Full Detailed Itinerary - South Florida: Residents, Rarities, and Exotics

Day 1: Arrival day in Miami

After arriving in Miami, please take the hotel shuttle to our nearby hotel. There are no activities on this day, so feel free to arrive at any time. Dinner is not included in the tour fee for this night, so please take your dinner at the hotel at your leisure. The guide for the tour will meet the group the following morning for the start of the tour activities. The arrangements for this will be confirmed shortly before the start of the tour.

Day 2: Metro Miami

On this first full day, we'll venture into the Miami suburbs to look for a number of introduced and exotic species, all of which are ABA-countable for the listers in the group. This panel includes Red-whiskered Bulbul, Spot-breasted Oriole, Common Myna, and Yellow-chevroned and White-winged Parakeets (though the last is getting very difficult to find). We'll hope to intersect resident Bronzed Cowbirds and White-crowned Pigeons, and we'll have our eyes open for migrants like Gray Kingbird, Black-throated Blue Warbler, and Cape May Warbler as we explore suburban parks and wooded hammocks. Importantly, we will make a special effort to find any notable vagrants — Western Spindalis, Bahama Mockingbird, La Sagra's Flycatcher, Smooth-billed Ani, etc. — which might be hanging around. We'll probably visit Matheson Hammock Park, Black Point Marina, and Crandon Park in the course of the day, but our exact itinerary will be determined based upon what's being seen where in the lead-up to the tour. We'll spend this night at the same airport hotel as the first night.

Day 3: Wakodahatchee Wetlands, Green Cay Nature Center, and Loxahatchee NWR

We'll make an early start on this second day and head north to a trio of wonderful reserves in Delray Beach: the Green Cay Nature Center, the Wakodahatchee Wetlands, and Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge. Wakodahatchee and Green Cay are small tracks of habitat in otherwise surrounding suburban sprawl. Both feature elevated boardwalks, and we'll look for Anhinga, Common and Purple Gallinules, Gray-headed Swamphen, Least Bittern, and Boat-tailed Grackle as we explore the impoundments. Nesting Wood Storks, Green Herons, and Tricolored Herons will keep the photographers busy, and we'll hope for American Redstarts and other migrants in the adjacent thickets. Moving slightly east after lunch, we'll explore expansive Loxahatchee NWR. At the eastern edge of the Everglades, the refuge offers similar birding to Green Cay and Wakodahatchee but in a wilder setting. Black Vulture, Turkey Vulture, Osprey, Swallow-tailed Kite, and Red-shouldered Hawk might be circling overhead, and we'll need to be alert to the possibility of Snail Kite and Limpkin as we explore the habitat. With turtles and alligators thrown into the mix, it should be quite the afternoon! Our memory cards full and our life lists grown, we'll grab dinner and retire to a Delray Beach hotel for single night.

Day 4: Delray Beach to Ding Darling and Fort Myers

We'll use the early morning to clean up any species or photographs we missed the previous day before heading west towards the Gulf Coast at Fort Myers. En route stops will offer opportunity to find the animated Florida Scrub Jay — a Florida endemic which occupies isolated parks and neighborhoods — and we'll invest additional time into Snail Kite if we didn't intersect with it at Loxahatchee the previous day. After lunch, we'll hit a number of Fort Myers spots including (but not limited to) Rotary Park Environmental Center and Six Mile Cypress Slough. By visiting a variety of habitats, we'll increase our chances of intersecting with Common Ground Dove, White-eyed Vireo, Northern Parula, Purple Martin, Tufted Titmouse, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, and — if we're really lucky — Short-tailed Hawk! We'll round out the day in Cape Coral where we should have incredible views of the Burrowing Owls which populate the suburban neighborhood. Throw in the possibility of Monk Parakeets and it should be the perfect end to our day. This will be the first of two nights in Fort Myers.

Day 5: Babcock-Webb WMA and Sanibel Island

An early start will deliver us to Babcock-Webb Wildlife Management Area as close to sunrise as possible. The dawn chorus will greet us, and we'll explore expansive pine savannas for the 'Pine Woods Trio': Brown-headed Nuthatch, Bachman's Sparrow, and Red-cockaded Woodpecker, the last a Threatened species named for its usually-concealed ear patch. We might observe Northern Bobwhite scampering across the reserve's roads, and we'll need to be on the lookout for Pileated Woodpecker, Blue Jay, Brown Thrasher, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Carolina Wren, Eastern Towhee, Northern Cardinal, and Pine Warbler. Bald Eagle and Crested Caracara are often in the area, and we'll have opportunity for Cooper's, Sharp-shinned, Red-shouldered, and Red-tailed Hawks. After lunch, we'll return to the water at JN 'Ding' Darling NWR on Sanibel Island. The refuge is comprised of tidal flats, wetlands, mangroves, and tropical hammocks, and we'll spend time looking for Piping Plover, Roseate Spoonbill, Marbled Godwit, Reddish Egret, Tricolored Heron, and the comical American White Pelican. Magnificent Frigatebird could fly over us at any moment, and we'll hope for Belted Kingfisher, Tree Swallow, Mangrove Cuckoo, Palm Warbler, and Loggerhead Shrike as we explore terrestrial parts of the refuge. Manatees are sometimes loafing round, so that would be extra cool, right? This will be our second of two nights in Fort Myers.

