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## A Birder's Guide to Florida, 4th Ed. by Bill Pranty

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## REVIEWS

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**A Birder's Guide to Florida, 4th ed.**—Bill Pranty, 1996. American Birding Association, Colorado Springs, Colorado. ISBN 1-878788-04-3. 388 pages, 83 maps, 29 line drawings. \$18.95 paper.—There have been two revolutions in bird book publishing during the twentieth century. The first was Roger Tory Peterson's *A Field Guide to the Birds* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin) in 1934, which made birdwatching feasible without a shotgun. The second was James A. Lane's *A Birdwatcher's Guide to Southeastern Arizona* (Santa Ana, Calif., L & P Photography) in 1965. This and the other "Lane Guides" catered to more mobile birdwatchers and abetted the growth of the "sport" of "birding." The first edition of *Birder's Guide to Florida* was written by Jim Lane and published in 1981 (also by L & P Press). This fourth edition, thoroughly researched and completely rewritten by Bill Pranty, is an excellent, up-to-date guide to birds and birding in the Sunshine State for visiting and resident birders, novices and advanced birders alike.

In the Introduction, Pranty summarizes the geological, human, and ornithological histories of Florida. He describes the major habitats found in Florida, many of them unique in the United States, and lists the common birds of each habitat, thus saving himself (and the reader) much repetition. The section on exotic bird species includes a plea for systematic monitoring of these birds and a summary of their impact on native species (a list of exotic species occurring in Florida is included near the end of the book on pages 313-317). A brief, month-by-month "calendar of bird activity" is followed by sections on such topics as lodging, weather, bird organizations, and "hazards" (from drug dealers to the "other" Florida state bird, the mosquito), all of which will be useful to the visiting birder. The important section on birding ethics is reinforced by the inclusion of the ABA Code of Ethics on the inside front cover and by many reminders and cautions throughout the text.

The main section of the book is devoted to birding sites throughout the state. The sites are presented geographically and divided into chapters on the Panhandle, North Florida, Central Florida, South Florida, and the Florida Keys. Pranty admits that not every site in the state could be included and that many smaller local sites are not covered; all of the major sites, however, are covered. Detailed directions and mileage are given to all sites discussed. I did not field-check mileages, but the directions are clear and consistent with the excellent maps, which depict all of the sites discussed. A particularly useful feature is the inclusion of information on hours of operation and fees and a contact with address and phone number for nearly every site. Of course, birds to be found at each site are also featured. One of my very few criticisms of the work is the heavy emphasis given to rare vagrants in these site accounts. Information on other natural, historical, and cultural aspects occasionally adds additional interest to the site accounts.

Following the site descriptions is an extensive section on "Specialties of Florida." Summaries are given for 211 species or groups of species, describing where, when, and how to find the most sought-after species. Identification hints are given that may augment descriptions found in popular field guides. In the now-traditional bar graphs depicting the seasonal and regional status of birds in Florida, columns are provided for both geographic and annual occurrence for each species. Multiple lines may be given for species with two different forms in Florida or, for example, a species that breeds in north Florida in summer and winters in south Florida. One could quibble over individual entries in these graphs, but on the whole, they are accurate, if a bit conservative, which probably better reflects the experience of visiting and novice birders. The final sections include lists of other fauna occurring in Florida including dragonflies, butterflies, amphibians, reptiles, and mammals. These will be useful to those birders (or their companions) whose interests extend beyond feathered species.

The "Literature Cited" section, actually a bibliography, is perhaps the least useful part of the book for visiting or novice birders. Most of the references are first-record articles, but there are some useful general references on Florida ornithology. An excellent index completes the book. The indexing of many of the sites under "Park," "National Forest," or "Reserve" is initially confusing, but should become less so with use. A nice feature is the "abbreviated table of contents" that occurs on each index page. This provides the reader with quick access to the pages of each of the major sections in the book.

Reviewers are also supposed to point out the shortcomings of a book, but there is little that I can say negatively about this one. The book is an outstanding guide to birding sites in the state. I found very few typographical errors, all inconsequential, in the text. I miss Lane's wry and perceptive comments, such as about Turkey Vultures wintering in Dade County or the distribution of *Homo sapiens* in the state, that did not survive into this edition. Anyone planning to visit the Sunshine State, either for an extended birding trip or especially for a hurried post-convention junket, will absolutely need this book. Native Floridians will also want it to help in exploring unfamiliar parts of the state.—**Bruce Neville**, Univ. of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico.