

CHAPTER 16

CAMPING WITH THE REST OF THE NATION IN EVERGLADES
NATIONAL PARK

"There are no other everglades in the world. They are, they have always been, one of the regions of the earth, remote, never wholly known. Nothing anywhere else is anything like them...It is a river of grass... It points toward and touches withintone degree of the tropics." Marhorie Stoneman Douglas

The call of the wild got to me after a few days in over-civilized Ft. Lauderdale, so I packed clean clothes, home-cooked and store food, sleeping bag and all my other camping gear into the van and headed for the Everglades National Park. When I arrived I wasn't too surprised to see a long, low, modern-design Visitor Center not far in from the entrance gate. The old square white building which I'd known was gone. I was tempted to go inside, as I knew there would be exhibits, but I was eager to get far away from buildings, so I put off seeing this, to me, new Center, for the present.

In a couple of miles there was a sign pointing to a side road on the left, indicating it was the way to Anhinga Trail. This was puzzling, for the road used to go right through Anhinga Tail. I decided to keep going. I was off for Flamingo, which was about thirty-five miles due west. I drove slowly, trying to orient myself.

out where I was. It was so strange to be on a wide, hard-topped road. Soon I ^came to a sign identifying the next side road on the left as leading to Long Pine Key Campground. This was totally new to me. I decided not to go in and investigate it now; it would be something to explore later.

It soon became obvious that this was not the same road on which I used to drive to Flamingo from my campsite on the little pond. I was expecting changes, for the Park was now developed for visitors, and the Flamingo Road of my day in here was not safe for public use. The first difference I noticed was that no canal was in sight. So often had speeding young people out that lonely road skidded in the loose gravel and gone into the canal, sometimes losing their life. Did they fill in that canal, or build this road farther in the everglades away from it? Much of the scenery seemed the same, - wide expanses of saw grass with small islands out in it here and there of dark-tree hardwood hammocks. There were stretches of scattered Caribbean pines, and then the familiar area of dwarf cypress which Peter and Kacy would recognize ~~z~~ if they were with me.

As I passed through these more familiar landmarks I felt as if I were on the old Ingraham Highway again though this road was built quite high above the surrounding watery everglades. By this time the Park was comprised of one and a quarter million acres, the largest sub-tropical wilderness in continental United States. It extended from the Tamiami Trail on the north, Florida City on the east, Florida Bay on its southern edge, all the way to the further reaches of Cape Sable and the Thousand Islands on the west. A mighty big bite of geography. It supports some of the largest

congregations of wildlife found in this country, especially in winter when migrant birds funnel down from Canada, to escape frozen lakes and deep snow, to spend a warm and food-abundant season in south Florida. Some, of course, continue right on down into Central and even South America, but great numbers of them settle into the sawgrass country. The everglades in winter, is the Serengetti of America, as to birds. The great River of Grass, rippling down slowly through the vast country from the southern end of ~~the~~ Lake Okeechobee to the Gulf of Mexico is a haven for all kinds of egrets, herons, ducks and other water birds.

Soon I passed Mahogany Hammock side road in the right; from there the road went almost due south to Nine Mile Pond; then southwest, looking once more like the old Highway I used to know, if you remembered the gravel road across which the water of Florida Bay rippled at incoming and outgoing tide. For I was soon at West Lake, then Mrazek Pond where the highway had come right down to touch this pond. Here I caught up with the canal, which still lined the right-hand edge of the road. It was now overgrown with a tangle of shrubs and trees making it difficult to see unless you were looking for a canal there. Then, of course, Coot Bay was next, but for a moment unrecognizable for its ranger station on stilts was missing. This was where I had put my kayak in and had psued with my paddle against a log-like alligator. From Coot Bay it was like sliding to home base into Flamingo, though I paused in my thinking to give due memory to the planks on which I used to cross that canal there. The road was not only wide and solid now but there waa a sturdy wide bridge.

Flamingo, however, was most changed of all. Where I used to sleep in my netting tent tied up to a car door handle on the bank

of Florida Bay, where I could look out at the vast flocks of water birds on the sand bars and perched in the mangroves on the Bay islands, where I had once camped all by myself, there was now a log row of buildings blocking the view of the Bay. The one on the left, a twostory structure, with a breezeway above and below which connected ~~it~~ it to the other buildings, turned out to be the Ranger Headquarters. The first building on the right was a gift shope at street level, in which was the Flamingo Post Office, with a restaurant and snadwich shop on the upper level. In front of these buildings was a long, narrow attractive parking area. Beyond, westward, barely visible through the trees was a set of low motel buildings. So the whole water front along there was built up.

One thing which puzzled me from the moment I arrived, was the absence of coconut palms. They used to provide shade under which to camp. But I soon learned they had all died from a disease which invaded Florida, known as "the yellows." I mention this further along as they died elsewhere, too.

It was late afternoon when I arrived, so the first task was to find a campsite. I followed signs westward, went through a pay gate, and found three large, very open campgrounds to choose from. I first passed ~~thru~~ a small pond on the right, which I had never seen before; its sign said "Eco Pond." It looked beckoning. But I moved along and soon selected a campsite in the se cond area.

It was so great to be out under the open sky, away from walls and ceilings, that I felt instantly at home. My own fireplace and picnic table! As I stood there, squealing with

sheer delight inside, I watched a flock of white ibis, then a line of egrets flying over. They moved on beyond the line of trees along the Bay and disappeared.

One outdoor thing I have written little about, but which is attention-getting in Florida, is the night sky. But I am always conscious of what is up there, even sometimes thinking of it in broad daylight. When I got out of my van, having retreated there by supper time from the mosquitos, to attend to some chore at the Picnic table, I glanced up at the crescent moon hanging in the sky.

I wa^s astounded to see a star at the bottom tip of the crescent. For a moment I thought it was a plane, whose light would soon pass by. But the longer I stared the more fixed the star. There was a young man camping not far from me and I saw that he was looking up at it too. He confirmed my guess that it was Venus. He said that the morning before the star's position by the moon was even more perfect. This looked like an artist's exaggeration.

Alone for the evening, with no demands on my time, I didn't have to be anywhere in the morning, I decided to just sit and look at the open sky for awhile. I got out my Maine headnet, put on a long-sleeved thin jacket, and sat by the picnic table. I've always been impressed with what is out there, and equally impressed with mankind's utter disregard of that outer space over their heads. The moon is only the most obvious, and the least important. Not only are the planets of our solar system out there, and our own galaxy in which our solar system is embedded, but there are more galaxies than astronomers have been able to count. Some galaxies are so numerous they are in clusters, traveling like a fleet of ships, such as with Virgo, which has thousands of galaxies. Then

there are the quasars, discovered in recent times, each of which emits the energy of a hundred galaxies, but from a very condensed volume. And there are the black holes, which suck in any stars which come near them; they are not yet understood, some imaginative astronomers thinking they are entrances to other universes. And there is the Horse's Head Nebula in Orion, which I had seen with my bird glasses one bitter night in Maine; and the Small and Large Magellanic Clouds, and our sister galaxy, the one closest to us, Andromeda. To say nothing of the wonders of our own galaxy, the Milky Way, whose center is 50,000 light years from our solar system, its light being detected as the background of the constellation Sagittarius. Our galaxy, however, is 100,000 light years across though but a small one in the universe.

