

## **Ft DeSoto Tour 4/21-23, 2018**

Six birders joined TAS Field Trip Coordinator Brian Rapoza this past weekend for a three-day Ft. DeSoto birding tour, TAS's first trip since 2010 to this legendary Pinellas County spring migrant hotspot. Though we arrived at the tail end of a spectacular spring migration week all along Florida's Gulf coast, we still managed to see and hear an impressive number of birds. By tour's end, we tallied a respectable 141 species, including 17 warblers.

We headed to the west coast on Saturday via the scenic interior route through Broward, Hendry, Collier and Lee Counties, spotting Wild Turkey, American White Pelican, Wood Stork, Roseate Spoonbill, Swallow-tailed and Snail Kites, Limpkin, Sandhill Crane, Crested Caracara and a good-sized herd of wild hogs along the way. Upon arriving at our first stop, Six-Mile Cypress Slough Preserve, south of Ft. Myers, an Eastern Screech-Owl greeted us at the entrance. Other cypress swamp breeders seen along the preserve's boardwalks included Wood Duck, Downy Woodpecker, Great Crested Flycatcher, Red-eyed Vireo, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and Common Yellowthroat. A few migrant warblers were also found, including Northern Waterthrush, American Redstart and Black-and-white, Black-throated Blue and Black-throated Green Warblers.

After a break for lunch, we continued north to Babcock-Webb Wildlife Management Area, in Charlotte County, where calling Northern Bobwhites greeted us near the entrance. Pine flatwood breeders seen or heard here included Red-headed Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Common Nighthawk, Great Crested Flycatcher, Brown Thrasher, Eastern Bluebird, Pine Warbler, Eastern Towhee and singing Bachman's Sparrows. We were also hoping to see Red-cockaded Woodpecker and Brown-headed Nuthatch, but were unable to locate any. At Oscar Scherer State Park in Sarasota County, Florida Scrub-Jays were heard calling somewhere in the distance, but we were unable to locate them either. Birds spotted during our search for the jays included Yellow-billed Cuckoo and Pileated Woodpecker. At our final birding stop of the day, the Celery Fields, also in Sarasota County, two Bronzed Cowbirds were discovered along the fence near the parking area while Purple Martins swirled overhead. Birds found in the surrounding wetlands included Mottled Duck, Blue-winged Teal, Bald Eagle, Sora, Purple Gallinule, Limpkin, Black-necked Stilt, Stilt Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher, Lesser Yellowlegs and Swamp Sparrow. We then proceeded to our hotel in Ellenton, Manatee County for the first of two nights.

We drove to Ft. DeSoto Park bright and early on Sunday; our first Nanday Parakeets and Magnificent Frigatebirds were seen along the way. Our first stop in the park was at North Beach, where we added several new shorebirds, among them Black-bellied Plover, Whimbrel, Marbled Godwit, Ruddy Turnstone, Red Knot, Sanderling, Dunlin, Willet and Lesser Yellowlegs. Laughing, Ring-billed and Lesser Black-backed Gull, Royal, Sandwich and Forster's Tern and Black Skimmer were also present. Later in the day, a visit to East Point, at the other end of the park, added Semipalmated Plover and Least Sandpiper.

The rest of the morning was spent scouring the park's woodlands for migrant songbirds. Around North Beach and the Arrowhead picnic area, we found our first Hooded Warblers and Indigo Buntings; both would be seen again and again throughout our visit. We encountered a few other songbirds in this area, including Gray-cheeked and Swainson's Thrush, Prairie, Palm and Black-and-white Warbler, Summer Tanager, Painted Bunting and Baltimore Oriole, but overall, the birding there was slow. Things picked up considerably when we moved on to the "Mulberry Tree" area east of the fort, where we were joined by dozens of bird photographers, all documenting the migrant songbird feeding frenzy that occurs here every

spring. Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and Gray Catbirds were most abundant, but Ruby-throated Hummingbird, White-eyed Vireo, Blackpoll and Hooded Warbler, Summer and Scarlet Tanager and Painted and Indigo Buntings were also present. Several stunning songbirds made appearances at the water fountain during our visit, including Blue-winged, Prothonotary and Kentucky Warbler, Indigo Bunting and Blue Grosbeak.

At mid-day, we made a run to the nearby Subway, then returned to the park to eat our lunch at the East Beach Picnic Area. Birds seen around the picnic area included Veery, another Gray-cheeked Thrush and more Hooded Warblers and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks. Cedar Waxwings, Prothonotary Warblers, Indigo Buntings and the resident flock of Nanday Parakeets were found on trails in adjacent East Beach Woods. Later in the afternoon, the group opted for a change of scenery, so we drove north to Philippe County Park, at the north end of Tampa Bay but still in Pinellas County. The current attraction at this beautiful little park are a flock of Brown Boobies that have been roosting on an electrical tower out in the bay. Using scopes, we found nine boobies perched on the tower; an immature Bald Eagle was also on the tower, just above the boobies. Several Least Terns were wheeling and diving offshore. We then moved on to the park's oak forests. A Great Horned Owl was discovered high up in the forest canopy, its position revealed by scolding Blue Jays. Other forest residents seen here included Downy Woodpecker, Great Crested Flycatcher, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Northern Parula and even a couple of gopher tortoises. Several migrant warblers were also found, including American Redstart and Black-and-white, Cape May and Black-throated Blue Warbler. A small flock of Lesser Scaup were spotted when we made our way back to the edge of the bay, just before calling it a day and heading back to our hotel.

