

USA, Georgia and Florida – December 2019

Report by Sjöf Öllers

This is a brief report on a “lightweight” trip to the Savannah area in Georgia, plus a short extension to Florida. Mammal highlights in Georgia were Bobcat and Nine-banded Armadillo and in Florida Manatee and Round-tailed Muskrat. Birding in both states did not result in exceptional sightings but highlights included Barred Owl, White-crowned Pigeon, Reddish Egret, (reintroduced) Whooping Crane, and the spectacular Painted Bunting.



Areas visited

My wife had to visit a conference in Savannah, Georgia in the second week of December, which provided the rationale for doing this trip. While my wife attended the conference, I could run my own spouse programme and visit several nature reserves near Savannah. The reserves near Savannah are all relatively small by American standards, but they were much quieter than the parks in Florida. Savannah itself is a charming and pleasant city to walk around for a few hours and has several good restaurants.

Okefenokee NWR East Entrance (Suwannee Canal area)

We arrived here rather late in the afternoon. It was sunny with clear blue skies, but cold with a stiff arctic breeze blowing in from the north. The entrance road and the wildlife drive proved good for woodpeckers (including Pileated and brief flight views of Red-cockaded). We stayed until the early evening – White-tailed Deer and Grey Squirrel were the only mammals seen. They do close the gate to the reserve relatively early, but there are some tracks with similar habitat just outside the reserve that one could explore after dark. In the morning we explored the limited but habitat-wise reasonably varied trail network. Again clear blue skies and a cold wind, but luckily it warmed up later in the morning. Birding was pretty good for someone new to east coast birding in the USA; best birds for me were Brown-headed Nuthatch, Carolina Wren, Orange-crowned Warbler, Sandhill Crane, Blue-headed Vireo, and Swamp Sparrow. Red-winged Blackbird, Blue-grey Gnatcatcher, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Pine Warbler, Palm Warbler, and Grey Catbird were all common. Apart from a brief Raccoon sighting no new mammals were seen. A park map can be found here: <https://www.fws.gov/uploadedFiles/OkeMapSide18.pdf>.

Savannah NWR

This wetland reserve is a 20 minute-drive from downtown Savannah but is just across the border in South Carolina. The reserve has a good network of [hiking trails](#). The Laurel Hill Wildlife Drive was unfortunately closed because of repair works (tornado damage from earlier that year). On our visit the sky was overcast, but there was little wind and temperatures moderate, so good conditions for hiking the trails.

We first visited the Kingfisher Pond area. In the parking and on the pond we did not see or hear a single bird. When we wanted to walk the trail around the pond, we saw a hunting notice at the trailhead. And literally 30 seconds later we heard several shots being fired not far away from us. So we left and headed to the Tupelo and Little Back River trails, which luckily had no other visitors or hunting activity. Birds initially demanded most of our attention – the undisputed highlight being an American Bittern seen in flight at close range. In a quiet corner of the park quite a distance from the main road I noticed a mid-sized mammal on one of the embankments and my bins confirmed it was the feline I was hoping to see here: a Bobcat! After a minute the cat disappeared into the reeds but our hiking route lead us in her direction. When we got to the area where the lynx was seen on the track, we were surprised and delighted to find the lynx with a kitten only about 6-7 metres away from us in the reeds; the animals were checking us out – both wary and curious – but remained fairly relaxed while hiding in the reeds.

On the trails I saw quite a lot of scats and tracks in softer soil of a variety of mammals, so it is probably worth visiting the reserve around dusk.



Bobcat

Skidaway Island State Park

The park is tiny by American standards, but has [several nice trails](#) that lead through beautiful lush forest/woodland and wetland areas. My first visit to the park was in the morning and the weather was very pleasant, sunny and about 22-24°C/70-75°F. Bird activity was good all morning, but nothing out of the ordinary was seen but I got a few lifers, including Tufted Titmouse and Carolina Chickadee. In the daytime Grey Squirrel was the only mammal seen. After 9 am it became fairly busy for a mid-week day, mainly cyclists though.