Sometimes, when up north, I sit on a cliff or a rock ledge in an open field, after dark, to contemplate the fabulous universe. Here in Florida, where there are no hills to obstruct the view, the heavens seem within touching distance. Now I looked at Venus, - which so often in the past led my way on early morning birding trips. This was a new view for me, to see Venus almost on the horn of the moon.

The next morning I drove back the short distance to Flamingo to pick up a morning newspaper, so I could look at the Want Ads. I was toying with the idea of finding some kind of work for the winter, as I knew the Park rules wouldn't permit me to stay more than two weeks; I couldn't afford private campsites, and I didn't want to sponge on my sister. On my way back to the parking lot I passed a door which had an amazing sign- "Jobs open."

What jobs? I had learned long ago through Dan Beard's kind efforts that there were no jobs in the Park in my field for women. But as I'd rather stay in this Park than travel around to other State and Federal Parks all winter, I opened the door, stuck my head in,

and said to the middle-aged lady sitting at a desk not far from the door, "Do you ever hire anyone my age?" not having the foggiest idea what she had to offer. The woman said, "Oh yes," and beckoned me to come in. I was hired on the spot. As salad girl, in the upstairs sandwich shop.

But I wasn't put on salads. The huge coffee urn and coke machine were put in my tender care. Also I had to keep the tables wiped off. In return for a free room in the employees quarters, which was out of sight near the Bay, free meals, and salary. Florida Bay and the birds were just outside the shop, as the second floor breezeway was right out ^{side the door.} ~~there.~~ It was a most fortuitous niche for me to fall into at that time, and was later to prove what is so often true, that if you are willing to work at something humble a better chance may come along.

My first noon hour I was out on that upstairs railed breezeway, which was now obviously a passageway to the Ranger Station at the far end. The tide was out that first day; thousands of shorebirds and water birds were all over the sandflats. There were also a couple of dozen white pelicans, about fifty brown pelicans, and at least fifty American egrets standing around ^{in the shallow water} ~~around~~, waiting for a hapless fish to swim by. There were shorebirds by the hundreds, including many kinds of sandpipers, ruddy turnstones, plovers, , especially the black-bellied. There were great blue herons, little blue herons, Louisiana herons, some of them being immatures. It was a very birdy place out there.

There was one new sight to me, which held my attention as long as I was in the area. There was a small island just off the shoreline, and in the middle of it grew a single wide-topped, wind-distorted tree. ^{prob. a mangrove} There was a big eagle nest in the top of it, and often the eagle sat there, mostly looking out to sea. It was his perch all winter.

One noon hour I walked across the open gallery to the Ranger Station, where I'd been told a Ranger was always on duty. I couldn't remember later who it was I talked to, but when I told the man on duty of my past interest in the Park, he asked what I was doing now. I told him of my job in the sandwich shop. He said, "Why don't you apply for Ranger kind of work?" I was baffled. "They don't hire women in such work," I answered.

He looked at me kind of funny. "We have a lot of women Rangers." he said in a commonplace tone. I couldn't quite absorb what he was saying. Then I decided he was teasing me. "But not my age," I said ruefully.

"Sure," he came right back. "We have two older women; one has all white hair."

He sounded serious. Could he possibly be kidding? "Where do you apply?" I asked still very dubious. On a piece of paper he scribbled a Ranger's name and told me to ask for him at the Headquarters back near the Park entrance, thirty-six miles eastward.

I did a lot of thinking about that. I had so many inhibitions built up in me from years of frustrating negatives that I couldn't think this one through very clearly. But I didn't forget about it. A few days later a Ranger stopped at the coffee bar and asked if I were the lady who had spoken to the Ranger across the way about a Park ~~naturalist~~ ⁿ ~~naturalist~~ job. The he, too, spoke positively, and said what he could to encourage me. It began to sink in. After all, times had changed. Since Dan Beard's day two social upheavals had happened: the militant youth of the '60's, and women's lib. Maybe it was really possible now to work in some biological field in the Park.

Then one day when I was pouring a coke for a customer I looked up to see a young girl dressed in a ranger's uniform, with the ranger badge prominently displayed on her sleeve, and a Smokey Bear hat atop her long flowing brown hair. It happened so suddenly I didn't have time to think. Reflex poured tears down my face. Quickly I grabbed a paper napkin and pretended to be blowing my nose. I hurried out to the tables to straighten the ketchup and sugar bowls.

How surprised I was at myself! Later, trying to analyze my reaction, I decided that my tearful outburst had been a welling up of excessive joy, that I had lived to see this day! I knew I had much buried resentment that I hadn't been allowed to use my training and talent, but it was also important that I live long enough to see the male world wake up to what was being wasted. It was too late for me. Men had been in the saddle all those long years, but they hadn't stopped me from living outdoors. I would now go submit my name, but not try for a professional ecology job. I'd be contented with work among those who were a new and more hopeful generation.

I used my next day off to drive back to ^{the S.S.M.} Ranger Headquarters, where I put in an application for a job. While there I saw half a dozen girl Rangers moving about the corridors. To my delight I was offered a chance to work as naturalist interpreter for senior citizens. It had to be a volunteer job, as the need existed only in the Everglades National Park which attracted senior citizens all winter; there was no National Park classification for the job. But I could have a campsite free all winter, and work out my own programs. I couldn't believe it! There had been years when I would have accepted only professional ecological research, but I was past that stage now, perfectly happy to be allowed to stay all winter in the Park, living my kind of outdoor life.

I had to return to Flamingo long enough for them to find someone to take my place. While there I took advantage of two opportunities I had been postponing. There were now scheduled tram rides out to Snake Bight, where I'd had that barn owl visitor looking in my car window years ago. Very friendly Kristie, a Park Naturalist with whom I'd become acquainted, drove the tram. What an odd experience, to get out there in such a fashion,- like a childn's toy train running through a jungle of mangroves. When we got there it was even more surprising to watch Kristie turn that long double-car tram around right where I'd spent the night ^{alone} in my car!

The other place I quickly visited, early my last morning there, was Eco Pond. It is claimed to be a very successful biological sewage system, being in balance with nature and the motel sewage inflow. Seldom is it devoid of birds. There was a shrubby island in the middle of it, and a very large open area just beyond it out back, where a hurricane had shaken the bark off the mangroves. Many mangroves stood stark and bare, and had become bird perches, especially for ospreys.

Just a few steps in off the road a flock of skimmers was dashing over the pond surface, with their obvious orange lower mandibles hanging open. They could trail their enlarged lower bill in the water yet not get head or wings wet. Several ducks were on the pond, mostly pintails, mallards, redheads, the teals, scaup, and pied billed grebes. All of the herons were represented in small groups,- snowy, American, Louisiana, little green, little blue.

One surprise for me was a small flock of smsooth-billed anis. in Years past, I'd had to go to a southern residential area of Florida City to see them, and often they were not there. But here at Eco

Pond they hung around in a clump of bushes near the edge of the road.

