperature, dwindling food supplies and/or changes in the photoperiod (how many hours of daylight there are).

Florida’s largest birding and wildlife festival takes place every January in Titusville. This will be the Space Coast’s 19th annual festival and visitors from all over the world will travel to Brevard County to participate. The Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail will be there, so stop by our booth and say hello!

This edition of Kite Tales features birding trail highlights, fabulous pictures from our readers in “Experience the Trail”, our NEW Wings Over Florida butterfly program, a feature on next year’s Chipola Feather Fest and, “Birding Guru”, which focuses on a tough sparrow ID and provides tips on how to find Winter Wrens.

We hope that you have a wonderful winter enjoying the many fantastic birding wildlife viewing opportunities Florida has to offer.

#birdsloveFL

–Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail staff

Visit our Facebook page at Facebook.com/floridabirdingtrail

FloridaBirdingTrail.com
Featured Trail Sites (Fall/Winter)

Panhandle Section
Three Rivers State Park

Pine and hardwood uplands with big, old trees characterize this park on the south shore of Lake Seminole. This lake is actually a reservoir created at the confluence of the Flint and Chattahoochee Rivers, where they form the Apalachicola—the opposite shoreline lies in Georgia. Bird the Lakeside Trail which begins near the campground, as well as the Half Dry Creek Trail near the picnic area. Habitat and location are good for Kentucky Warbler and Louisiana Waterthrush in spring/summer. Otherwise, wintering birds characteristic of the area include Winter Wren (check the slope forest between the recreation area and canoe launch), Golden-crowned Kinglet, and Brown Creeper. In winter, scope the lake for Canvasback; Lake Seminole has Florida’s largest wintering population. Other birds to look for on the lake during winter include Common Loon, Horned Grebe, American White Pelican and Bonaparte’s Gull. Other animals to keep an eye out for include Fox Squirrel and White-tailed Deer. The squirrels are often seen along the park road. Loaner optics and field guides are available at the entrance station; call ahead and let park staff know when you would like to borrow them.


Sherman’s fox squirrel by Andy Wraithmell, FWC.

West Section
Withlacoochee Gulf Preserve

This Yankeetown property opened to the public in 2009 and features salt marsh, pine flatwoods, and mixed hammocks of hardwoods, cedars, and palms, plus tidal ponds and creeks. Visitors have 3.5 miles of well-marked hiking trails and 4.5 miles of biking opportunities. The 3-story, on-site Ellie Schiller Education Center has educational programs, museum exhibits and a butterfly garden. Start your exploration on the 0.5-mile Salt Pond Trail. This trail has wading birds such as Yellow-crowned Night-Heron. Near the western end of the preserve stands a 30-foot observation tower; watch for Ospreys and listen for the harsh “kek” call notes of the Clapper Rail. Butterfly viewing at the site is excellent! As you wander along, look for Red Admiral and Black Swallowtail. Specialties include Salt Marsh Skipper in the salt marsh, and Sewardner’s Juniper Hairstreak in the red cedars. Other wildlife found on the preserve includes Bobcat, American Alligator and Salt Marsh Periwinkle. Guided group tours can be arranged by calling in advance.


East Section
Guana River Wildlife Management Area

Guana River Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is an excellent birding destination. 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 views of duck populations during the winter: scan for Blue-winged and Green-winged Teal, Ruddy Duck and Hooded Merganser. 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 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 the WMA. Watch for songbirds in the hammocks as well as owls and woodpeckers. From the bird blind at Diego Pond, look for night herons and shorebirds feeding on crabs and fish. Bring plenty of water, food, bug repellant and lace up your hiking shoes. This site makes you work for your birds, but the rewards are well worth it. A full color recreation guide with map is available from FWC’s Office of Recreation Services – call (850) 488-8755.


