



Rufous
Rufous
2 Purple Gallinule
nest & young
Snake Bight
ex. 5
Am. Redstart
vs. Heron
Flamingo

Term

Spring Birding In The National Park

by LOUIS A. STIMSON *illustrated by Walter B. Colebrook*

THE SPRING MONTHS in the Everglades National Park offer to the observer of birds ever changing possibilities in the birds that may be found. Many wintering species are present during part or all of the spring months. These with the ebb and flow of spring transients, together with the arrival of summer residents make for a constantly changing picture over the background of the permanent resident species. My own records over the years during March, April and May have yielded a total of 166 species, the greatest number for any quarter of the year. Records of other observers increase this number. With favorable conditions, including the juxtaposition of migrant waves, a hard day's work in the park may give one a list of 100 or more species, but the usual list for a day is more apt to be around 70.

The snack bar at Coot Bay operates only until April 30th, after which the carrying of lunch is a necessity. Mosquito repellent may be needed, and an aerosol bomb for in the car is good. Extra clothing and extra footwear may be desirable depending on the distance and type of country one may wish to tramp on foot. Although mileages from the park entrance to various points were given in the earlier articles of this series it may be well to repeat them briefly: Anhinga Trail, 2.25 mi.; Royal Palm Ranger Station, 2.5 mi.; Paradise Key picnic tables, 2.7 mi.; Long Pine Key Road, 3 mi.; (any mileage used on Long Pine Key should be added to the following); concrete bridge, 15.25 mi.; End-O'-Glades observation tower, 18.5 mi.; West Lake Pond, 25 mi.; Snake Bight Road, 26.5 mi.; small duck pond, 28.7 mi.; Coot Bay Ranger Station, 29 mi.; Bear Lake Road, 30.5 mi.; Flamingo picnic tables and observation shelter, 33.5 mi.

Many visitors during March and April will wish to take the trip to the famous Cuthbert Lake Rookery. A cruise from West Lake Pond dock to Cuthbert three times a day is offered by a park concessioner, Everglades Transway Service, who also offers a cruise on Coot Bay and Whitewater

Bay several times a day. Information as to these may be obtained at the Park Headquarters in Homestead, from the ranger on duty at the park entrance and the Royal Palm Station, or at the dock.