I felt as if ^{I could} ~~you~~ almost touch them. If the bill of this odd-looking black bird were highly colored it would look a puffin. Two flamingos flew over; they were considered to have originated from the pinioned flock at a south Florida race track. Flamingos were present here many years ago, but as with the egrets and the pink spoonbill, they were killed off for their feathers. That was the days before the advent of conservationists; in fact, it was the greediness of feather hunters which began demands for conservation.

One ^{reason} ~~thing~~ I hated to leave the Flamingo area was the eagle on that nest off the breezeway. One day I was surprised to see a small airplane buzzing the eagle. ^{Plotted} ~~It~~ soon flew off. I assumed that a Park official was photographing the eagle on its nest, but when I spoke of it to a Ranger a couple of days later he was furious. No one working in the Park had a plane available; even if they did they wouldn't buzz a sitting eagle. Here was that poor bird. Sitting peacefully at the bottom edge of the United States, as far as you could get ~~to~~ the south end of the continent, yet someone had to be a harrasser of wildlife. You just can't escape these jokers. They are among Nature's parasites.

When I told one of the Rangers I was moving to the Long Pine Key Campground he surprised me by saying that is where the little pond is which I'd camped beside so long ago. When I finally drove in there I was all agog. I didn't recongize anything on the way in for the entrance road ^{was new;} ~~was new;~~ it had been solid piney woods where I'd almost gotten lost walking in there with a friend once. Now this was a ^{paved} ~~good~~ road in from the Flamingo road. I soon passed a small entrance station, or kiosk, near where I found the Caretaker, Jack.

He had been notified of my existence and was to assign me a campsite.

I soon found myself living in my van at the far end of the little pond. One of the first things I did was walk in there to see if it looked the same. I was instantly disoriented. There was a large amphitheatre with rows of wooden seats facing a large, tall projection screen. A small projection house, stood back of the seats. Somehow I got the idea this was the shore on which I had camped. Probably because I didn't recognize the other end, where there was ^{now} an island. But before long I realized that more gravel had been gouged out of that man-made pond, and a clump of land with a few wild bushes on it, was left. The gouggers had worked all around it. It was ^{now} the front edge of that island which had been my campsite. And where the rows of seats now were was the beach where the wood storks had filed around the boy scout fireplace. One thing I then lined up easily, was the hammock, just beyond where that fireplace had been. The long pile of gravel from the pond was gone.

There had been no alligators in the pond back then. Now a medium-size one was resident in the pond. He had been around long enough to acquire a name. George. George had become so friendly with the ~~picnickers~~ ^{picnickers}, for there were now picnic tables at the far side of the pond, that the Rangers were concerned. An alligator doesn't have very big brains; it can't tell a sandwich from a hand or an arm. George ^{had been} ~~was~~ trapped the previous fall, before winter visitors were due to arrive. He was transported out to Cape Sable, beyond Flamingo. But within two months he had found his way back. It was decided to leave him ~~there~~ for the rest of the season, but signs were put up warning against feeding him.

Part of my job was to lure older campers out of their snug RV's, for most of them just sat indoors, even in that beautiful

June-like Florida weather, playing cards or watching TV. So I set up short morning walks. As Florida is so flat, and the Park has many trails, it was easy to take a group on a different walk all six days of a week. As campers stayed two weeks, usually, and didn't attend a walk every day, it was easy to vary the scenery.

A naturalist interpreter, who knows the commoner species of plants, animals and birds, can make a walk interesting. In just the area of the pond, the path through the hammock, and the long narrow glade behind the hammock, there were over 1200 species of plants. As most people can't absorb many names in one walk, there is always variety available to talk about and point out.

A favorite walk of many of the older campers was the trail through the hammock. A hammock is a slightly higher, dryer island of land, usually surrounded by the wet everglades^a, though in this case it was wet only on its further side. Practically all of the plant species which form a hammock are Caribbean hardwoods. With the exception of red maple in some of them, none of the species are from the north. Pines, which crowd up to the edge of some hammocks, are never found in the hammock, unless the hammock is in a transition stage, losing its hardwoods and general character.

One of the most intriguing trees found in this hammock^{by the pond} is the gumbo limbo. It looks like a sunburned red Indian who is peeling. If you do peel down the shredded bark, which no one should do any more than you should peel a white birch up north, ~~the~~ the trunk is a bright, rich green underneath. The gumbo limbo has strong yet light-weight wood. Its most unusual use is for merry-go-round horses.

Another interesting tree on that trail is the Lysoloma, or Tamarind. It belongs to the pea family and has compound leaves which look similar to the leaves of the northern locust trees. It's smooth

bark makes it a favorite of the exotic tree^ssnails, a beautifully varied-colored land snail from the Caribbean. This tree is considered a native of the Bahamas.

Coco plum is rather easy to spot. Its leaves, lamb-tongue-shaped, occur in two^v which march along the upper edge of the twigs. Satinleaf is another one that is easy to learn; the leaves are a little larger than the coco plum and similar in shape; but they are shiny green on the upper surfaces, russet brown underneath with masses of fine silvery hairs which, in bright light, gives them a satin sheen.

In this hammock there is a good example of the strangler fig, a species of Ficus rather common in Florida. Its seeds become caught in the branch notches of trees, or in the Spanish moss fest^ooning some of the trees. They sprout, and send down long thin hanging ropes to the ground. When the tips of the roots reach the soil they develop real roots, and send up moisture and food through the ropes which gradually thicken, like branches. Eventually, when these thickened supports become strong enough, they are able to stand on their own; then they strangle the original tree which had supported them. There are strangler figs in Florida whose myriad of hanging roots spread^a out to form a canopy large enough to shade a small army, for each thickened rope sends down more rope-roots. *often wound around the tree branches or limbs*

Among the great variety of trees and shrubs which are not seen in the north are the wild coffees; the Seminoles mixed the seeds of them with other seeds to produce tasty drinks. Coffee^f leaves are easy to spot. To me they look as if the ribs of the leaves were made on a sewing machine with too highly tensioned a needle, for the leaf material between the ribs is puckered, giving a puffy quilted look. There is a mahogany in this hammock, sweet bay, and super-hard lignum vitae.

I wondered where the wagon road was which I used to drive over

to come into this pond area,- the one which Casey and Peter brought me in on when the first thing I saw was an eagle. There was a wooden gate not far back of my campsite, shutting traffic out of what looked to be car tracks. I walked out through there one day, wondering where it went to. After a half mile walk through open pine land, I came to another gate, with a surfaced road outside it. Gradually my mind sorted things out. I had just walked over the Fire Tower road. I walked back to about where I thought ^{the tower} ~~it~~ should be. There, hidden by vines and a big sweet pepper bush, were many scattered pieces of ^{the tower} ~~the tower~~ cement. It reminded me of the Bungalow. A once cherished structure lying sprawled on the ground, under vines and weeds.

