

REVIEWS

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Guide to the Great Florida Birding Trail, East Section.—Julie A. Brashears and Susan Cerulean, editors. 2002. University Press of Florida, Gainesville, Florida. 188 pages. \$19.95 paper. ISBN 0-8130-2561-3.

Watching birds represents the fastest-growing form of outdoor recreation in the United States. The primary goal of the Great Florida Birding Trail is to harness the economic power of nature lovers in hopes of spurring local governments to conserve additional land. The Great Florida Birding Trail is a project of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and, when completed in 2006, will be a network of sites along a 2000-mile driving route.

For logistical purposes, Florida has been broken into four sections: East, West, Panhandle, and South. The project began with the East Section; books for the other sections are anticipated to be published at 18-month intervals. Sites chosen must meet a set of criteria (not defined in the Guidebook) and must be able to withstand frequent visitor use. The East [really Northeast] Section comprises 18 counties from Nassau County south to Highlands, Okeechobee, and St. Lucie counties, and from the Atlantic Ocean west to Clay, Putnam, Marion, Lake, and Polk counties.

The Guidebook has a soft spine that allows it to lie flat at any page—a nice feature. The layout is pleasing, with good-quality line drawings accenting the text. Twenty-four high-quality maps show the locations of sites within a region. The book has a very wide margin (almost 2.5 inches) on the outside edge of nearly all the pages. Although this may encourage note-taking, readers might have instead preferred a smaller, less expensive book. The Guidebook's size (8 x 10 inches) greatly hinders its portability in the field.

Following the Table of Contents, the book begins with three very short sections. A Preface gives somewhat of an overview about the Birding Trail, and contains the acknowledgments (although names of the site nominators are excluded). The How To Use This Guide section explains just that, and the final section addresses Birding Ethics. Among other topics, the latter section advises readers to “[r]esist the urge to drive your car on the beach, even when it’s legal.” But ironically, beach-driving by “the more intrepid birders” is mentioned in several of the site accounts that follow! The introductory material is surprisingly brief, especially considering that this book is the first in a series of four. Much of the introductory material presented above was obtained from the Guide’s advertising flyer, and not the book itself! Birding guides typically contain information about bird abundance and distribution, habitats, traveling tips and cautions, species accounts of regional “specialties” and tips on how and where to find them, and a bird checklist. None of these topics is addressed in the Birding Trail Guidebook, which suffers greatly from these omissions.

The bulk of the Guidebook consists of the birding sites, which are arranged in “clusters.” The East Section contains 135 sites (not 136; back cover) arranged in 23 clusters that each contain between one and 12 sites. Because the clusters are chosen by their proximity, many of them are misleadingly named. As examples, five sites within the Gannet Cluster are located several miles inland (where there are no gannets); the [Lake Wales] Ridge Cluster includes only sites within Polk County—Ridge sites in Highlands County are listed in another cluster; and perhaps most bizarrely, only one of eight sites in the Scrub-Jay Cluster contains Florida Scrub-Jays!

Site accounts are supplemented with up to 14 icons that denote, for instance, whether an entrance fee is charged (although the amount is not specified), whether seasonal hunting occurs, the best times to visit, whether restrooms are provided, etc. Site

accounts contain a description of around 10–15 lines of text each, including a brief description of the site, portions worth visiting, and brief listing of birds to be seen. I was bothered by three aspects of the species listings: (1) they often are rather general, (2) they tend to list the same common and widespread species repetitively, and (3) the seasonality of species occurrence is never indicated, so readers could be excused for thinking that Horned Grebes, Swallow-tailed Kites, and Common Nighthawks, among numerous other species, occur in Florida year-round. Following the Description are directions to the site, usually of a few lines each. These allow the reader to find the site via public roadways, but information on where to go *within* the site often is lacking. The accounts conclude with the hours that the site is open, a telephone number, and an often general website address. Best months to visit also are indicated; these tend to be year-round (“January–December”) or from fall through spring. Migration is presented often in the text as occurring in “October and again in April,” which implies incorrectly that migration occurs solely in those two months.