**South Section**

**Crowley Museum and Nature Center**

This site contains more than 2 miles of trails through native habitats such as pine flatwoods, hardwood hammocks, freshwater marsh and swamp, and riverine areas. There is a 2000-foot boardwalk terminating at an observation tower overlooking the marsh. During the winter months look for Northern Harrier, Sora and Blue-headed Vireo. Bald Eagles and Barred Owls nest here, Swallow-tailed Kites cruise through during summer and dabbling ducks visit the swamps and marsh during winter. This site has records for Black-bellied whistling-Duck, Crested Caracara and even Vermillion Flycatcher! Call ahead to find out the schedules for workshops and other educational programs that occur throughout the year. This is a great family-friendly trail site!

**Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail**

**Chipola Feather Fest**

Panhandle birding at its best!
April 15 – 18, 2016
Marianna, Florida

Come join us in the beautiful Florida Panhandle for a great birding and wildlife viewing experience. We have a fantastic selection of field trips for you to take part in: Visit Apalachicola National Forest, home to the world’s largest population of Red-cockaded Woodpeckers; search Cypress Swamps for the skulky Swainson’s Warbler; explore Apalachee Wildlife Management Area at night for goatsuckers n’ gators; and enjoy Florida’s largest Cliff Swallow colony at the Jim Woodruff Dam. We are also offering a post-festival field trip to the famous migrant hot spot St. George Island, which is also home to the endangered Snowy Plover! Hummingbird expert Fred Bassett will be our keynote speaker and we have a great selection of educational workshops at Chipola College.

Visit our website and register today!

For more information contact: Andy Wraithmell at (850)488-9453

FloridaBirdingTrail.com
Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail
Chipola Feather Fest
Panhandle birding at its best!
April 15 – 18, 2016
Marianna, Florida

Apalachicola National Forest is home to the largest population of Red-cockaded Woodpeckers in the world!

The call of this large flycatcher will be heard throughout the festival weekend.

Join Brad and Brook Rohman on the Lake Seminole Hotspots trip to see this beautiful swallow.
The Birding Guru
Andy Wraithmell has been a birder for over 30 years. Birding Guru will feature one of Florida’s toughest identifications: Nelson’s versus Saltmarsh Sparrow. Focus Point will help you find Winter Wrens.

Identification Challenge: Nelson’s versus Saltmarsh Sparrow

These small secretive sparrows are uncommon winter visitors to Florida, typically found frequenting coastal marshes between October and March. Prolonged close views are often required to separate these two species. Nelson’s have a gray crown stripe, bright orange face with gray auricular (ear coverts), a short bill and an orange breast with very faint rufous streaks. Saltmarsh have a gray crown stripe, an orange face that is brighter than their very pale buffy breast, gray auricular, a long bill and distinct dark streaks on their breast and flanks. Saltmarsh Sparrows are most frequently found on the Atlantic coast of Florida and are very rare on the Gulf coast. Nelson’s are found on both coasts.
Focus Point – Winter Wren

This diminutive bird escapes colder northern climes and starts to arrive in Florida around Thanksgiving; by early March almost all of them have headed back north. They are a common winter resident in the Panhandle but can also occasionally be found as far south as Gainesville. Finding this bird can be difficult if you are not sure which habitats the wren prefers. Look for Winter Wrens prefer weedy habitats with plenty of fallen dead trees that are close to a wetland, on a forested slope, in deep ravines, dry-to-damp creek beds, wooded river banks and bottomland cypress and tupelo swamp. They are a very small, secretive bird that stays close to the ground, foraging around fallen trees and brush piles. Make yourself familiar with their rattling alarm call and/or song (Winter Wren calls and song - http://www.xeno-canto.org/species/Troglodytes-hiemalis), as this will increase your chances of finding one. When alarmed, Winter Wrens will perch a few feet off the ground, on a tree stump or log, cock their very short tail upwards and bob up and down issuing a single alarm note, reminiscent of a Song Sparrow’s call. NOTE: other wren species will cock their tail too; A Winter Wren’s tail is shorter than the length of their wing. The similar looking House Wren has a long tail, which is the same length as its wing. Here is a list of Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail sites where Winter Wrens can be seen every year.