My questions back at the Ranger Station gave me the information that the Tower had become a liability. An older man, who insisted upon climbing up to the Ranger lookout, against his family's pleadings, dropped dead of a heart attack just before he reached the top. A sign put at the bottom forbidding people to go up was often ignored. Then, as more ^modern methods ~~of fighting~~ spotting and fighting forest fires were developed the Tower became almost obsolete. Fearing kids would climb its framework and get badly hurt it was ^e ~~take~~ taken down; the steel framework was incorporated into a newer, more modern tower, nearer to Forest City. It became sort of a game for me to ask my walkers what they thought all that concrete ~~had~~ had been, now on the ground. Not one ever guessed. But that abandoned roadway from the campground to ~~the~~ surfaced road became a favorite scheduled walk.

That new surface^d road turned out to be the way to the Research Station, about a mile to the west. That Station ^a ~~was~~ was a delightful surprise to me. Often in my long years living out in the woods I dreamed of a big modern library out in the middle of the wilderness. It was such an impossible dream that when I got out to the library

in that Research Station I felt as if my fantasy had at least ~~been~~ partly materialized. It wasn't long before I found good reason to spend one day a week out there.

A new thing to me out the Tower road was a small pond almost across from where ^e the Tower had been. It had been apparently gouged out for more road material. Two large alligators lived out there, a pair. That first year that I saw it, several baby alligators were sprawling around in the bushes, and the mother stayed nearby to protect them, as the male will often eat them. He spent most of his time at the other side of the pond, probably kept over there by the female which is very aggressive during ^{the} season of tending the young. I didn't bring visitors in there that year, not wanting to risk a misadventure.

That one-track road out there had enough different things for visitors to see, though I knew alligators were Uno Numero in interest. One of my favorite shrubs which can be easily seen there is the sweet acacia. It has clusters of little round flower balls; looked at closely each ball looks like finely-cut yellow crepe paper rolled up. They are sweetly fragrant, scenting the air all around. Another one that appealed to me was the velvet seed shrub. It has very coarse, heavy leaves, a perfect adaptation to the dry season; but its seeds in clusters look like red velvet, giving the plant a touch of royalty.

Other easy to see and identify shrubs grow along there, ^{were} - marlberry, varnish leaf, and pepper bush. The latter is an import which is so contented in that habitat it is taking over, choking out native species. Present also along here is the poisonwood; probably a ⁿative but of the same ilk as poison ivy. This one is a shrub, and like the pepper bush, even burning it doesn't kill it off. Tetrazygia is another interesting bush along here. But visitors soon learn they can't bring in little bouquets of ~~them~~ ^{their blossom clusters} without soon finding a row of tiny ants, or

other minute insects forming a parade across dresser or table.

Many of these plants can also be easily looked at around the campground roads. Myrsine is one the visitors confuse with tetrazygia and marlberry. Myrsine's black fruits grow in knot-like clusters on stems under the leaves.

Most of the senior citizens, like all visitors to the outdoor spots of Florida, are conscious of the birds. Many come to camp in the everglades just to birdwatch. Most need an interpreter for they can't tell a heron from an egret. Not only are some of the birds of Florida spectacular, for they include the pink spoonbill and the huge woodstork, but thousands of the ducks and songbirds funnel down there from all over Canada and the United States for the winter. It's a great place to learn the birds, or just to live with them as I do.

One that interested me was the tree swallow. As the little pond was just across the camp road from my campsite, I was able to step over there at all hours. I wanted to see if the tree swallows ever formed that great wheel which they did my first winter in there. I happened to be on hand one morning at seven thirty when in zoomed a flock of about five hundred of them. They dashed around in the air just a few feet above water, but in no definite formation. Now and then one of them touched water enough to cut it, but though they hung around for over half an hour they never attained a wheel formation.

Later that day they came in again, but there must have been a thousand of them. They were scattered all over the sky like blowing leaves. This time they did create a formation, but it was more like a conveyor belt, with a kind of suctioning-off at each end. Several swallows dropped down out of the sky into a loosely formed wheel, went around and around

~~around~~ three or four times, then slipped out of the wheel at the bottom end back up into the sky. Was this a modification of the wheel, to give everyone a turn? There certainly were too many swallows blowing and flowing around to fit into any wheel. In this system, they reminded me of kids jumping rope; one would jump in from the side, as one jumped out. Like kids, they seemed to have to wait for the right moment to enter, then to leave; and there seemed to be some suggestion that they were taking turns.

Then, as with the wheel of long ago, off they would all go leaving not a ^aswallow in the sky or over the water. Only George was in sight, at the far end of the pond, sunning himself on an open spot of the island just above the water.

A few warblers passed through the campground shubbery during the afternoon, a pair of cardinals moving along with them. An hour or so later several red-winged blackbirds and boat-tailed grackles were walking around the pond beach, seemingly picking up bugs of some kind. Looking in on them for a few minutes, I was delighted to see three killdeer at the far corner of the beach, near where the killdeer had held a midnight revelry so long ago. I hope^d like mad no one would scare them off. But suddenly, from the bush-hidden path over there to the picnic area, a group of school children emerged onto the beach. Off went the killdeer. So often have I seen this happen. Especially along the seashore, where a human or a dog or both come along, innocently taking a walk, but scaring away the little beach creatures which need to feed there.

It is perplexing what to do. People, es^ppecially children, want to see live creatures in the wild. But the creatures won't stand still when anything invades their territory. Considering what such in-

truders as those with guns do, it's just as well that the wild creatures are over-cautious. It pays them to stay out of sight until they are sure of the invader, as they had kept me waiting three days my first winter there.

To further enlist the interest of senior citizens, or any campers present, I posted a typed list on the bulletin board near the caretaker's office of all of the birds from the south Florida check list. I made space for the observer and date. This did stir up much conversation, and added sightings I had not seen in this part of the Park. It came to be a like a meeting at the town pump.

On one of my days off I took a trip back to Flamingo with Ranger Shirley; ^{Beau} we stopped at all the sights along the way. At Paurotis Pond, long one of my favorite wild spots, named for the native Paurotis palm which grows there in a typical clump, there were no birds in sight. A young couple were feeding a small alligator at the pond edge, defying warning signs. They moved away when they saw us arrive, for they knew they were breaking the rules. An alligator even that size could grab the hand that fed it and pull its owner out and into the middle of the pond.

We moved on to Mrazek Pond. But there were so few birds present, that the two or three people with cameras were moving away. As we turned back to our car we saw over along the western skyline in the near distance a line of pink spoonbills flying low. We stopped to watch them, as there was a glistening body of water far over in there. Soon to our surprise we were counting, forty-five, fifty, sixty, a hundred. By the time the flight had disappeared we counted approximately three hundred! Neither Shirley nor I had knowⁿ the spoonbills had made that good a comeback! Imagine their pink feathers on the hats of the ladies of the Gay Nineties? The spoonbills were nearly exterminated.

Mrazek Pond is always irresistible except when the dry season turns it to a mud flat. When water is present there are always several people on the grass there with cameras, often with tripods. By some coincidence no one was there this time. But also, by a different kind of coincidence, as if Nature did it on purpose, of the several birds in sight only one of a species was present. As if it were deliberately orchestrated for a stage scene. There was one each of great blue heron, coot, pied billed grebe, white ibis, common egret, Louisiana heron, a brown pelican, a white pelican, and, believe it or not, one wood stork. I suppose coincidence is the only explanation. I hung around for a while, assuming other birds would swim or fly in from around clumps of vegetation and create a more normal species count. But there was the scene, as set as if posed. I had to move on.