I revisited the park later that day in the late afternoon and used the thermal scope after dark. Around dusk I saw at least two different bat species fly over the wetlands and along the forest edge and I encountered 2-3 bats on trails inside the forest. In the forest areas I saw several White-tailed Deer. Deep in the forest I picked up two rodents in the scope but they were moving fast and heading away from me further off-trail. Near the HQ area I saw a small rodent scurry away, but not sure which species it was. Just outside the park I picked up three raccoons in the scope and had good views of them going about their business about 15 metres away. Unfortunately, I couldn't stay longer because I had to fulfill "trophy wife" duties for some evening event that was part of the conference that my wife was attending. The rangers told me that armadillos, raccoons and opossums are regularly seen, but bobcat sightings were rare. They could not really give me any info on small mammals.

Harris Neck NWR

This reserve on an abandoned military airfield is about an hour's drive south of Savannah. Harris Neck NWR has plenty of [trails for hiking](#), one Wildlife Drive and features a variety of habitats (marsh, ponds, grassland, and woodland/forest). The area was much drier than Skidaway Island, which may explain why the birding here was much slower than in Skidaway. I visited this park twice and I don't know if I was just lucky or conditions were exceptionally good for them, but this appeared to be an armadillo hotspot. On our first visit we arrived at about 2 pm and had at least 10 Nine-banded Armadillos in less than 1.5 hours. I visited on my own a day later and still had at least 7 armadillos within about 2 hours without looking for them specifically. We also saw a couple of Raccoons, White-tailed Deer, and plenty of Grey Squirrels on the first visit. I initially wanted to go spotlighting here, but I changed my mind last minute because there were remarkably few mammal tracks on the sandier trails or other soft soil and strangely there was quite lot of traffic and general disturbance in the afternoon (including repair works at the visitor centre area) on my second visit, so I headed back to Skidaway, although in better/wetter conditions I would pick this reserve over Skidaway for mammalwatching (the general area appears to have more potential).

Altamaha WMA

We only passed through here and only stopped briefly for birding and a snack. West of the I75 there are plenty of tracks through the forest, but there was too much disturbance from hunting, so we did not spend much time here.



Grey Squirrel – the Mercurial and Apollonian type

Florida

After the conference we headed south for a “sampler trip” of Florida’s nature reserves. As others have reported the Everglades and Big Cypress area are disappointing nowadays for mammalwatching. Other areas visited included Florida Keys, Highlands Hammock, Blue Springs, Archbold Biological Station, Oscar Scherer, Lake Kissimee and Kissimee Prairie, Platt Branch, and a number of wetland areas (Merritt Island, Sanibel Island, Fort de Soto Park and Viera wetlands). Most of the Florida reserves have been covered well in numerous birding and mammal reports, so I won’t discuss them here.

The weather was extremely variable during our stay in Florida, often overcast, several mornings and evenings were spoiled by heavy rain, one tornado past through, and we several cold spells that completely killed activity. Nevertheless, most key bird species and doable mammal species were found, but the odd Spotted Skunk or Florida Panther would have been nice of course.



West-Indian Manatee

Bird List

Fulvous Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna bicolor* – about two dozen on the Apopka Wildlife Drive
Canada Goose *Branta canadensis* – small groups seen twice between Jacksonville and Orlando
[Muscovy Duck *Cairina moschata* – domestic variety seen a couple of times]
Wood Duck *Aix sponsa* – four seen in Savannah NWR
Blue-winged Teal *Spatula discors* – 50+ in Merritt NWR, about two dozen in Apopka Wildlife Drive, about 15 in Harris Neck NWR, 8 in Savannah NWR
Northern Shoveler *Spatula clypeata* – at least five in Savannah NWR, 15+ in Merritt NWR
Gadwall *Mareca strepera* – 40+ in Merritt NWR
Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* – one male seen in Savannah NWR
Mottled Duck *Anas fulvigula* – seen more often than expected, sightings at Ding Darling, Merritt NWR, Everglades, Ten Thousand Islands Marsh, Oscar Scherer, Babcock Webb WMA,
Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* – two in Merritt NWR
Green-winged Teal *Anas crecca* – two pairs at Harris Neck NWR, two in Savannah NWR
Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris* – 4 at Viera wetlands, common at Savannah NWR and Apopka, occasionally seen on route
Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis* – a male at Merritt NWR, a few on the Apopka Wildlife Drive