NEW! Wings Over Florida Butterfly Program

On September 19 at the Florida Museum of Natural History, we launched our new Wings Over Florida butterfly listing program. This exciting program rewards butterfly viewers for their Florida butterfly listing achievements. Six certificates featuring original illustrations of butterflies are available for those who keep a life list of the butterflies they have seen in Florida. We hope that this program will appeal to people of all ages and will encourage them to explore the many different habitats around Florida searching for butterflies. We also hope that through the program people will support butterfly conservation in Florida, and beyond. Visit the Wings Over Florida webpages at floridabirdingtrail.com and start your butterfly life list today.

Winter Wren Hot Spots

Ponce De Leon Springs State Park
Florida Caverns State Park
Chipola River Greenway: Hinson Conservation Area
Chipola River Greenway: Butler Tract
Alfred B. Maclay Gardens State Park

Maya Grace Frith earned her butterfly certificate at St. Marks NWR.
Experience the Trail

Thanks to all the photographers who contributed their wonderful pictures!

Danny captured this gorgeous image of a Ruddy Daggerwing at Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge. What a beautiful butterfly!

Marilynne snagged this great image of a Red-shouldered Hawk in the Wakodahatchee Wetlands. If you enjoy wildlife photography then you will love this Palm Beach County trail site.

Pam photographed this juvenile White Ibis in Pensacola recently. It was the first one she had ever seen! Congrats on the life bird Pam!

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FloridaBirdingTrail.com
Lyn took this cute picture of a family of whistling-ducks at Circle B Bar Reserve in Polk County.

Wings Over Florida butterfly-viewing pride during the Monarch Festival on the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge.

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.
Wings Over Florida

Congratulations to the following Wings Over Florida participants who were awarded certificates between July and October 2015.

Bird Listing Program

Northern Cardinal level (50 to 149 species)
- Marie Dugan
- Daryl Bernard
- Christopher Ely
- Madeleine Leinke
- Dan Koch
- Sean Beard
- Piper Vorhees
- Kaitlynn Casiano
- Logan Casiano
- Harriet Wright
- Zebra Longwing level continued
- Maya Grace Frith
- Hannah Wellendorf
- Abigail Wellendorf
- Brianna Callentine
- Rhett Baldwin
- Kori Jacoby
- Amelia Tew
- Rachel Depart
- Roy Wilt

Florida Scrub-Jay level (150 to 249 species)
- Whitney Gray
- Debbie Olavarria
- Dan Koch
- Charles Hill
- Jay Wherley
- Cindy Crease
- Deanna Barne
- Norayani Barne
- Vijay Barne
- Kaylee McDole
- Lori Swarthart
- Abigail Graham
- Ruari Thompson
- Mikaela Thompson

Butterfly Listing Program

Zebra Longwing Level (10 to 19 species)
- Toshiter Barne
- Norayani Barne
- Vijay Barne
- Kaylee McDole
- Lori Swarthart
- Abigail Graham
- Ruari Thompson
- Mikaela Thompson
- Kaitlynn Casiano
- Logan Casiano
- Harriet Wright
- Zebra Longwing level continued
- Maya Grace Frith
- Hannah Wellendorf
- Abigail Wellendorf
- Brianna Callentine
- Rhett Baldwin
- Kori Jacoby
- Amelia Tew
- Rachel Depart
- Roy Wilt

Common Buckeye Level (20 to 39 species)
- Ela Patel
- Evan Patel
- Zak Gezon
- Debbie Olavarria

Palamedes Swallowtail Level (40 to 79 species)
- Thomas Wilton
- Stephen Goff
- Whitney Gray
- Andy Wraightmell

Southern Dogface Level (120 to 149 species)
- Travis MacClendon
- Karen MacClendon
- Virginia Craig

Silver-banded Hairstreak Level (150+ species)
- Alana Edwards
- David Harder

MyGFBT - Our Facebook page has 10,400 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.

MyGFBT - As of writing we are over 3,000 followers on twitter. Follow MyGFBT for tweets on conservation news, trail news, anecdotes, birding news and more.

MyGFBT - We now have an Instagram account.

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:

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