I had other stops to make, especially in Flamingo, and I hoped for time enough to stop in at Mahogany Hammock on the way back. There was nothing especially new at Flamingo. Returning, I did stop at the Hammock, and saw the big mahogany. It was as large as I'd remembered, probably a thousand years old or more. Its upper parts have become badly worn, from a licking by too many hurricanes.

Anhinga Trail, where I had slept out on the boardwalk when the Ingraham Highway passed through it, was now a much frequented spot by visitors. I was surprised to see a large parking lot there, and a Visitor's Center with exhibits. The boardwalk was now double in extent, with two fenced outer ends over the slough. But it was still an ideal way to walk out over the slough's leather leaf ferns, cocoplum, and pond apple, over pond lilies and pickerel weed.

The major attraction is the anhinga, a bird which in size is similar to a cormorant, but with a thinner, longer neck, a large

tail, and long, sharp bill. They are mostly black, with silver streaks on the scapulars; the female has a buffy neck, especially during the breeding season. It perches on shrubs over the water, from where it drops down into the water and chases fish under water, all of which can be seen from the far ends of the board walk. It is an amazing sight to look down in the water, and where you might expect to see an alligator there goes a bird darting by, completely at home in the fish's element. Then, it gets itself up on a shrub branch and literally hangs its big wings out to dry, as it has no oil glands.

Usually a half dozen of them build nests in the rather open branches of those shrubs, making the whole process of mating, nest-building, and rearing the young easily observed by visitors. Often there are a dozen or more cameras^s set up there at height of the nesting season. That board walk has been there for over forty years, having first been built by the local garden club. Over the many avian generations, the birds have become so accustomed to people on that boardwalk, and to the never-changing fact that the people never leave that definite path of the board walk, they carry~~ing~~ on their daily lives without alarm. They KNOW those two-legged predators have as delineated a territory as theirs.

The anhinga usually lays two eggs, but the last winter I was there one female had laid three, and all three hatched. But I later learned that one, which inevitably was fed the least, became quite weak and was soon trampled by its nest mates. This happens with many young birds, and even mammals. There were only^t three nests that year, with several bachelors sitting hopelessly watching. One could only hope that most of the young of the year were females. But it is true that this Anhinga Trail flock is often supplemented by other aningas comingⁱⁿ from the vast everglades. Many nest out there, miles away from any humans where only airboats, or planes going over, see them.

High in two trees on a foot trail back of the picnic area a red shouldered hawk and a ~~barred~~ ^{barred} owl had a nest, not far from one another. It is a pleasure for a naturalist to be able to show city people such sights. But, once word gets around, too many people come to see ~~such~~ ^{the} sights, especially in the case of such large birds. A mob of people came to see these two birds on Washington's Birthday, for the Park is only seventeen miles from Homestead, and about an hour's drive from Miami. The birds endured the mass of humans down below, looking over their nest edges now and then in a nervous manner. The next day both took off, and who could blame them. None of us could tell if eggs were in the nests, or if any had hatched and the young too small to detect from below. No one wanted to climb up and find out, hoping at least one of the parents would come back. They didn't.

A couple of evenings later a girl Ranger, named Tarn, gave a lecture at the amphitheatre, and she played some bird~~s~~ song recordings. Among the bird calls were some of a barred owl. When the program was over she replayed the barred owl calls, hoping to attract the nesting owl or its mate. Suddenly a barred owl landed on the top edge of the movie screen and looked down on everyone. Several people turned their flashlights on him. Tarn suggested they all turn off their lights but one, hoping not to scare the bird away. The owl had started swiveling its head around to avoid the light. Once only a single light was on him, he faced the audience for awhile before taking off.

The crowd left and I followed along, out onto the surface^d road near my campsite. All at once there was a hullabaloo of owl voices. I thought Tarn was replaying her tapes again, or some teen-agers were playing at being owls. I stepped back to the close-by pine trees.

There they were. Two barred owls. Two teen-age boys came running up

with flashlights. One owl was easy to see; he pumped himself up, shook his feathers like a dog shaking off water, then hollered. I only briefly saw the other. Soon both vanished silently in the night dark. I'd been hearing these owls across the pond at night, and couldn't help but wonder if they were from the same gene pool as those which used to call across the pond when my tent was out there. It wasn't too many years for them to be direct descendents.

The wildflower exhibit I set up at the entrance near Jack's became quite an attraction. There was no regular exhibit shelter at the spot, so I improvised a table. But the wind all too frequently blew the plants out of their labeled jars. Among the easy to find species which I kept on display were sweet acacia, sticky ground cherry, wild petunia, Porterweed, hat pin, a large form of rattlebox and jacquemondia. Some of the senior citizens came on repeat walks, then, unlike some other age groups, they came here to this display to try to really learn some of the species.

The season was coming to an end for me. I had to get back to Maine to plant my vegetable garden and move the mulch off my wild flower beds. All sorts of mail kept on reaching me, concerning that other life I live when not camping. Walden Pond had begun to call, for I received a message that the last person who had insisted that a million dollar landscaping project ^{to} repair the damaged forested slope had died. I wrote to the new head of the Massachusetts State Parks Dept. and offered to repair that bad slope, volunteer. I had little ~~response~~ faith in a response, but it cost only a postage stamp to ask.

On my way I tried driving up into the Hue Ridge. I had never been able to take altitude, but I had known for years that the Appalachians was the geographic area where the northeastern wild-

flowers remained in escrow, as it were, while the sixty-thousand year, two mile high glacier had covered the northern land. I had long yearned to get up in there, but had also realized that if I ever did, and stayed a bit too long, I would never come back, - easily swopping the Appalachians for New England.

I arrived in the densest fog I ever tried driving in. But eventually I found a campsite on the Shenandoah River, where I spent the usual very comfortable night in my van. While tree leaves were not yet out, I explored up a small valley at about 1400 ^{elevation} feet and found many of the early spring blossoms with which I was familiar. A very common wildflower which surprised me was the bluet. It was so much huskier looking than the fragile northern one. By comparison, its stems were like pillars, and its blossom petals were almost thick, reminding me of porcelain. Some of the bluets were solid blue, more than in any I had ever seen. Maybe it was from this mountain form that it got its name, for northern ones are mostly white with an occasional touch or wash of blue.

Also in bloom were ^{many beautiful northern species} rock saxifrage, countless handsome hepaticas, rue anemone, trout lily, bloodroot, a handsome purple violet, and the ubiquitous pussy toes and dandelion blossoms. Three Solomon seal plants had their noses above the ground a few inches. Shadblow was in full bloom throughout the woods. There was one redbud just opening its blossom buds, an amazing shrub to see in the wild woods. The wind anemone flowers were so huge they were half way to bloodroot size. There ^{were} ~~was~~ some mountain laurel scattered through the woods, but I only saw two of the famous Appalachian rhododendrons, but of course they weren't in bloom this early.

At another campground, where it was easy to park and look around, there were mayapples coming up among carpets of trout lily. There were a few striped pipsissewa, and vast expanses of spring beauty.