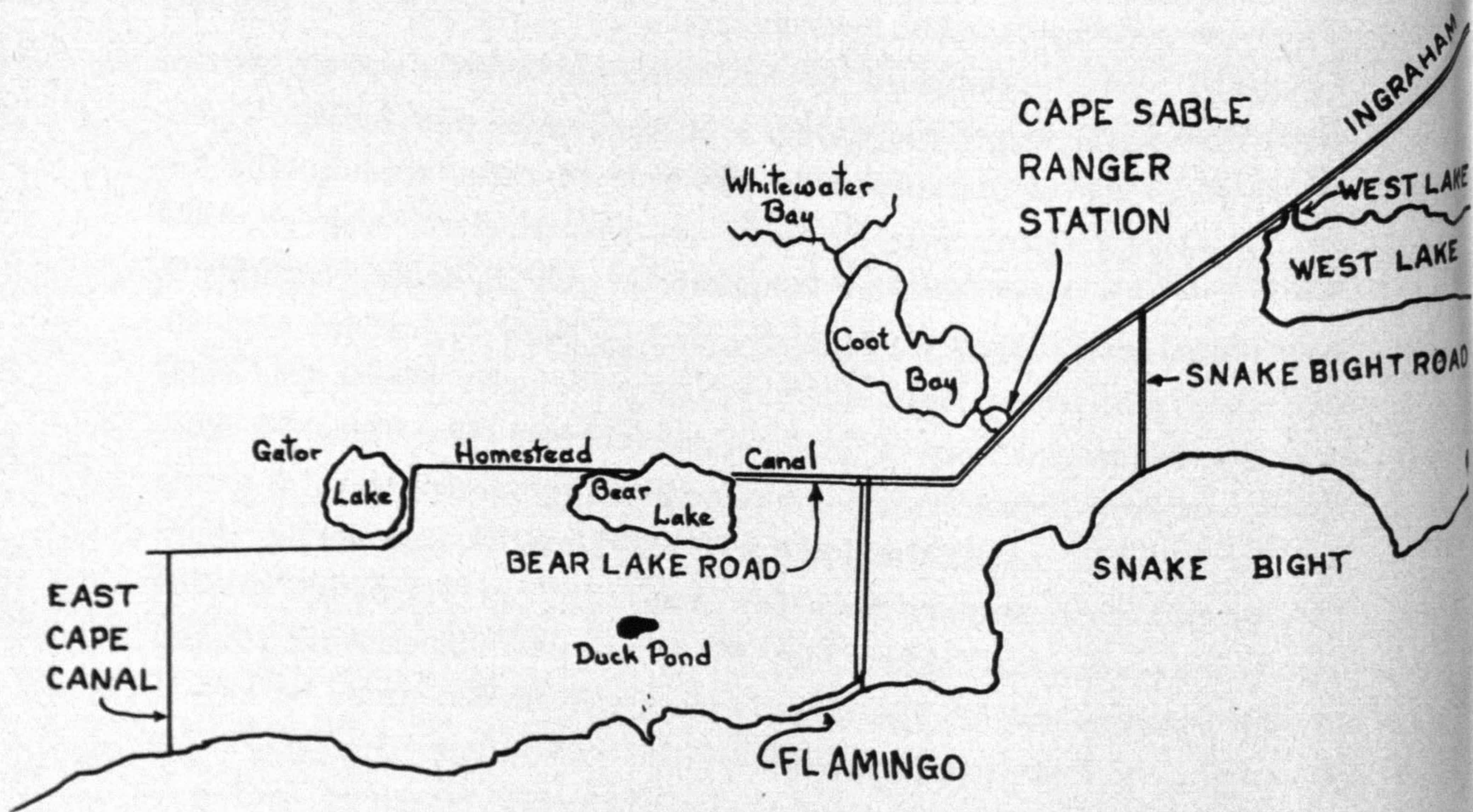
As in the fall and winter the drive to Flamingo over the Ingraham Highway (Florida Route 27), with an early morning brief visit to the edge of Long Pine Key (curve and trail about 0.65 mi. from the Ingraham Highway), and an afternoon side trip to Snake Bight, will offer the most to one who has only one day to spend in the park. To others with more time to spend, early morning hikes on the Snake Bight Road, the Bear Lake Road, the trails on Long Pine Key (road north at the fire tower and road-trail to the northwest 1.3 mi. west of the fire tower), or a morning or an afternoon trip along the sloughs on the Cape Sable prairie (conditions being permissible on advice of rangers) will add much satisfaction for the hardy birding outdoorsman. The extreme migration dates given herein are taken either from my own records or from Arthur H. Howell's *Florida Bird Life* (1932). Of course one can not expect to find a bird every year on the first or last date given, and further observations may contract or expand these dates.

Since the night roost at the Anhinga Trail breaks up near the end of February or in March, a start there at sunrise is not essential, although it will give the best results. In the neighborhood of the Anhinga Trail, along the Ingraham Highway, at Snake Bight, or the Flamingo shore I have found the following birds to have been present in all three spring months: pied-billed grebe, double-crested (Florida) cormorant, water-turkey (anhinga), great white heron, great blue heron (Ward's sub-species is the breeding representative in Florida), American egret, snowy egret, Louisiana (tri-colored) heron, little blue heron, green heron, black-crowned night heron, wood ibis, white ibis, turkey vulture, black vulture, swallow-tailed kite, king rail, purple gallinule, Florida gallinule, American coot, tree swallow (to May 10), (common) yellow-throat (the Florida race being resident, and other sub-species may pass through), meadowlark, red-winged black-bird (Maynard's being the resident sub-species), boat-tailed grackle, and purple (Florida) grackle. I have found the yellow-crowned night heron, American bittern and glossy ibis present in March and April but have no records for them in May. The least bittern is, without doubt, resident, but is seldom seen. The long-billed marsh wren is often in full song during

