

## 2010 Big "O" Birding Extravaganza Tour Descriptions

**\*Birding by Boat on Lake Okeechobee.** This is a covered pontoon boat that seats 16. Captain James Erskine departs Roland & Mary Ann Martin's Marina for a leisurely paced tour to the spoil banks, a product of dredging, from Lake Okeechobee to the Rim Canal. Lots of great birding and photography opportunities. Look for snail kites, peregrine falcons, roseate spoonbills, white pelicans, swallowtail kites, and a variety of gulls, terns, shorebirds, waterfowl, wading birds and song birds. Last year's trips yielded more species than the STA-5 tours. There are six scheduled tours, mornings and afternoons, with a variety of excellent tour guides.

**\*Witherspoon Mine Mitigation Wetlands,** located on CR 78 in Ortona (Glades County). This is a fine example of a wetlands mitigation project. Travel by bus to the site. There is some walking through grassy and sometimes seasonally marshy areas. Historical sightings include belted kingfishers, vireos, hawks, ducks, warblers, wood storks, ibis, egrets, and caracaras. Boots are recommended. Bring a light jacket, or layers depending on the weather. Gene McAvoy leads the tours.

**\*Harney's Pond Canal & Fort Center FWC WMA Indian Mounds.** The best view of Lake Okeechobee is hidden in plain sight in the town of Lakeport, at the Harney's Pond Canal Recreation Area. The walk is short, but long on scenery. You will scramble up two spoil banks to a boardwalk that's pointed towards the stars, you'll discover increasingly beautiful views of the Indian Prairie and marshlands around Fisheating Creek as you walk up, up, up. At the very top, take in the panorama of canals, marshes, and the ribbon of open water in the distance. Fort Center FWC WMA includes a swamp buggy ride to the historic Indian mounds and burial pond. The combination lake-side and Fisheating Creek's oak hammocks and cypress heads help rack up impressive bird lists. A camera is a must. Dr. Paul Gray leads this tour with archaeologist Chris Davenport.

**\*Owl Hoot at Fisheating Creek FWC WMA.** A long tradition of the Big "O" Birding Festival is the Almost Famous Owl Hoot. Lifetime resident, historian, and all around good guy Larry Luckey does an amazing job of hootin' down the barred owls after dark. Bring a jacket, good walking shoes, and night vision goggles if you have them! We're taking the short bus this year.

**\*Premier Loop Tour** is right out of Pranty's Guide but this one includes Dr. Paul Gray from FL Audubon as your tour guide and includes extra local detours, including Fisheating Creek. The bus stops periodically, opportunities to see crested caracara, Florida scrub jays, eastern bluebirds, red-headed woodpeckers, burrowing owls, short-tailed hawks, swallow-tailed kites and wading birds. Look for the common mina at the Clewiston McDonalds.

**\*STA-5. Storm Water Treatment Area #5** is quickly becoming THE place to bird in Florida. This impressive eight square miles of filter marshes was designed by the South Florida Water Management District to remove excess phosphorus from water flowing into the Everglades. Travel by bus along the levee between the cells and see pink clouds of roseate spoonbills, white pelicans, and purple gallinules, swallow tail kites, kestrels, falcons, various shorebirds and more. Margaret England leads the tours.

**\*Boardwalk at Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum** on the Big Cypress Seminole Indian Reservation. Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki means a place to learn. This one-mile boardwalk goes through a massive cypress swamp lined with educational placards that explain the form and function of over 60 different species of plants. Stop in the native village and ceremonial grounds along the way. Take a trip through Seminole history at this world-class museum. See warblers and woodpeckers, herons and hawks, turkeys and vultures and more. Mark & Selena Kiser will lead this tour.

**\*Okaloacoochee Slough State Forest** is also known as the OK Slough for those who think Okaloacoochee is just too hard to say. The new Boardwalk takes you up close and personal with nature. The checklist includes cranes, limpkins, turkeys, caracaras, kites, hawks, eagles, wood storks, ibis, waterfowl, kingfishers, woodpeckers, shrikes, warblers, and more. Kim Willis leads this tour.

**\*Dinner Island Ranch FWC WMA** is home to an incredible diversity of birds. A continuous turnover of species in response to migratory movements ensures birders ever changing experiences matched to the seasons. Expect to see anhinga, egrets, herons, turkeys, quail, kites, hawks, wood storks, caracaras, owls, kingfishers, woodpeckers, shrikes, roseate spoonbills and other wildlife. You'll tour in a swamp buggy and Kim Willis leads this tour.

**\*Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail (L.O.S.T).** The Bird & Bike tour is one-way from Clewiston to Uncle Joe's Fish Camp (or vice versa) a six-mile ride on a flat, paved trail. We make several stops to enjoy the diverse landscape. The grassy marsh beyond the Rim Canal, the dead melaleuca forest and the sugar cane fields offer a variety of birds. The pace is leisurely and bicycles can be rented at Roland & Mary Ann Martin's Marina. Deen Mountain is the tour leader.

**\*Photo Shoot at STA-5** is for the SERIOUS photographer. Bring your own equipment and transportation will be provided to and from STA-5. Here is an excellent opportunity to get some awesome shots. Photographer John J. Lopinot leads these tours. Other locations may be added. There will be a PHOTO CONTEST with the winner announced on Sunday.

**\*Off the Beaten Track** tour with Deen Mountain is a scenic photo opportunity as well as a short hiking tour along Fisheating Creek. You'll enjoy lots of other great bird sightings. Grassy trails that can be seasonally wet. Boots or good hiking shoes are recommended.

**\*Private Ranch Tours** is NEW to the Big "O" Birding Extravaganza. Local ranchers are opening their lands for private tours. Margaret England is the tour guide.

## 2010 Big “O” Birding Extravaganza Programs Descriptions



The Big “O” Birding Extravaganza Welcomes **James Currie**, host of Birding Adventures TV as the **Keynote Speaker**. A life-long birder and native of South Africa James Currie has many years experience in the birding and wildlife tourism arenas. James has led professional wildlife and birding tours for over 12 years and his passion for birding and remote cultures has taken him to far corners of the earth from the Amazon and Australia to Africa and Madagascar. He has contributed to several publications, including the acclaimed Southern African Bird Finder. He is also an expert in the field of sustainable development and holds a Bachelor's Degree in African Languages and a Masters degree in Sustainable Environmental Management.

From 2004-2007 James worked as the Managing Director of Africa Foundation, a non-profit organization that directs its efforts towards the upliftment of communities surrounding wildlife areas in Africa. James has recently immigrated to the United States with his family and currently resides in West Palm Beach, Florida. James' enthusiasm, energy, and passion breathe a whole new excitement into the world of birding. Tickets will be on sale for a chance to dine with him at the Keynote Dinner.

**\*Hidden Gems of the Great Florida Birding Trail** is a spectacular presentation by Mark Kiser, FL Great Birding Trail Coordinator. Assisted by his wife, Selena, Mark will share their experiences along the Great Florida Birding Trail.

**\*Bird & Wildlife Photography** seminar is presented by John J. Lopinot. Learn new tips and techniques, share experiences with a professional photographer with 30 years of experience – specializing in nature and underwater photography.

**\*Taste of Florida & Wildlife Program** is presented by Allen & Patty Register of world famous Gatorama in Palmdale, FL. There is a private tour of Gatorama, a scavenger hunt, and a wildlife presentation by Patty Register. The outstanding meal consists of alligator ribs and alligator tail, BBQ chicken, Okeechobee Rice, swamp cabbage, fresh seasonal vegetables, sour orange pie or banana pudding, and ice tea. This event is EITHER Thursday or Friday, not both.

**\*Florida Time Forgot.** Florida author and native Mark Renz sees incredible beauty while wading chest deep in our area rivers in his search for Ice Age fossils. But he also sees humor. Renz's slide presentation, "Florida Time Forgot", is extracted from his web site by the same name. His off-beat images of wildlife and landscape are funny, artistic and entertaining -- even if you're a grouch by nature. "Giants in the Storm" is his latest endeavor and you can see some of his discoveries at the Clewiston Museum.

**\*The Outdoor City Market** is located in the City Park adjacent to the Historic Clewiston Inn. This is a Saturday only event and it features local arts and crafts, birding related vendors, fresh organic vegetables and fruits. There's some good Urban Birding at the park as well. We are still seeking the elusive Smooth Billed Ani!

**\*Evening on Big Cypress** begins with a tour of the world-class Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, then over to Billie Swamp Safari for dinner (ON YOUR OWN) at the Swamp Water Café featuring Cultural Cuisine and American Fare (Vegetarian also); Story Telling around the Campfire then a Night Eco-Tour of Billie Swamp Safari on a Swamp Buggy. Panthers have been sighted in the wild!

**\*Audubon Birds of Prey** is a wonderful and informative presentation by Lynda White of the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey. Take an up close and personal view of the magnificent bald eagle "Paige", and a few others Lynda and her husband Jim display in the Sugar & Spice Room.

**\*Nature Based Eco-Tourism** workshop is for the practical application of attracting tourists in today's economy. For the hotelier, restaurateurs, and tour guides. Focus will be on opening up private lands programs, identifying markets, matching markets to programs, and ethical ecotourism.

**\*Turkey Calling & Alligator Wrestling Demonstration.** We had turkey callers last year and it was a big hit. Seminole Billy Walker is one of the best and you will enjoy his presentation. The alligator wrestling demonstration is something you won't want to miss.

**\*Old South Barbeque** at the Clewiston Inn. Original and authentic recipes from an era gone by. This ends a perfect day in Paradise and the 2010 Big “O” Birding Festival.