

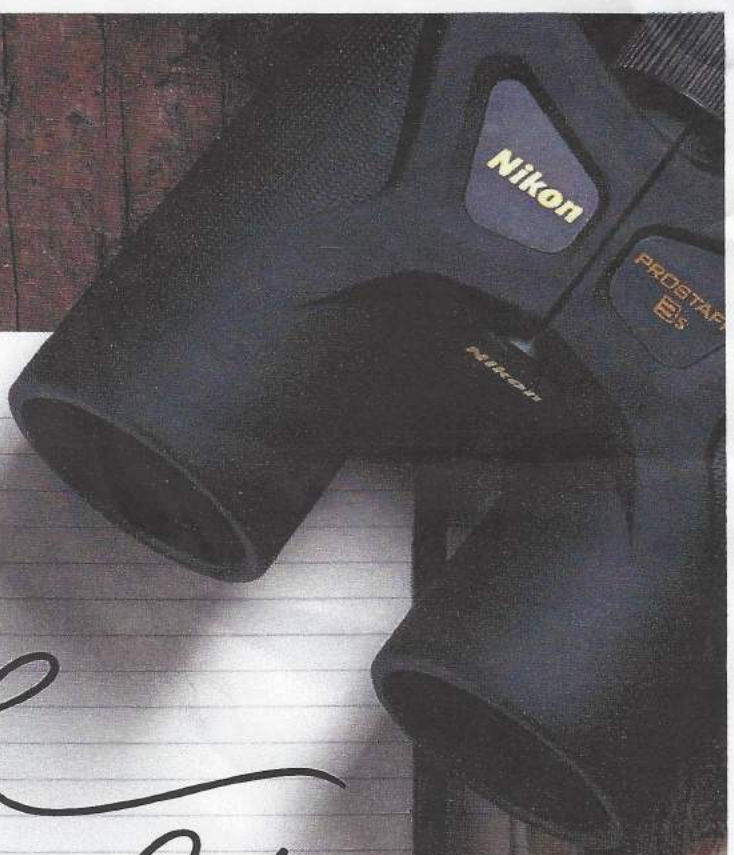
# NAPLES

3 LOCAL  
FARMS  
*Yummy Food  
& Fun Visits*

BIRDING  
IN PARADISE  
*A healthy hobby  
to love*

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# ARTS & CULTURE

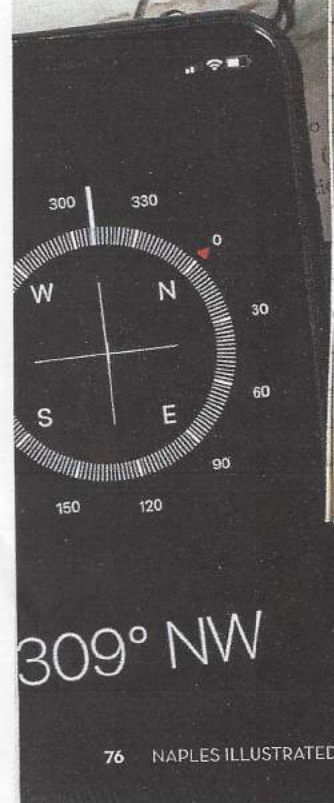


# Take Flight

## BIRDING *in* NAPLES

AS THE GREAT OUTDOORS OFFER SAFE WAYS TO STAY ENTERTAINED AND ENGAGED, ALL EYES TURN TO OUR FEATHERED FRIENDS ON THE PARADISE COAST

BY MARIANNE MCNEE





## AVIAN ESSENTIALS

YOUR BIRDING SKILLS WILL SOAR WITH THESE RESOURCES

**FIELD GUIDE:** A good field guide is important. *Sibley's Birding Basics*, the *Peterson Field Guide to Birds of North America*, and resources from the National Audubon Society are all excellent. Check out online guides, including [allaboutbirds.org](http://allaboutbirds.org) from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the online guide from Audubon at [audubon.org/bird-guide](http://audubon.org/bird-guide). Join the Facebook Group What's this Bird?, managed by the American Birding Association, to assist with hard-to-identify birds.

**OPTICS:** You'll need a pair of binoculars, or 'bins' in birding lingo. Experts recommend going with 8x42 magnification, rather than 10x42, as it provides a slightly wider field of view and better image stability. Try out a few. If you wear glasses, get binoculars with adjustable eye cups that screw down to achieve better visibility. More experienced birders use high-end spotting scopes for long-distance bird-watching.

**SMARTPHONE APPS:** Most birders download several of the smartphone apps available. Merlin is a great tool to help instantly ID birds, whether through its Bird ID Wizard or Photo ID match. Another top app is eBird, a joint project between the Cornell Lab and Audubon. It helps birders track birds they've sighted and create a life list. Also check out eBird hot spots to see where local birders are having success. The Audubon app is another great option, and Sibley's Song Sleuth is a fun way to learn birding by ear. All are free.

JOIN GROUPS THROUGH THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY FOR HELP SPOTTING BIRDS LIKE THE RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER.



**P**icture yourself hiding in the brush at a Naples sanctuary, park, or conservancy on a clear November day with a trusted pair of binoculars in your hand. You've been waiting for an hour to spot a painted bunting, and suddenly, out of the clear blue sky, there is not one but two, a brightly colored male and his mate, a muted yellow-green female.

This type of reward for calmness and diligence is exactly what keeps seasoned birders hooked and has new birders wanting to witness and understand more. Naples resident Edward Kemnitzer, a long-time birding devotee, explains how he got started. "My Aunt Jo gave me a birding guide when I was 9 years old growing up on Long Island, New York. I still have that guide to this day. Everybody should have an Aunt Jo."

If you've ever thought of taking up birding, you're in good company. As of 2016, more than 45 million Americans bird-watch. With the pandemic, birding has gotten even more popular as a safe, fun, and interesting way to encounter nature. For instance, downloads of the free Audubon Bird Guide app nearly doubled between March 2019 and March 2020.



STEVEN CHU



Naples-area birders of all levels are lucky ducks, as this zone is teeming with some of the world's most spectacular birds, such as roseate spoonbills and wood storks, and Southwest Florida is recognized by *birdwatching.com*, the National Audubon Society, and *Smithsonian Magazine* as a top U.S. birding destination. Uniquely located on the doorstep of the Everglades, Southwest Florida is the year-round home of many bird species. Naples is also an important stopover on the Atlantic Flyway, a major migratory path. And given the area's abundance of fresh- and salt-water habitats, you can often see rare birds during spring and fall migrations.

One such precious find is the Florida scrub jay. The only bird species endemic to Florida, the Florida scrub jay is on the list of threatened species, both federally (1987) and at the state level (1975). Birders from all over come to attempt to glimpse this elusive bird. Its native scrub habitat has diminished in size over the past 100 years, resulting in the loss of 80 to 90 percent of the population. Scrub jays are family-oriented, as the young stay with their mother for a few years, until they start their own family nest close by. Kemnitzer recalls a trip to Briggs Nature Center in the early 2000s. "My birding friend Kevin was visiting, and I wanted to 'give' him a life bird," he says,

employing a birding phrase that signifies when an individual birder spots a specific species for the first time. "We went to Shell Island Road and waited and waited, and just before throwing in the towel, two Florida scrub jays landed on the telephone wires. Birding is a lot about patience." Naples birders, like Kemnitzer, hope that conservation efforts, such as controlled burns and clearing away taller trees to create wider scrub environment, will help the Florida scrub jay population grow.