They, like most of the others, were much more sturdy looking than our northern spring beauty. I was getting the impression that either the cold of the north had sapped some of the strength from these wildlings, or their trip north over ten thousand years ago took too much out of them. In a way I like the more fragile appearance of the northern wildflowers, but I did find these southern forms beguiling. They looked as if they might be easier to work with in cultivating them.

The trees under whose canopy these wildflowers were growing, for remember that the shade-growing wildflowers are accessory forest vegetation, were mostly white oak, red maple, elm, blue beech, ironweed (Ostrya), chestnut oak and some form of southern pitch pine. I yearned to wander, on and on. But I couldn't tarry. Friends were expecting me along the route home. And I knew I had to leave before I got imprinted by these Appalachian denizens.

In July I did hear from the Massachusetts State Parks Director, who met me at Walden and went over with me my ideas for repairing the deforested and gouged-out slope which became more and more like a gravel pit. He agreed to let me try to restore it. But it couldn't be started until the spring, so I decided to return to Florida for another winter. By then it was 1979. I'd be back in April, 1980.

That fall,
Crossing from Georgia into Florida a bit further west than usual I settled into a campsite at Osceola State Park. It's lake, about six times as large as Walden, has the absurd name of Ocean Pond. Only a few campers were present so I was able to choose a waterfront site, where marsh vegetation extended many feet out into and up along the pond to the right. The opposite shore was so far away there was only a dark tree line, so I couldn't distinguish anything over there. Most of the trees around me were longleaf pine, with a few live oaks festooned

with Spanish moss.

There were no birds in sight when I arrived late that afternoon. Eventually two kingfishers landed on a dead tree nearby. In the morning, however, there was real bird activity out on the lake, it being fall migration time again. Out in the middle of the lake, opposite me, was a raft of about one hundred coot, but closer in about forty grebes were swimming and diving. A tiny lone one, separated from the flock, was swimming around in the weeds nearby. Then another one swam in, and the two browsed around for an hour. They'd both dive together and seemed to be forever coming up. One stayed down so long once I feared a snapping turtle had gotten it, but it did soon bob up.

Quite a ways out beyond the coot there was a small flock of ducks. Now and then they splashed their way up out of the lake, flew around in a wide circle, then settled down on the water. They were too far out for me to be sure what kind they were. But I was contented. Just to live out with them, to be migrating south with them, was my all.

I discovered another raft of grebes, and one of coots, when the ducks circled them ^{when in flight}. My eyes caught up with a little band of six grebes, acting as if paired, for they'd string out, following one another, but always in twos. It was like spotting more and more galaxies out there in space.

Had they all arrived after daylight this morning, or did some or all drop in during the night? Who arrived first? They or I. Why hadn't I seen any of them yesterday? Coots and grebes don't exactly go to roost, so they didn't spend the night in trees. I was of the opinion they all dropped in after I did, and were ^wno_^ taking a restful day before moving on further southward. None seemed to be feeding except the two grebes, still in the weeds.

Then, no surprise, a small flock of tree swallows appeared,

flitting about some distance up the pond. In the next two days there were larger flocks of birds on Ocean Pond, most of them in different spots. There was no way for me to tell for sure, but I felt that the first ones I'd seen had taken off and these were newcomers. When birds are in migration, there is sometimes a pressure from those behind to push the first to arrive further along. But in this case they all remained too far away over too vast an expanse of water, for me to see what was really going on. Now and then they were all obliterated by a sudden wind whipping up wavelets. Every duck and grebe would seemingly miraculously disappear.

From Osecola I moved down to Rodman's Dam, not far from DeLand, where I would visit cousins. I was sitting at this dam pond on a set of sandbag steps above the water/^{facing west}when I was astounded to see a great mass of tree swallows fly in from the far horizon. At the far end of the lake, but within binocular vision, they fell into the wheeling pattern, from a height of several feet down to the water. As they flew down, and up, streaming past one another, the birds on one side of the wheel suddenly, all at once, changed direction. Who gave the signal? How did ALL the others know to change instantly so none collided? In another instant all of the birds were flying in the opposite direction to what they were doing when they started the wheel. Suddenly, the ones which had flipped over first now flipped back to the original pattern. Once more the wheeling was streaming, and intact. They lost little altitude and latitude, and that little was quickly corrected. What mechanism in their tiny brains permits such precision? This was the first time I had observed swallows to stop and perform this ritual in migration, for I was sure these birds would keep on going until in the everglades. It would take banding to prove it, but some things you sense.

While watching them in my binoculars a big bird with a lot of white on it blocked the view. I looked up. Five wood storks were flying by, right across my binocular line of vision, like birds crossing the moon face. They soon disappeared in the distance. The swallows went off stage, and all that was left to watch was a painted turtle. When a group of boys scouts moved in, and were so noisy a crow wouldn't stay around, I gave up, and drove down to Pompano Beach to visit a friend, the northern Shirley one. *Denise?*

What a sissy life I went into. A cozy condominium apartment. It proved to be a wet, windy week, which helped me to accept apartment living for a little while. I got much paper work done, which always helps indoor time go by. When the weather cleared I tried a walk on the beach, which wasn't far away, hoping to see shorebirds. But as is all too frequent these days, sanderlings and ruddy turnstones just flew in, in very small groups, when a man walking his dogs scared them off. I sat on some rocks which were composed of sea shells and limestone, but they didn't seem to be coquina. The rocks were pitted with tiny holes, in some of which were very tiny snails. I witnessed one miniature life-episode I've never seen mentioned in any literature. In one hole were five tiny snails, not a half inch in diameter, clustered close together so that each looked as if it fit into its own niche. I knew that many seaside snails know their own private niches, where they snuggle in for the day then go wandering over the rocks at night and eventually return to their own little spot, for the bright daylight hours.

My eye was caught by a little snail working its way toward the quiet, motionless five. When he reached the group of other snails he either pushed against them, or by some means of communication I

couldn't detect, he caused all the others to move; it looked as if he got one of his tentacles, then the other, under one of the five; they seemed to get the message they were to get out of his way. ^{for} they all hitched over a bit to the right. Finally he settled down where one of the other snails had been, and they settled down, ^esunggled in, too. He was quit^e conspicuous, being smaller than they. All was again motionless on the rock and in that niche. A newcomer just seeing them ~~;~~ might think they were all dead. Another case of a rose blooming in a desert unseen, and denied by those not seeing.

I had a real eye-popping outdoorsy adventure here in the middle of Pompano Beach. There is a tiny park at the head of my friend's street, about the size of a large house lot. Through its back end flows the cement-walled Intracoastal Waterway, merely a canal at this site. Leaning on the railing when I first got there, looking down into the water which had a visible current, I didn't know I was about to see a marvel pass by.

I had hung around awhile, hoping for birds. Leaned over the railing; then sat on the bench. I heard, then saw, a fish jump and splash. I stepped back to the railing and looked down at the canal water. "Wow! Wow! Wow!"; I was saying half aloud. The canal was one mass of fish, from wall to wall, jammed close together, all moving, seeming to be sliding through the water, in unison yet I couldn't see a fin move or a body wiggle. It could have been they ^{ventral} ~~were~~ moved by ventral fins. They had rounded snouts, were sort of oliv^e-tan, with cylindrical bodies. There were thousands of them. Now and then there was a break in the surface layer and I could see three and ~~four~~ layers of fish under the top layer. They could only be mullet, I decided.