Hooded Merganser *Lophodytes cucullatus* – a group of 6 including a male at Okefenokee NWR, about 15 in Merritt NWR

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator* – one near Long Key SP, another one on the Florida Keys but did not write down the exact location

Northern Bobwhite *Colinus virginianus* – a group of about 6-7 flushed and poorly seen in Platt Ranch WMA and at least six seen well in Archbold Biological Station

Wild Turkey *Meleagris gallopavo* – two males along Hwy 521 near Tooscalosa WMA

Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps* – common in Merritt NWR, Apopka Wildlife Drive, and Ding Darling, also seen regularly elsewhere throughout the trip

Rock Pigeon *Columba livia* – regular in urban areas (did not pay attention to them, maybe under-recorded)

White-crowned Pigeon *Patagioenas leucocephala* – remarkably shy, one seen well at close range on the Gumbo Limbo Trail in Everglades NP, otherwise only flushed birds or birds in flight were seen in Everglades NP and Dagny Johnson

Eurasian Collared-Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* – seen in the Florida Keys (did not pay attention to this species, so probably under-recorded)

Common Ground Dove *Columbina passerina* – a pair on Fire Prairie Trail in Big Cypress, several at Playa Linda Beach, at least two in Babcock Webb WMA

White-winged Dove *Zenaida asiatica* – seen in Highlands Hammock NWR and Archbold Biological Station

Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura* – not as common as expected; small numbers in Georgia, including Skidaway island, Savannah NWR, Corkscrew and on route. More common/conspicuous in the Everglades and Florida Keys area.

Common Nighthawk *Chordeiles minor* – at least two in the Everglades NP in the Research Road area

Eastern Whip-poor-will *Antrostomus vociferus* – at least two in the Everglades NP in the Research Road area

Common Gallinule *Gallinula galeata* – common, seen among other places on the Anhinga trail in the Everglades, Apopka Wildlife Drive, Harris Neck NWR, Savannah NWR, Everglades NP

American Coot *Fulica americana* – common, seen (among other places) in Merritt NWR and Ding Darling, Apopka Wildlife Drive, Savannah NWR, Everglades NP

Purple Gallinule *Porphyrio martinica* – fairly common, seen on Anhinga Trail, Harris Neck, Savannah NWR and Ten Thousand Islands Marsh

Limpkin *Aramus guarana* – only seen in Viera wetlands, about 6-8 present on both visits

Sandhill Crane *Antigone canadensis* – fairly common in cattle country or open woodland in central inland Florida, heard at Corkscrew, fairly common in the Platt Branch WMA area, 7 in Viera wetlands, common in and around in Kissimee SP

Whooping Crane *Grus americana* – a pair along Backbone Road in Polk County



American Avocet *Recurvirostra americana* – 25+ seen in Merritt NWR

Black-bellied Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* – a few seen in Ding Darling, five at Bahia Honda SP,

Wilson's Plover *Charadrius wilsonia* – five from parking 13 at Playalinda Beach

Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus* – Platt Ranch WMA, three at Playalinda Beach, three at Altamaha WMA

Marbled Godwit *Limosa fedoa* – a few seen in Merrit Island NWR

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* – usually 2-5, seen in Ding Darling, Merritt NWR and Playalinda Beach, Bahia Honda SP
 Sanderling *Calidris alba* – seen at Merritt NWR and Playalinda Beach, 25+ at Bahia Honda SP
 Dunlin *Calidris alpina* – seen in Merritt NWR and Playalinda Beach and Fort de Soto Park
 Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla* – seen in Merritt NWR, Playalinda Beach and Fort de Soto Park
 Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla* – seen in Ding Darling, Merritt NWR, Playalinda Beach and Fort de Soto Park
 Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus* – about two dozens in Merritt NWR
 Wilson's Snipe *Gallinago delicata* – (at least) one on the Fire Prairie trail in Big Cypress, one seen in Oscar Scherer
 Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius* – Merritt NWR and Playalinda Beach
 Solitary Sandpiper *Tringa solitaria* – Merritt NWR and Playalinda Beach
 Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca* – 5 in Savannah NWR, a few in Merritt NWR and Playalinda Beach, scattered sightings in Everglades including Flamingo and Snake Bight trail, Backbone Road in Polk County
 Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes* – a few in Ding Darling, two on Backbone Road in Polk County
 Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* – Merritt NWR and Playalinda Beach
 Willet *Tringa semipalmata* – seen in Ding Darling (30+), Merritt NWR (40+) and Playalinda Beach (2) and Fort de Soto Park (>10)
 Laughing Gull *Leucophaeus atricilla* – common, seen daily



Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis* – common, seen daily
 Herring Gull *Larus argentatus* – at least three at Playalinda Beach
 Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus* – about 4-5 seen in Flamingo
 Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia* – seen in Merritt NWR (5) and Fort de Soto Park (2)



Roseate Spoonbill / Yellow-crowned Night-Heron / Red-shouldered hawk

Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri* – fairly common to common, seen among other places at Flamingo, Merritt NWR, Ding Darling, Merritt NWR, Apopka Wildlife Drive, Playalinda Beach, three at Viera wetlands, and Florida Keys

Royal Tern *Thalasseus maximus* – seen in Merritt NWR (50-60), Fort de Soto Park (50+) and Ding Darling (30+)

Black Skimmer *Rynchops niger* – one in Fort de Soto Park in a group of Royal Terns and at least 75 at Merritt NWR (just after crossing the bridge)

Wood Stork *Mycteria americana* – regular sightings throughout often en route; one at Altamaha WMA, two in Harris Neck NWR, common (5-20 daily) in Everglades/Big Cypress area

Magnificent Frigatebird *Fregata magnificens* – remarkably scarce, only about 7-8 on the Florida Keys, not seen elsewhere

Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus* – one near Fort de Soto Park and 4+ on sea from Playalinda Beach

Anhinga *Anhinga anhinga* – common, seen daily in double digits

Double-crested Cormorant *Phalacrocorax auritus* – common, seen daily in double digits

American White Pelican *Pelecanus erythrorhynchos* – about 20 at Fort de Soto Park, 10+ in Merritt NWR, a few near Flamingo

Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis* – fairly common along the coast in Florida and Georgia, seen among other places in Florida Keys, Everglades NP, Sanibel Island, Fort de Soto, Merritt NWR, and the Everglades City area

Green Heron *Butorides virescens* – locally common in Big Cypress and Everglades, three in Viera wetlands, a few on Merritt Island

Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* – seen in Harris Neck NWR, Viera wetlands, Corkscrew, Merritt Island and Everglades/Big Cypress area

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron *Nyctanassa violacea* – two seen in Harris Neck NWR, fairly common in Ding Darling

American Bittern *Botaurus lentiginosus* – one in Savannah NWR, one in Viera wetlands

Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias* – common in wetland areas, including Apopka, Everglades, Skidaway Island, Big Cypress, Ding Darling, Merritt NWR, Savannah NWR

Great Egret *Ardea alba* – common to abundant in wetland areas, including Apopka, Everglades, Skidaway Island, Big Cypress, Ding Darling, Merritt NWR, Savannah NWR