Day 6: Bunche Beach, Corkscrew Swamp, and the Everglades via Tamiami Trail

Can you say shorebirds? If not, that's gonna change after a morning at Bunche Beach! Waders should be out in full force, and we'll try to pad the trip list with the likes of Black-bellied, Wilson's, Semipalmated, and Piping Plovers. Beyond those, American Oystercatcher, Marbled Godwit, Ruddy Turnstone, Sanderling, Least, Semipalmated and Western Sandpipers, Willet, and Short-billed Dowitcher are all within the realm of possibilities. Royal, Sandwich, and Least Terns are usually around, and we might also observe Black Skimmer feeding low over the water. Exploring the adjacent mangrove habitat, we'll try for the shifty Mangrove Cuckoo, a species which has experienced sharp declines with the continued development of its obligate habitat. Next up? The legendary Corkscrew Swamp! Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Limpkin, and White Ibis lurk in the swampy recesses, and we might find Barred Owl roosting among the beautiful, moss-covered cypresses. Also possible along our extended boardwalk amble are Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Great-crested Flycatcher, Tufted Titmouse, Northern Parula, Yellow-throated and Prothonotary Warblers, and Louisiana Waterthrush. The setting is absolutely stunning, and our trip to Corkscrew won't be forgotten! We'll have lunch outside Naples and recross the peninsula on the Tamiami Trail through the afternoon. An en route stop at Thousand Island NWR might yield Bald Eagle or Stilt Sandpiper, and we'll need to keep our eyes skyward in case a Snail Kite floats over the road. If we've missed Bronzed Cowbird, we can look for it in the agricultural fields west of Homestead, where we overnight.

Day 7: Everglades National Park and The Florida Keys

An early start will deliver us to the Flamingo Recreational Area at the southern end of Everglades National Park. Brown Pelicans and Ospreys should grace the tidal flats, and we'll explore adjacent thickets, marshes, and wooded hammocks for migrants, waders, and raptors. Swallow-tailed Kites can abound, and we'll make a special effort to tease the Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow from appropriate habitat. Shiny Cowbird is a rare but regular visitor, and resident Prairie Warblers usually offer confiding, photographic views. Whooooo knows? Maybe we'll add Barred Owl at Mahogany Hammock! We'll backtrack to Florida City for lunch and spend the rest of the day exploring the incomparable Florida Keys. Birding as we island hop to the southwest, we'll look for Laughing Gull, Roseate Tern, Gray Kingbird, White-crowned Pigeon, Black-whiskered Vireo, and Mangrove Cuckoo. Rarities are always a possibility in the Keys, and we'll pursue anything interesting that surfaces. We will also make a late-evening attempt for Antillean Nighthawk, either en route at the Marathon Airport or somewhere closer to Key West. The keys are only reliable place in the United States to see the bird, so we'll try hard to find it for the ABA listers! Two nights will be spent in Key West.

Day 8: The Dry Tortugas

We will board the high-speed and very comfortable Yankee Freedom III and reach west to the Dry Tortugas on this last full day. The crossing takes about two hours, and we'll have four hours to explore Garden Key and Fort Jefferson once we arrive. With white sands and turquoise waters, the setting is a tropical paradise! Throw in breeding colonies of Magnificent Frigatebirds, Sooty Terns, and Brown Noddies, and it makes for an incredible birding experience! Brown and Masked Boobies, and Bridled Tern are present in smaller numbers, and we might get really lucky with something like Black Noddy. Beyond the resident breeders, spring migration could deposit Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Gray Catbird, Veery, Gray-cheeked Thrush, Cape May Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Scarlet Tanager, Baltimore Oriole, Blue Grosbeak, or Indigo Bunting on the tiny island. At the end of our Tortugas time, we'll board the ferry and return to Key West for a second night, the final of our amazing tour.

Day 9: Departures from Miami

The drive from Key West to Miami takes around three hours, and we'll leave early so we can mop-up any missing birds as we return north and east. Clients should arrange to fly out any time after 3pm. If that's a problem, please contact the Tropical Birding office.

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