To get started, all you need to do is look out your window, gaze off your balcony or sit in your backyard, quiet your mind, and sharpen your eyes. It's almost meditative, as you can get lost in the art of bird spotting and forget all of the pesky holiday season to-dos. "If you live anywhere in developed Naples, it's not hard to notice these birds working lawns and a variety



**LEFT: THE FLORIDA SCRUB JAY IS ONE OF THE STATE'S MOST PRIZED SPECIES. IT MAKES ITS HOME IN LOW-GROWING OAK SCRUB AND SCRUBBY FLATWOODS WITH SANDY SOILS. IT CAN OFTEN BE SEEN PICKING INSECTS OR HARVESTING ACORNS IN TREES AND SHRUBS.**



**BELOW: SPOT UNIQUE SPECIES AT THE NAPLES BOTANICAL GARDEN, WHICH FREQUENTLY HOSTS SPECIAL BIRDING EVENTS.**

of other habitats," Kemnitzer reports. Common backyard birds in Naples are the ubiquitous American white ibis, chatty northern mockingbirds, and the soothing mourning dove.

Begin to notice the size, shape, colors, and location of each bird. Pay attention to their bills, facial features, and plumage. Sketching birds and taking notes will help focus your attention. Print out a checklist of Florida Birds available through the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Hang a bird feeder. Take a walk around your neighborhood. Head outside with your bins. Join a community birding organization. Your appreciation of our feathery friends will grow every day. "Birding hits a chord in your heart," says Kemnitzer. "It's a simple, entertaining connection with nature's complex undertones. I've had bad days at golf, tennis, bridge, work, and running, but I've never had a bad day birding."



## FEATHERED FESTIVALS

GET IMMERSSED IN BIRDING BY ATTENDING EVENTS WITH OTHER ENTHUSIASTS

Birding festivals are a prime opportunity to learn and have fun—and some are within a few hours' drive from Naples. Experienced birders know to get a one- or multiday pass depending on your interest in the various field trips and educational opportunities available. Field trips fill up quickly, so go online and register early. Outings are often led by more than one experienced birder, who will guide attendees to spot unique species; some might even bring their spotting scopes. There are also expert-led presentations on topics such as habitats, field techniques, advanced birding skills, birding calls, and photography. Some Florida festivals to consider include:

**1 FLORIDA'S BIRDING AND PHOTO FEST:** Held in St. Augustine and Ponte Vedra in northeastern Florida and set for April 21-25, 2021. Plan for field work, classroom sessions, and night and action photography. ([floridasbirdingphotofest.com](http://floridasbirdingphotofest.com))



**2 EVERGLADES BIRDING FESTIVAL:** Headquartered at the Holiday Inn Express in Davie and scheduled for January 14-18, 2021, but check for updates as the date gets closer. Expect expert guides, field trips, and workshops. ([evergladesbirdingfestival.com](http://evergladesbirdingfestival.com))



**3 SPACE COAST BIRDING AND WILDLIFE FESTIVAL:** Hosted at Eastern Florida State College in Titusville, this was postponed for 2021 but is in the books for January 26-30, 2022. The festival includes field trips, workshops, and presentations, along with world-class photographers. ([scbwf.org](http://scbwf.org))

## NEXT-LEVEL NATURALISTS

### ELEVATE YOUR BIRDING HOBBY TO AN EXPERTISE



**HIRE A PRIVATE BIRDING GUIDE.** Call ahead to the park you are visiting and ask if they have birding guides who give private tours. Reach out to one of their recommendations and have him or her lead you on a birding adventure. Outings are often organized for two or more hours in the morning. Check out [birdingpal.org](http://birdingpal.org) to connect with a network of passionate birders in your area (who often don't charge for their time), or go to [guidedbirdwatching.com](http://guidedbirdwatching.com) to help create a custom birding experience all your own.

### WATCH MOVIES AND DOCUMENTARIES.

There are a few inspiring feature-length movies about birding, including *A Birder's Guide to Everything* (2013) and *The Big Year* (2011). As for documentaries, consider *The Eagle Huntress* (2016), *Birders: The Central Park Effect* (2012), *The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill* (2005), and *The Life of Birds* (2003). On Netflix, try *Birders* (2019), which is about birders on both sides of the Rio Grande Valley (in South Texas and Mexico) as they protect and preserve some of the world's most beautiful bird species.



**FOLLOW LIVE BIRD CAMS.** Type in "live bird feeder cam" to your search bar, and get your field guide handy as you settle in for some very cool remote birding. Cornell Labs has a number of live cams on [allaboutbirds.org](http://allaboutbirds.org).

**TAKE AN ONLINE CLASS.** The Cornell Lab also offers Bird Academy, a variety of online courses to enhance your understanding of birds. Start with the Joy of Birdwatching, for which you pay a modest fee. Another class to consider focuses on identifying birds through their songs.



MANGROVE CUCKOO AT DING DARLING

© J. L. FISCHEB

## BEAK GEEKS' HOT SPOTS

### DAYTRIPPING FOR BIRDS IN SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

Ready to explore birding in more adventurous ways? Top Southwest Florida locales to visit are Everglades National Park, Big Cypress National Preserve, Tigertail Beach Park, and the Sanibel Lighthouse. The Great Florida Birding Trail has 10 locations in Collier County alone. Although spending time in nature can cost little to no money, the standout bird-observing perches we recommend below all rely on the philanthropic hearts and wallets of the avian-friendly community to provide top-notch experiences.

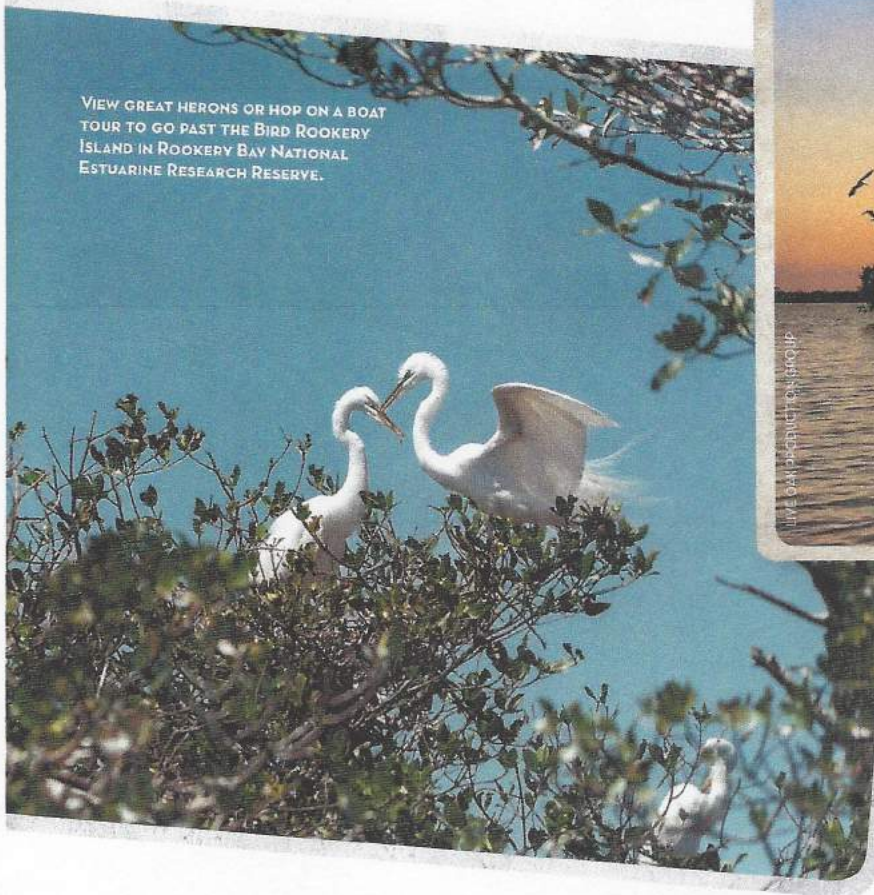


DING DARLING ABOUNDS WITH AROUND 240 SPECIES OF BIRDS.