April and apparently leaves before May. Barn swallows have appeared by March 17, but are more common through April, and last recorded May 14. Bank swallows are rare in April. Limpkin may be present depending on feeding conditions. The sora leaves by May 4.

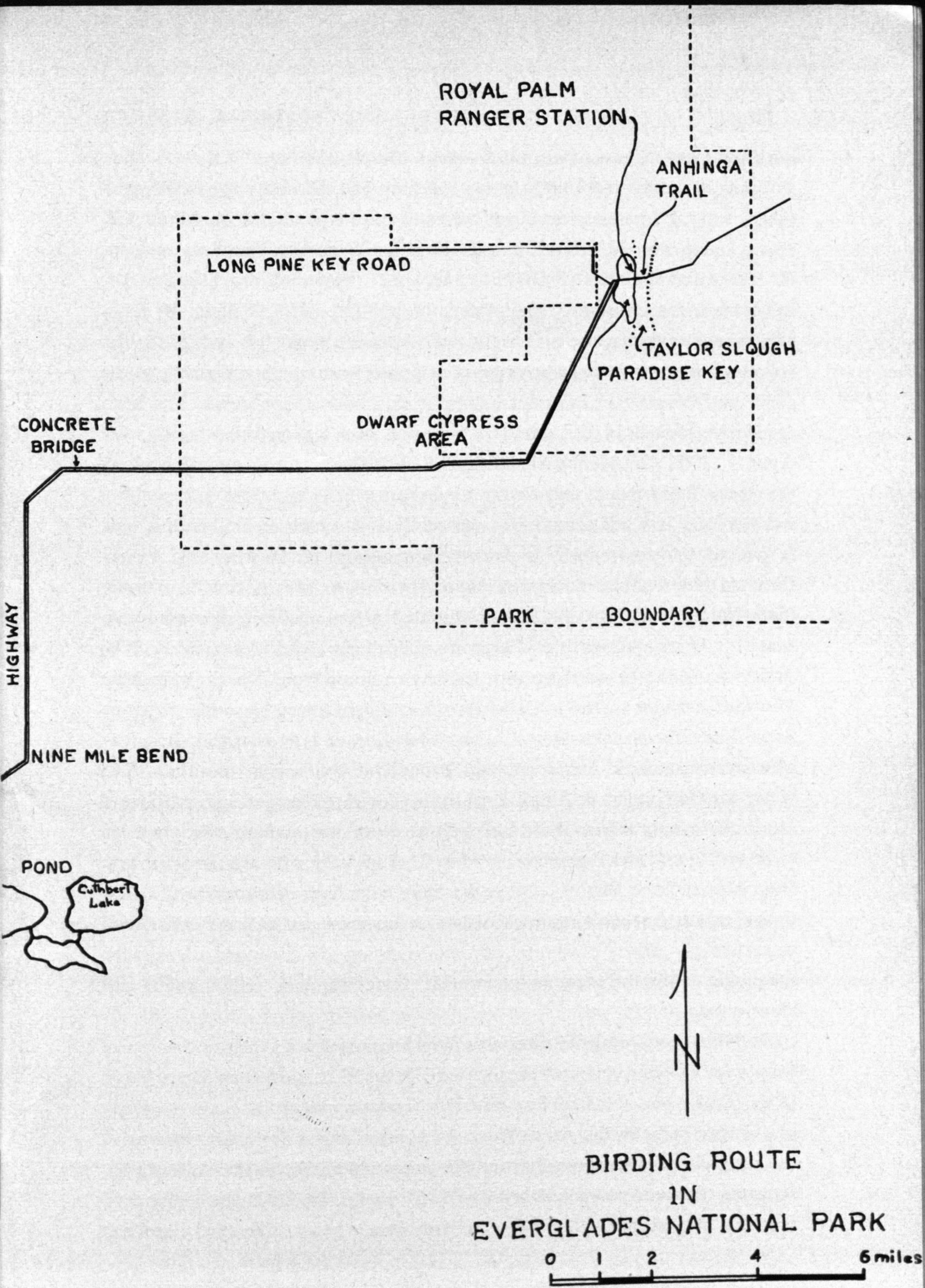
Purple gallinules have nested within three feet or less of the elevated walk at the Anhinga Trail in two years recently. On May 30, 1952, I reached the end of the walk at early dawn. There in a clump of tall grass within arm's reach of the platform I found a nest with a parent gallinule brooding two newly hatched young. The infants crept out from under their parent and each seemed to have a fluorescent spot on the bill. A closer look showed the light spot to be on the little protuberance on the bill with which the baby bird is equipped to help it break its way through the egg shell. The other parent soon came to the nest, and as they all seemed to resent my presence, I left. Late in the same day I returned to find that the precocial youngsters had left the nest and were running around over the spatterdock leaves with their parents.

At the Royal Palm Ranger Station, Paradise Key, and Long Pine Key areas the following species are permanent residents: red-shouldered hawk, bob-white, screech owl, great horned owl, barred owl, (yellow-shafted) flicker, pileated woodpecker, red-bellied woodpecker, hairy woodpecker, downy woodpecker, crested flycatcher, blue jay, American crow, Carolina (Florida) wren, mockingbird, brown thrasher, bluebird (western part of Long Pine Key), loggerhead shrike, white-eyed vireo, pine warbler, (common) yellow-throat, cardinal and white-eyed (eastern) towhee. The following winter residents may be present to the date given: whip-poor-will April 25, belted kingfisher May 12, phoebe March 28, house wren May 7, short-billed marsh wren (in open dry glades) April 17, catbird May 10, blue-gray gnatcatcher April 1, ruby-crowned kinglet March 21, cedar waxwing (irregular) May 10, yellow-throated vireo (rare) May 10, blue-headed (solitary) vireo April 27, black and white warbler May 14, parula warbler May 17, myrtle warbler April 18, yellow-throated warbler April 30, western palm warbler May 14, oven-bird May 21, indigo bunting (rare) May 4, painted bunting May 16, American goldfinch April 19, and swamp sparrow May 4. The arrival of summer residents may be looked for around the following dates: yellow-billed cuckoo April 1, chuck-will's-widow March 1, nighthawk April 1, eastern kingbird March 12, and gray



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kingbird (more frequent near salt water) March 25.

Transients may be found in many locations but the above areas are good places to look for them: red-eyed vireo (I have one record on March 28, 1941, and Arthur H. Howell in a list of birds of the Paradise Key environs in *The Auk*, Vol. XXXVIII-261, July 1921, reported one seen by Dr. Burgess on the unusual date of December 26-28, 1917. William B. Robertson reports seeing the bird eight times between April 14 and 23, 1952. However, the bird is a spring migrant at points both north and south of the park, and because of its quiet habits at this time it apparently has been much overlooked in the park); Tennessee warbler (another rarity. On April 1, 1951 Dr. Henry M. Stevenson called one to my attention along the Snake Bight Road, and we both watched it for some time); Cape May warbler (the few wintering ones apparently start north early, but this bird is one of the commonest transients from April 10 to May 8); black-throated blue warbler (common from April 10 to May 12, with extreme dates March 9 to May 29); black-throated green warbler (uncommon to May 1); black-poll warbler (large numbers from April 13 to May 27); prairie warbler (the northern race is fairly common from March 26 to May 22, with extreme dates at Sombrero Key Light directly south of Cape Sable from March 9 to May 29. The Florida race is resident in the mangroves and may be heard singing throughout the spring months). The water-thrushes might be found even in the hammock but are most frequent along the canals below West Lake Pond. Both winter here, the northern to May 21, and the Louisiana to May 4. American redstarts are common from March 28 to May 31. Other warblers have been recorded in the park during spring but until more records turn up they can only be considered as extremely rare: prothonotary, worm-eating, blue-winged, Nashville, magnolia, black-throated gray, cerulean, blackburnian, yellow-palm, and Connecticut.

Bobolinks are common transients from the middle of April to the last of May with extreme dates of April 4 and May 26. I have seen large flocks in the glades just south of Paradise Key, and they might be seen in grassy places anywhere in the park. There have been only a few observations of the orchard oriole reported from the area under discussion. William G. Atwater observed one on April 18, 1954 in the Snake Bight region and tells me that he has a few other records in the park. The bird has been

seen at widely separated points north of the park, and it certainly must migrate through the park to a greater extent than known records indicate. The Baltimore oriole has been reported in the area in spring, and I have a record on April 16 near West Lake.

Sandhill (Florida) cranes have been observed several times within the park. On May 23, 1948 Willard E. Dilley, some other men and I observed two cranes in the open glade on the east side of the Ingraham Highway about a mile north of the End-O'-Glades observation tower (18.5 mi.). In recent years they have been seen at varying seasons a little farther south, near the Paurotis palm area. (See note on dancing cranes by Daniel B. Beard in this magazine, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 30, March, 1953.)

Members of the hawk family may be looked for in habitats suitable for the species and perhaps will be found most often in the places mentioned below. The delightfully graceful swallow-tailed kite is most common in the Cape Sable region but may be seen anywhere in the park. It arrives about the last week in February. Its dexterity on the wing is really marvelous. I once saw one, apparently bent on nest building, sail by a moss covered cypress and, without checking its speed, by a flip of its forked tail, bank its body sidewise as, with a quick stroke of its talons, it seized some moss which it carried away. This kite is one of our few hawks that carries its prey aloft and eats while on the wing. Sharp-shinned hawks are somewhat rare along the Ingraham Highway to April 25. Red-tailed hawks seem to be uncommon residents. Broad-winged hawks usually leave by April 10, and are perhaps seen most often in the Snake Bight area. The short-tailed hawk has been observed most often, yet rarely, in the Paradise Key area and in the Cape Sable area, with a few records from other locations, up to May 10. Dorothy E. Snyder mentions rare summer records in this magazine (Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 69, June, 1954). Bald eagles have been sighted in the Cape Sable region during all the spring months. Marsh hawks hunt over the open glades and prairies through April. Ospreys are resident along salt water shores and are frequently seen elsewhere. Duck hawks (peregrine falcons) are uncommon to April 14, with most of my records from the Cape Sable region. Pigeon hawks have been seen most often over the Cape Sable prairie to April 22. Sparrow hawks (eastern race) are fairly common till the last of April, and the Florida race (little) is an uncommon resident.

The following ducks have been recorded during the spring months along the Ingraham Highway canal, at West Lake Pond, Snake Bight, Bear Lake, Coot Bay and small ponds on the Cape Sable prairie: Florida (mottled) duck (resident); pintail to April 22; bluewinged teal to May 22; baldplate (American widgeon) to May 17; shoveller to April 27; lesser scaup duck to May 29; ruddy duck to April 14; and red-breasted merganser to May 29.