Snowy Egret *Egretta thula* – common to abundant in wetland areas, including Apopka, Everglades, Skidaway Island, Big Cypress, Ding Darling, Merritt NWR, Savannah NWR

Reddish Egret *Egretta rufescens* – scarce, 5+ in Ding Darling, three in Merritt NWR



Roseate Spoonbill and Reddish Egret

Little Blue Heron *Egretta caerulea* – fairly common to common in wetland areas, including Apopka, Everglades, Skidaway Island, Big Cypress, Ding Darling, Merritt NWR, Savannah NWR

Tricolored Heron *Egretta tricolor* – fairly common to common in wetland areas, including Apopka, Everglades, Skidaway Island, Merritt Island, Ding Darling, Savannah NWR, S41 in the Big Cypress area, Savannah NWR

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* – fairly common locally, most seen on route, but also Everglades, near Oscar Scherer

White Ibis *Eudocimus albus* – fairly common to common in wetland areas, including Merritt NWR, Apopka Wildlife Drive, Altamaha WMA, Skidaway Island, Savannah NWR, Everglades NP, Big Cypress area

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* – locally fairly common, seen in Merritt NWR (30+), Apopka Wildlife Drive (25+), a few in Altamaha WMA, one in the Ten Thousand Islands Marsh, one along the Snake Bight trail, two near Eco Pond, 40+ in Viera wetlands at dawn

Roseate Spoonbill *Platalea ajaja* – one at Altamaha WMA, about 10 in Ding Darling, very localized in Everglades (a few in Flamingo and singles in flight occasionally), Big Cypress area (mainly along the S41), about 35-40 in Merritt NWR

Black Vulture *Coragyps atratus* – common, seen daily

Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura* – fairly common to common, seen almost daily

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* – common, seen daily

Northern Harrier *Circus hudsonius* – two seen in Savannah NWR, one male and one female-type bird Viera wetlands, five seen on Apopka Wildlife Drive, one at Lucky Hammock, on on the Gobbler Ridge trail in Lake Kissimee SP

Sharp-shinned Hawk *Accipiter striatus* – one on Chokoloskee Island near Everglades City, one in Oscar Scherer

Cooper's Hawk *Accipiter cooperii* – twice in Merritt NWR and one in Viera wetlands, one in the outskirts of Savannah city

Bald Eagle *Haliaeetus leucocephalus* – an adult in Merritt NWR, an adult and immature in Viera wetlands, an adult and immature on the Apopka Wildlife Drive

Red-shouldered Hawk *Buteo lineatus* – common in Florida, scarcer in Georgia

Red-tailed Hawk *Buteo jamaicensis* – a few seen in Georgia and the Ocala Forest area in Florida

Barred Owl *Strix varia* – one on Turner Road in Big Cypress, one in Highlands Hammock, one on the Mahogany Hammock boardwalk

Belted Kingfisher *Megasceryle alcyon* – common, seen daily

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus varius* – two in Okefenokee, one male in Skidaway Island SP, several in Corkscrew

Red-cockaded Woodpecker *Leuconotopicus borealis* – one briefly in Okefenokee

Red-headed Woodpecker *Melanerpes erythrocephalus* – seen among in Skidaway Island (8+), Harris Neck, three in Okefenokee

Red-bellied Woodpecker *Melanerpes carolinus* – common, seen daily

Downy Woodpecker *Dryobates pubescens* – fairly common, 1-2 seen on most days including Skidaway Island, Savannah NWR, Okefenokee, Everglades/Big Cypress, Oscar Scherer, Highlands hammock

Pileated Woodpecker *Dryocopus pileatus* – in the end easier than expected, more than 10 sightings but half of the sightings were birds in flight; one seen well in Okefenokee, one in the Florida Panther Reserve, one in Harris Neck, one in Corkscrew, several on route in Georgia and the Osceola Forest area, one on the Cypress Bend Boardwalk, one in Highlands Hammock

Northern Flicker *Colaptes auratus* – one at Archbold BS, two in Savannah NWR, one in Skidaway Island, one on the Fire Prairie trail in Big Cypress, one near Flamingo, one in Oscar Scherer

Crested Caracara *Caracara cheriway* – three sightings on route in the Archbold BS/Sebring area

American Kestrel *Falco sparverius* – common roadside bird on wires, seen daily, often in double digits in southern Florida, less common in Georgia where seen in Harris Neck, Altamaha and on route.

[Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* – a large robust falcon near Lucky Hammock may have been this species]

Nanday Parakeet *Aratinga nenday* – a group of about 25 in flight in Fort de Soto Park

Eastern Phoebe *Sayornis phoebe* – common, seen daily about 3-10 times

Ash-throated Flycatcher *Myiarchus cinerascens* – one at Lucky Hammock

Great Crested Flycatcher *Myiarchus crinitus* – twice seen in Highlands Hammock, heard in Corkscrew

Blue-headed Vireo *Vireo solitarius* – only once seen with certainty in Okefenokee

White-eyed Vireo *Vireo griseus* – twice in Corkscrew Sanctuary, one in the Florida Panther reserve

Loggerhead Shrike *Lanius ludovicianus* – one seen in Viera wetlands, a few Merritt NWR, one on the Fire Prairie trail in Big Cypress, one at Lucky Hammock, one in Fort de Soto

Blue Jay *Cyanocitta cristata* – one in Skidaway Island SP, two seen at Corkscrew, 4+ in Archbold, two in Oscar Scherer

Florida Scrub-Jay *Aphelocoma coerulescens* – surprisingly only seen well once: a group of about 8 birds a few miles outside Archbold BS, brief roadside views of one at Merritt NWR and one flushed at Oscar Scherer SP



American Crow *Corvus brachyrhynchos* – fairly common throughout

Fish Crow *Corvus ossifragus* – fairly common, seen on the Apopka Wildlife Drive, in Flamingo, Merritt NWR

Carolina Chickadee *Poecile carolinensis* – at least five seen in Skidaway Island NWR (5+), heard in Blue Springs SP and Gobbler Ridge trail in Lake Kissimee SP

Tufted Titmouse *Baeolophus bicolor* – seen in Skidaway Island NWR (6+), Gobbler Ridge trail in Lake Kissimee SP

Tree Swallow *Tachycineta bicolor* – fairly common, regularly seen in migrating groups of 100-1000 birds

Ruby-crowned Kinglet *Regulus calendula* – seen in Skidaway Island NWR (20+) and Savannah NWR (5+)

Brown-headed Nuthatch *Sitta pusilla* – seen in Skidaway Island NWR (5+) and Okefenokee (3)

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher *Polioptila caerulea* – common, seen daily

House Wren *Troglodytes aedon* – one in Okefenokee NWR

Marsh Wren *Cistothorus palustris* – one in Viera wetlands

Carolina Wren *Thryothorus ludovicianus* – one in Okefenokee, Skidaway Island SP (3), Savannah NWR (heard only), one on the Gobbler Ridge trail in Kissimee SP



Palm Warbler and Carolina wren

European Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* – several sightings in urban areas (did not pay attention to this species, so probably under-recorded)

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* – easiest on the Florida Keys (did not pay attention to this species, so probably under-recorded)

Gray Catbird *Dumetella carolinensis* – common, seen and heard daily

Northern Mockingbird *Mimus polyglottos* – common, seen daily

Eastern Bluebird *Sialia sialis* – three in Okefenokee, five near Folkston, 15+ in Skidaway Island SP

Hermit Thrush *Catharus guttatus* – one in Okefenokee, one in Skidaway Island, one in Highlands Hammock

American Robin *Turdus migratorius* – fairly common but localized, seen on most most days

Cedar Waxwing *Bombycilla cedrorum* – about 10 seen in Skidaway Island SP

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* – occasionally seen in urban areas