The biomass was incredible. No doubt only because they were constantly moving did they have enough oxygen. But where, I pondered had they found enough food to have attained such fish-flesh production?

Since the last of them I haven't seen
After a visit with my sister for a few days I decided to go camping in the Everglades National Park for the two allotted weeks. I had written to see if they could use me again, but no answer. To my surprise, when I got there, I learned they ~~were~~ had written and were waitin^g for an answer or for me to appear.

There were no swallows at the pond yet. George, the big alligator had been moved to Shark Valley, where it was hoped he'd find plenty of company, ~~there~~ ^{along the way} if he tried the long trek back, to hold his attention. As the first thing I did, even before setting up camp, was to walk over to the pond ^{where} I was greeted with an odd site. George's successor, a slightly smaller alligator, was over on the edge of the water at the back end of the island. He looked as if he were choking; he seemed to be either trying to swallow something big in his mouth or spit it out and couldn't do either. I hurried over to Jack's and he called a Ranger. While I was back at pond edge watching, the alligator slid down into and under the water. He soon came up and out, and this time he was at an angle which permitted me to see, through my field glasses, that the object in his mouth was a star-nosed turtle. The poor turtle had his weird nose sticking straight out front.

I knew the turtle was doomed, and that ~~George~~ the alligator wasn't choking. Whenever ~~an~~ an alligator has something large and alive in its mouth ^{he} ~~it~~ takes his catch down under water, hoping to drown it. If it is too big to swallow, he has powerful crushing jaws with which he can reduce it to swallowing-size. By the time

the Ranger arrived the crushed turtle was disappearing down the alligator's hatch.

A few days later, sitting by the little pond by myself, hoping for some marvel to pass by, I saw something very red in the water at shore edge near the end of the island. With my binoculars I saw it was a pileated woodpecker. In the water! I looked without the glasses. A pileated was standing on a dead root which curved down to the water, and was now and then leaning down and sucking up a drink. His real self met his reflection in the water! A double pileated attached at the head end. That was the first time I ever saw a woodpecker drinking, but, as with all birds, he had to hold his head up and let it run down his throat, as birds don't have our kind of throat muscles. I was reminded again of Pegasus, whose reflection the little boy saw in the well.

I was too early to miss the last of the mosquitos. I set up my netting tent at the back end of my campsite, where two trees were in just the right position for tying up the "roof tree" rope. It was too warm to work in the van ~~with the~~ without window netting. In utter comfort, I typed or read, under the Caribbean pines, close to a myrsine and a marlberry bush. Even a tetrazygia was close by. This beat Shirley's apartment on the ^{Pompano} Gold Coast. Especially when I soon had the company of a dragonfly, which dashed around my airy abode, snatching mosquitos out of the air. Not many visitors would be arriving for another couple of weeks.

This year I was to be camp^librarian, on natural history and Park subjects, holding court on two large picnic tables on the beach near the amphitheatre. What a combination, literature out under the open sky with tree swallows setting up their ferris wheel, and by then, three alligators on the library doorstep.

To have enough reading material for my pond-side library I walked out to the Research Station once or twice a week, where I found and zeroxed articles on suitable subjects. These I put in folders by subject and permitted campers to look at what was available, and I signed out to them to their campsite whatever they wanted to borrow. This proved an easy way to educate many of the visitors on the wildlife and plants of the Park.

It was an educational experience for me, too, to take that walk out to the Park library. I had been told that the tree swallows feed on the myrtle berries, which were abundant out there. I made a special effort to catch these insect-eating swallows eating berries off of bushes but I never did catch them at it. But one day there was what I thought ^{to be} a bird with a broken wing in the middle of the road. It seemed about robin size with a wing fanned out. As I approached, however, I saw it was not a bird, but a coiled snake, with its head slightly lifted above its coils. It turned its head to face me and opened its mouth. A cottonmouth^h! One of the Park's five poisonous species, and considered the most dangerous.

While I like snakes, even like to pick them up, I had no desire to fool around with this one. He is a water snake, which made the middle of the road an unlikely place for him. But he was warming himself in a sunny spot; just down off the road shoulders on each side in that area were marsh pools. I didn't dare try to pass him, as he was coiled, and could spring at me. I was beginning to think I was stuck there until a car came along, which was not very often out there except at library opening and closing time. But the snake must have been disturbed by my obvious presence, there in the middle of that open road, for he dropped his head and gradually slid over his

own coils, unraveling himself and slid over the bank into the slough to my left. Known also as the water Moccason, he was one creature I was glad to see disappear.

There were overhead wires along the road to the Station. They were a great place for song birds to perch. Once there were four great-crested flycatchers up there, looking down at me. Sometimes smaller flycatchers, too, which I put down as Empidonaxes which I couldn't identify. The wires near the campground road attracted blue-gray gnatchers. There was always a catbird or two, and cardinals up and down from the wires. In the bushes below the wires were flocks of myrtle warblers, seemingly in constant motion, acting as if spending the winter there. Often a tall white American egret stood in the slough, and once I saw several baby alligators in that roadside water.

There were mammals in the area, too. Deer, smaller than our Virginia whitetail but larger than the Key deer, could often be seen in the road shoulder openings. I'll never forget the morning I thought I saw a new roadside sign loom ing up ahead on the right. As I approached, the "sign" took on the shape of a large animal with a big head. I thought it must be a very large dog belonging to someone at the Research Station not far away. As I drew closer, cautiously, hoping the huge dog wouldn't pounce at me, I was astounded to see it stand, look at me from its tall height, and turn and slip into the bushes on the right. It was a Florida ~~panther~~ panther! The rare Felis concolor coryi, of which there were estimated to be only a couple of dozen in the whole ^{Everglades} ~~Park~~, from the Gulf to Okeechobee. I felt like an anointed one to have seen it, and so close. I learned the huge cat had been seen several times in the past few days around the Station. It is considered on the edge of extinction.

I had renewed my senior citizen walks. One woman was so enchanted with the red berries of the Brazilian pepper I had to disillusion her. There was a large clump of them, full of their clusters of orange-red fruit, at the Fire Tower ruins. "But they make such decorative bouquets," she said. "It would cost a fortune to buy anything that colorful at the florist."

But Brazilian pepper, or Schinus (shine-us) terefinthus, is not a native of Florida. It is one of several shrub species introduced into Florida which have no natural enemies, either insects or disease. They thrive in the warm sunny climate. The berries on this shrub are highly viable, and are eaten, and spread ^a by birds such as the catbird, and mockingbirds. There are places now in south Florida where Brazilian pepper has crowded out the native vegetation. People have helped its spread by planting it in yards. ~~Time~~ it seems too orange a red for a Christmas berry but it gets used much at that season. Like the poisonwood, if you try burning it, it sprouts even more vigorously than if you cut it down.