Separating the site clusters are 26 short essays that relate mostly to “specialty” birds of the region. These were written by several Florida ornithologists and include essays on Whooping Cranes (Steve Nesbitt), Swallow-tailed Kites (Ken Meyer), Crested Caracaras (Joan Morrison), Least Terns (Jeff Gore), Florida Scrub-Jays (Reed Bowman and Glen Woolfenden), Florida Grasshopper Sparrows (Paul Gray), and Dusky Seaside Sparrows and Painted Buntings (Jim Cox). Other topics address timely conservation issues such as prescribed burning (Todd Engstrom), human and dog disturbance of shorebirds and larids (Nancy Douglass), mortality of Neotropical migrants from communication towers (Jim Cox), benefits of shade-grown coffee vs. “sun coffee” (Ann Morrow), and restoration of the Kissimmee River (Paul Gray). Finally, three “Birdwatching 101” essays address the basics of bird identification, selection of binoculars and field guides, and birding by ear. The essays are pleasant, quick reads that add much to the book.

Throughout the book, the English names of birds are typed in lower-case, which is annoying. Capitalization of the English names of birds now is standard practice, and it helps to locate names within the text. A proofreader skilled in current avian nomenclature would have caught the non-standard names and spellings that occur frequently throughout the text. I noticed several other types of errors: Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers are presented as being permanent residents (p. 52), American Bitterns are called “prolific” and are implied to breed in Florida (pp. 59 and 114), American Redstarts are inferred to be something other than wood-warblers (p. 81), vultures are presented as being raptors (p. 123), Least Terns are claimed to be winter residents (p. 126), Anhingas are called wading birds (p. 125), and “petrels” should be “storm-petrels” (p. 155). Rough-legged Hawks reportedly have occurred at Emerald Marsh and Sunnyhill Restoration Area (p. 25)—if so, the sightings are not known to the Florida Ornithological Society Records and Field Observations committees. The Guidebook recommends watching for Red-throated Loons in central Brevard County during winter (p. 147), an exercise that may require considerable patience. Cruickshank (1980. *The Birds of Brevard County, Florida*. Florida Press, Orlando) referred to Red-throated Loons as “a rare and irregular winter visitant . . . that may go unrecorded for an entire year.”

The closing material consists of several helpful sections. A four-page Resources for Birdwatchers includes brief and incomplete listings of Florida conservation organizations, recommended field guides, checklists, other publications, and telephone numbers for Rare Bird Alerts. Among the critical omissions from this section are Robertson and Woolfenden (1992. *Florida Bird Species: An Annotated List*. Special Publication No. 6. Florida Ornithological Society, Gainesville), Stevenson and Anderson (1994, *The Birdlife of Florida*. University Press of Florida, Gainesville), and Sibley (2000, *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York). The Sibley Guide likewise is not mentioned in the essay on available field guides, a startling omission. Following the Resources section is an Index Chart that lists all 135 sites together with symbols that indicate if two criteria

(i.e., educational; good for beginners) are met, as well as whether 13 species or groups are found onsite. The birds are presently in seemingly random order (i.e., neither taxonomic nor alphabetical), and the headings on p. 186 are severely mangled, with many headings missing. The symbols that indicate bird presence are incomplete for most or perhaps all species or groups. The book lacks an Index, which represents another flaw.

The Guidebook seems specifically geared to bird-watchers and beginning birders, who have the most to gain from this project. In contrast, serious birders will be disappointed by the inclusion of many less-than-worthwhile birding sites, and the exclusion of information on how and where to find particular sought-after species. Local Audubon chapters and community libraries certainly should have copies of the Guidebook available. Businesses near some of the sites may benefit from purchasing one or more “display copies” to increase awareness of the Birding Trail and its purposes. Museum and university libraries probably can do without this guide.

Finally, most of the information in the *Guide to the Great Florida Birding Trail, East Section* is available free of charge from the Birding Trail’s website: <<http://www.florida-birdingtrail.com>>.—**Bill Pranty**, 8515 Village Mill Row, Bayonet Point, Florida 34667-2662, <billpranty@hotmail.com>.