House Finch *Haemorhous mexicanus* – only seen once, i.e. at least 8 in Skidaway Island

Bachman's Sparrow *Peucaea aestivalis* – one in Archbold BS

Chipping Sparrow *Spizella passerina* – 15+ in Lake Kissimee SP

Savannah Sparrow *Passerculus sandwichensis* – at least four in Viera wetlands, at least 10 in Savannah NWR, fairly regular on the Apopka Wildlife Drive

Song Sparrow *Melospiza melodia* – a few seen in Savannah NWR, 5+ on the Fire Prairie trail in Big Cypress

Swamp Sparrow *Melospiza georgiana* – seen in Okefenokee, Savannah NWR and Savannah wetlands

Eastern Towhee *Pipilo erythrophthalmus* – poor sightings in Archbold

Eastern Meadowlark *Sturnella magna* – two in Savannah NWR

Red-winged Blackbird *Agelaius phoeniceus* – common in wetland areas, including Apopka Wildlife Drive, Merritt NWR, Ding Darling, Savannah NWR, Everglades NP/Big Cypress, and Viera

Brown-headed Cowbird *Molothrus ater* – locally common, seen on Apopka Wildlife Drive, Lucky Hammock, Everglades, Big Cypress, Okeechobee Lake

Rusty Blackbird *Euphagus carolinus* – one in Okefenokee

Common Grackle *Quiscalus quiscula* – locally common to common, seen (among other places) on Apopka Wildlife Drive, Merritt NWR, Viera wetlands, Fort de Soto, Oscar Scherer, Everglades City area

Boat-tailed Grackle *Quiscalus major* – locally common, seen on Apopka Wildlife Drive, Viera Wetlands, Merritt NWR, Okeechobee lake, Viera wetlands, Gobbler Ridge trail in Kissimee SP, Oscar Scherer

Ovenbird *Seiurus aurocapilla* – one seen in Corkscrew Sanctuary, one in Blue springs SP



Savannah Sparrow



Ovenbird

Orange-crowned Warbler *Oreothlypis celata* – one in Okefenokee

Black-and-white Warbler *Mniotilta varia* – two seen in Corkscrew Sanctuary, one on the Gobbler Ridge trail in Kissimee SP, two in Highlands Hammock

Common Yellowthroat *Geothlypis trichas* – fairly common, seen in most wetland/swamp areas including Corkscrew Sanctuary, Merrit NWR, Apopka Wildlife Drive, Highlands Hammock

American Redstart *Setophaga ruticilla* – one male on the Anhinga Trail in the Everglades

Palm Warbler *Setophaga palmarum* – common to very common, seen daily
Pine Warbler *Setophaga pinus* – fairly common to common, seen daily
Yellow-rumped Warbler *Setophaga coronata* – common on most days, seen (among other places) in Skidaway island, Harris Neck, Savannah NWR, Corkscrew, Everglades
Yellow-throated Warbler *Setophaga dominica* – one in Corkscrew Sanctuary, one in Skidaway Island, one at the Ernest Coe Visitor Centre
Prairie Warbler *Setophaga discolor* – one seen well at the Ernest Coe Visitor Centre
Black-throated Green Warbler *Setophaga virens* – one in Corkscrew Sanctuary
Summer Tanager *Piranga rubra* – a male at the Corkscrew Sanctuary entrance
Northern Cardinal *Cardinalis cardinalis* – seen almost daily in small numbers (2-6 birds) including Skidaway Island, Okefenokee, Harris Neck, Corkscrew, Florida Panther Reserve, Florida Keys
Indigo Bunting *Passerina cyanea* – one in Lucky Hammock, one in Dagny Johnson
Painted Bunting *Passerina ciris* – five males and three females in Corkscrew Sanctuary