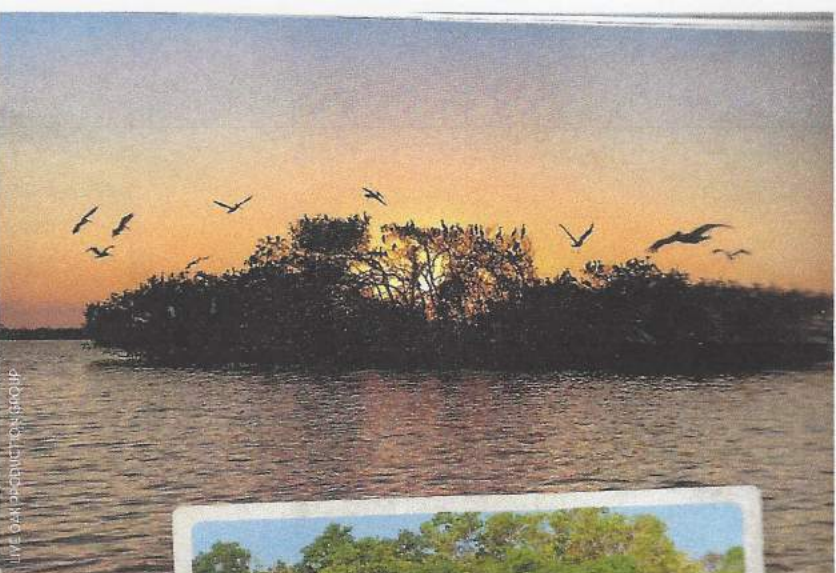
### J.N. "DING" DARLING NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE:

Occupying one-third of Sanibel Island, this 6,400-acre refuge is a unit of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Not to be missed is the one-way, 4-mile-long Wildlife Drive, where you can see birds roughly 240 species—from your car, bike, or on foot. Look for the American white pelican, mangrove cuckoo, reddish egret, roseate spoonbill, yellow-crowned night heron, and others. Book a beautiful sunset cruise or guided kayak outing with Tarpon Bay Explorers. ([fws.gov/refuge/jn\\_ding\\_darling](http://fws.gov/refuge/jn_ding_darling))

VIEW GREAT HERONS OR HOP ON A BOAT TOUR TO GO PAST THE BIRD ROOKERY ISLAND IN ROOKERY BAY NATIONAL ESTUARINE RESEARCH RESERVE.



LIVE OAK PRODUCTIONS GROUP



2

**ROOKERY BAY NATIONAL ESTUARINE RESEARCH RESERVE:**

At 110,000 acres, Rookery Bay represents one of the largest undisturbed mangrove estuaries around, stretching along the Gulf of Mexico from Naples to the western edge of the Everglades. Some 200 bird species have been spotted here, including the American kestrel, belted kingfisher, black skimmer, green heron, and frigate bird. Water access is the ticket to premier birding at Rookery Bay. Book a spot on a six-person passenger boat tour, a new ADA accessible pontoon boat, or a kayak tour, all with guides. Sunset at Rookery Bay is spectacular. ([rookerybay.org](http://rookerybay.org))



LUKE FRANK

AT THE AUDUBON CORKSCREW SWAMP SANCTUARY, BIRDERS HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPOT BALD EAGLES.

3

**AUDUBON CORKSCREW SWAMP SANCTUARY:** Located 30 minutes north of Naples, this 13,000-acre sanctuary is home to 220 bird species. You can potentially spy the endangered wood stork, great egret, painted bunting, black-bellied whistling duck, loggerhead shrike, and more. Take an easy stroll on the fabulous 1- or 2.25-mile boardwalk loops, where you will pass through habitats including pine flatwoods, marsh, wet prairie, and the largest remaining old-growth bald cypress forest in North America. Corkscrew is a gateway site for the Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail. ([corkscrew.audubon.org](http://corkscrew.audubon.org)) <<



KIMBERLY GERINELLE