Along the shore at Snake Bight, Flamingo, and the prairie sloughs the shore-bird migration at times reaches spectacular proportions. Immense flocks containing thousands of birds rise and circle, appearing like great black clouds drifting hither and yon in the sky. White pelicans have been seen as late as May 30, and in 1950 a few apparently remained all summer. Brown pelican, man-o'-war-bird (magnificent frigate-bird), roseate spoon-bill, and, of course, most of the wading-birds mentioned earlier are present in all three months. The Wurdemann's heron, thought to be a hybrid of the great white heron and Ward's great blue heron, is always possible but quite rare. Reddish egrets are often found at Snake Bight and at Durdin's (House's) Ditch Pond. They also may be seen in Florida Bay by persons taking the National Audubon Society's tour from Tavernier. An occasional flamingo is reported in the area. They may have wandered over from Cuba or the Bahamas, but according to Robert P. Allen in the September, 1954, issue of this magazine are more likely unpinioned escapes from the breeding captives at Hialeah Park. Florida clapper rails are resident in the salt marshes on the Flamingo prairie, and if not seen, can be heard frequently. In the shore-bird list to follow unless a date is given the species has been observed in all three months: piping plover (April 20); semi-palmated (ringed) plover; Wilson's plover; killdeer (March 20 with possible stragglers); black-bellied plover; ruddy turnstone; Wilson's snipe; long-billed curlew (rare, but I have a few spring records, usually in the vicinity of Durdin's (House's) Ditch, where on April 15, 1945, Frank McCamey and I saw one so close to a Hudsonian curlew that both birds appeared in our binocular field at the same time); Hudsonian curlew (at times numerous. On May 17, 1953 Wm. G. Atwater and I found sixteen just west of Durdin's Ditch); spotted sandpiper; solitary sandpiper (April records only); willet; greater, and lesser, yellow-legs; American (red) knot; pectoral sandpiper (rare); least sandpiper; red-backed sandpiper; dowitcher; stilt

sandpiper (rare, but on April 22, 1944 Albert Dietrich, Robert Woodmansee and I found a flock of 40 just west of Durdin's Ditch, and they also have been observed at Snake Bight); semi-palmated sandpiper; western sandpiper; marbled godwit; Hudsonian godwit (only record so far was six at Snake Bight on May 2, 1948 by Robert Woodmansee and me); sanderling (I have no records for the park in May); American avocet (on April 8, 1951 with a party of Dade Ornithologists I found 68 at Snake Bight, and other observers found up to 100 there at about that time. On May 17, 1953, William G. Atwater and I found 38 at Durdin's Ditch Pond.); black-necked stilt (arrives about the middle of March. On May 14, 1949, Woodmansee and I counted 70 on the Cape Sable prairies, but on May 29 could find only 20); herring, ring-billed and laughing gulls in all three months and Bonaparte's gull rare to April. Gull-billed terns appear in March and have been recorded in April, usually at Durdin's Ditch Pond or the Cape Sable prairie sloughs. Forster's tern is fairly common throughout the spring. Least terns appear in numbers after the first week in April. On May 14, 1949, Woodmansee and I found about 100 with nests and eggs on the dry prairie marl a short distance west of Flamingo. Royal tern, Caspian tern and black skimmer are present in all three months. On April 1, 1951 Dr. Stevenson and I found 80 Caspian tern at Snake Bight, the largest number either of us had ever seen at one time. A few Cabot's (sandwich) terns have been recorded in March and April, and a few black terns in April. Mourning and ground doves are present during all three months. Mangrove cuckoos return to their favorite habitat, and, as usual, are rarely seen. Barn owls are resident and might be seen early in the morning or late in the afternoon, with best possibilities over the Cape Sable prairie. The Arkansas (western) kingbird has been seen as late as April 5 near Flamingo. Black-whiskered vireos arrive about April 9 and may be heard singing in the mangroves. The wintering sparrows stay late: savannah (April 22); grasshopper (possibly to May 12); sharp-tailed (April 20); and swamp (May 4).

The editor apologizes for errors introduced into Mr. Stimson's article in the December, 1954, issue. On page 184 ground dove was omitted from birds seen on the Ingraham Highway and common mallard got into the category "common" instead of "possible."