Painted Bunting Male and White-eyed Vireo



Blue Springs

Mammals

Common Raccoon *Procyon lotor* – two in Harris Neck NWR, one at night in the Everglades, one spotlighted in Oscar Scherer SP, a few seen after dark in Highlands Hammock, 3 after dark in Skidaway Island SP
Northern River Otter *Lontra canadensis* – one midmorning along the S41 near Turner Road and one at about 9 am in Everglades NP along the main road towards Flamingo
Bobcat *Lynx rufus* – a female with a kitten at Savannah NWR, one just outside Highlands Hammock



Marsh Rabbit



Bobcat

Eastern Gray Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis* – common, seen almost daily, often in double digits
White-tailed Deer *Odocoileus virginianus* – several encounters with small groups in Okefenokee, about 3-4 after dark in Skidaway Island SP, two on the wildlife Drive in Harris Neck, a group of four once in daytime in Highlands Hammock and occasional sightings of 1 or 2 at night, once two in Turner Road area, once two in Everglades NP



Florida Deer and Raccoon

Wild Boar *Sus scrofa* – seen in Platt Ranch WMA

Nine-banded Armadillo *Dasypus novemcinctus* – 10 in Harris Neck on the first visit and 7 in Harris Neck and surroundings on the second visit, one in Blue Springs SP at dusk, two at Merritt NWR between Haulover Canal and the entrance road to Playalinda Beach

Virginia Opossum *Didelphis virginiana* – one at about 7 am on Turner Road in Big Cypress, one at night on Turner Road in Big Cypress, a few in Highlands Hammock after dark

Eastern Cottontail *Sylvilagus floridanus* – two in the car park of the Corkscrew Sanctuary, common after dark and at dusk in Oscar Scherer SP

Marsh Rabbit *Sylvilagus palustris* – only three seen at Vierra wetlands, not seen elsewhere!!

Round-tailed Muskrat *Neofiber alleni* – one in Viera wetlands and one of those weird but unforgettable mammal sightings. In a quiet corner of the Viera wetlands I saw a small rodent scurry in the vegetation along the water's edge (assuming it would be a rat or maybe a juvenile Coypu) but when I got a relatively free view of the animal I was rather surprised to see that it actually looked more a Muskrat. It then became obscured again by the vegetation and when it finally reached an open gap in the vegetation I finally got a relatively brief but clear view on the animal. Just when I had decided that I needed a picture of the animal, an explosive sound materialized and once I had fully realized what had happened, a small alligator was shaking my prize animal to death within a few seconds; by the time I had the camera ready for action the alligator had already assumed the victorious stance shown in the picture below. Expert evaluation of the image (thanks to Jon Hall for help and organizing input on the ID) also leans towards Round-tailed Muskrat as the correct ID. A fantastic wildlife experience but rather frustrating as well.



Nine-banded Armadillo and (most likely) Round-tailed Muskrat about 8 seconds past being tickable

Southern Short-tailed Shrew *Blarina carolinensis* – one at about 5.45 am on Turner Road in Big Cypress
Common Bottlenose Dolphin *Tursiops truncatus* – a few seen at Bowman's Beach
West-Indian Manatee *Trichechus manatus* – the weather was unfortunately really bad during our visit to Blue Springs. We arrived here in the late afternoon in drizzly and cold weather and we had mediocre views of about 3-4 animals that unfortunately stayed on the other side of the river mouth. The next morning the weather was even worse but luckily the animals were much more active and allowed very close views; the windy and overcast conditions were terrible for photography though. In the end we saw about 10-12 manatees (ranging from babies to full adults). We stayed in one of the cabins on site, which probably would have been good for some nocturnal sightings if the weather had been better. It started raining when I wanted to go out for a night walk after dinner. So I got up at 4 am and tried again, but half an hour into the walk a proper storm drifted in and the temperature dropped by at least 10 degrees Celsius within half an hour. Apart from the heavy rain, the storm was severe enough to break off mid-sized branches from the trees, so I went back to the cabin.