Monday was getaway day; a small flock of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks passed over the hotel parking lot as we were loading the van. Hoping that overnight rains had brought down a few new trans-gulf migrants, we headed back to Ft. DeSoto for one last look around. Though it appeared that not much arrived overnight, we did pick up a few new trip birds: Yellow-throated Vireo and Orchard Oriole at East Beach, Wilson's Plover at North Beach, Red-breasted Merganser at both North Beach and East Point and Reddish Egret along the causeway as we exited the park. We made two stops on our way back to Miami, both in Lee County. In Cape Coral, we visited a neighborhood well known for their substantial Burrowing Owl populations. We found plenty of marked burrows, but only a couple of owls were out in the mid-day heat. A family of Florida Scrub-Jays was recently discovered in this area, but we were unable to find them. On Fort Myers Beach, we stopped at Big Carlos Pass, where we added Snowy Plover, which turned out to be our last new bird of the tour.

Following are all the birds seen or heard on the tour:

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck

Muscovy Duck

Wood Duck

Blue-winged Teal

Mottled Duck

Lesser Scaup

Red-breasted Merganser

Wild Turkey  
Northern Bobwhite (heard)  
Brown Booby  
Wood Stork  
American White Pelican  
Brown Pelican  
Double-crested Cormorant  
Anhinga  
Great Blue Heron  
Great Egret  
Snowy Egret  
Little Blue Heron  
Tricolored Heron  
Reddish Egret  
Cattle Egret  
Green Heron  
Black-crowned Night-Heron  
White Ibis  
Glossy Ibis  
Roseate Spoonbill  
Black Vulture  
Turkey Vulture  
Osprey  
Swallow-tailed Kite  
Snail Kite  
Bald Eagle  
Red-shouldered Hawk  
Sora  
Purple Gallinule

Common Gallinule

American Coot

Limpkin

Sandhill Crane

Black-necked Stilt

Black-bellied Plover

Snowy Plover

Wilson's Plover

Semipalmated Plover

Killdeer

Whimbrel

Marbled Godwit

Ruddy Turnstone

Red Knot

Stilt Sandpiper

Sanderling

Dunlin

Least Sandpiper

Short-billed Dowitcher

Greater Yellowlegs

Willet

Lesser Yellowlegs

Laughing Gull

Ring-billed Gull

Lesser Black-backed Gull

Least Tern

Forster's Tern

Royal Tern

Sandwich Tern

Black Skimmer  
Rock Pigeon  
Eurasian Collared-Dove  
Common Ground-Dove  
Mourning Dove  
Yellow-billed Cuckoo  
Eastern Screech-Owl  
Great Horned Owl  
Burrowing Owl  
Common Nighthawk  
Ruby-throated Hummingbird  
Red-headed Woodpecker  
Red-bellied Woodpecker  
Downy Woodpecker  
Northern Flicker  
Pileated Woodpecker  
Crested Caracara  
Nanday Parakeet  
Great Crested Flycatcher  
Loggerhead Shrike  
White-eyed Vireo  
Yellow-throated Vireo  
Red-eyed Vireo  
Blue Jay  
Florida Scrub-Jay (heard)  
American Crow  
Fish Crow  
Purple Martin  
Barn Swallow

Tufted Titmouse  
Carolina Wren  
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher  
Eastern Bluebird  
Veery  
Gray-cheeked Thrush  
Swainson's Thrush  
Gray Catbird  
Brown Thrasher (heard)  
Northern Mockingbird  
European Starling  
Cedar Waxwing  
Northern Waterthrush  
Blue-winged Warbler  
Black-and-white Warbler  
Prothonotary Warbler  
Kentucky Warbler  
Common Yellowthroat  
Hooded Warbler  
American Redstart  
Cape May Warbler  
Northern Parula  
Blackpoll Warbler  
Black-throated Blue Warbler  
Palm Warbler  
Pine Warbler  
Yellow-rumped Warbler  
Prairie Warbler  
Black-throated Green Warbler

Bachman's Sparrow

Swamp Sparrow

Eastern Towhee

Summer Tanager

Scarlet Tanager

Northern Cardinal

Rose-breasted Grosbeak

Blue Grosbeak

Indigo Bunting

Painted Bunting

Eastern Meadowlark

Orchard Oriole

Baltimore Oriole

Red-winged Blackbird

Bronzed Cowbird

Brown-headed Cowbird

Common Grackle

Boat-tailed Grackle