But even worse than these is the meleleuca, or camphor tree. The first time I met these trees they had been planted as ornamentals near Worth Avenue at Palm Beach. I was told then they were treasured trees, brought in from the Far East. Since then they have spread like wildfire. Such dense ^{forest} stands of them occur along Rte. 27 west of Ft. Lauderdale and Miami that there isn't space to walk between them. Everything which had been growing there naturally has been crowded out, from trees to shrubs to ground species, including animals and birds. The meleleucas have formed a closed, unnatural eco-system. They have become a threat to the everglades.

Now and then there was a little excitement in the campground. I heard much hollering at supper time in the lane beyond my camp site. I hurried over, thinking someone imagined they needed to be rescued from a snake, but saw a half dozen people looking up in a tree and waving and shouting. There sat a red-shouldered hawk with a big hunk of something under one foot on the tree limb.

"What has he got?" I asked.

Several people answered at once. "A steak!"

The hawk had dropped down out of the tree and grabbed one of the steaks on the fireplace grill though the fire was burning. There was no chance of that family getting back half of its supper.

It was near that tree that a Pileated woodpecker had drilled so many holes in a ~~telegraph pole~~ ^{telephone pole} that the pole was about to fall. In keeping with one of the purposes of the Park, the pole was braced up with a new pole lashed to it, leaving the nesting holes intact.

The mosquitoes were gone, so sometimes I sat at my picnic table after dark and contemplated the moon. What if we didn't have any moon? Would someone have dreamed up one in literature? What, on the other hand, if we had a dozen moons as some of the big outer planets do? We would never have real dark nights. In what way would that have affected the development of our sleeping patterns? Would plants have evolved in the same direction as now, if there was no real night rest for them? Evidence is that the planet Earth has flipped over several times in its history. If I ever looked up some night and saw the moon on the northern horizon I would know it had flipped again.

One subject which interested the majority of my senior citizens on our walks was Florida wildflowers. There were so many I told people they shouldn't try to learn them all in one season. A surprise to them, as it had been to me in earlier years, is how many of the

wildflowers in Florida are the same as those in the north. Familiar wild faces, I called them. Maybe botanically some are sub-species, but to the average citizen they are the same. Among them are some of the goldenrods, pickerel weed, meadow beauty and pokeweed.

Delicate Florida wildlings are found all along the Park trails, some even along streets and in abandoned lots. One little wildflower which grows in the campground in this everglades Park is ground cherry, Physalis angulata. It is a delicate, bell-shaped blossom, several pendant under foot-high narrow leaves. These blossom turn into small lanterns, with a small bright orange berry inside. The powder-blue Porterweed grows in grassy road shoulders; they open one two or three ^{small blossoms} at a time as they progress up a flowering stalk. It's native in Brazil, where the natives mix its leaves with tea.

A wild petunia grows on some of the trails, especially back of the small pond. It is blue with a slight lavender cast. Some claim our garden petunia was developed from it, but there isn't much resemblance, though it's a pretty flower. In that area grows the orange milkweed, a surprise to me as I've mostly seen it in the north in places like Nantucket. That soil on Nantucket is quartz-sand, the soil in the southern everglades is limey-oolite. Seemingly the opposite

Along the Firetower Trail grow such species as jacquemontia, a low vine with evergreen leaves. The flower, less than an inch across, is very white, with a starry effect, and fragrant. It is thought to be extinct in the United States except in this one spot in the everglades; but it can be found in caribbean lands. Growing with it is the everglades pimpernel, a name given to it by Park naturalists as otherwise it only has a Latin name, Samolus bracteatus. The leaves form a rosette near the ground; they are a noticeable gray

green with pinkish red veins. The flower stem, up to a foot tall, produces flowers in an ascending cluster; their buds are pin^k-red when when they open the blossoms are white inside, and a little fleshy, giving them a porcelain look.

This pimpernel, and the jaquemontia, grow in among the sawgrass along this trail. The sawgrass, which isn't a grass but a sedge, is a tall, slender grassy-leaved plant; if you run a finger up the grass stem you find out why it has such a name. If you try walking very far through sawgrass you end up with shredded clothing and badly lacerated skin. Its formal name is Cladium jamaicensis, the "back-bone" plant of the everglades. Sawgrass grows in the fresh water which trickles down from Lake Okechobee to the Gulf coast.

Two very pretty flowers, which don't blossom until March in the southern everglades ^{are} is the marsh pink, and the meadow beauty. They are showy in that their blossoms are more than an inch across., though the plants are only a few inches tall. The ^{five} petals of the marsh pink tuck behind one another down in the calyx, and have a yellow center with a red line outlining the pink-red junction. The meadow beauty has only four petals, and has a cluster of long yellow stamens in the center. Both grow in northern meadows but they attract more attention in Florida where they stand out in the tall sawgrass.

Some so-called wildflowers in Florida are not exactly dainty; they are large and in huge clusters. All of the flowers of the native palms occur in massive clusters. The flowers of the airplants, which belong to the pineapple, perch high and obvious on trees, having heavy stalks and thick flower clusters. The airplants are so large and heavy they have rain catchbasins in the joints of their leaves which provide damp to wet homes for tiny frogs and even a highly specialized tiny fish. These ~~Bromeliads~~ are Bromeliads; the one known

popularly as Wild Pine has what are assumed to be red flowers. The red part is really heavy bracts, imbedded in which are violet flowers. These are tropical plants, never found in the north.

Palm trees are a special group of plants on their own. They are the plants which give the tropical look to Florida, for they grow in the north only in greenhouses. The coconut palm was very common when I first was at the Park. But in recent years, an imported disease known as "the yellows" has almost exterminated them. I've mentioned the paurotis palm out the Flamingo Road. The most handsome of all, the royal palm, is native to Florida, and can be seen as only a handful of specimens in the Anhinga Trail area. They don't do well at reproducing themselves and in the past so many were dug up and planted on town streets, as at Palm Beach, that they are a disappearing species. They have stately boles, with green-urn-like tops, and long waving fronds.

Two other palms, however, are as profligate as the royal palms are sterile. The saw palmetto, Serenoa repens, is found the entire length of the Florida peninsula. It has a broad hand-shaped leaf, with stems three to four feet high; there are very sharp teeth along the stems, which give the plant its name. Their trunks recline ^{along the ground} adding an inch or more to the growing tip every year. The trunk is very resistant to fire; a fire may completely burn up the fronds, but very quickly a new set of fronds comes up. Palmettos are so dense few or no wildflowers or other ground plants grow under them. These saw palmettos are common throughout the Everglades National Park.

The other common palm is the cabbage palm, often called sabal palm. While it is common, it spreads out as individual trees; its trunk stands upright, but it is not very sturdy, being composed of the

bases of the old last year's fronds. This palm produces a center bud which is not only edible but a gourmet food choice. Once that center is destroyed the palm dies, but the cabbage palm seeds are numerous and quite viable so the trees are replaced rather rapidly. Like all palms it is related to the grass family. The Seminole and Calusa Indians ate it as a vegetable; some fancy restaurants in the Miami area serve it as a specialty, but many who have tasted it say it appeals best when there is little other choice. It grows all around the campgrounds, in the Park.

Palms have what I call wind-voices. Slight breezes cause them to rustle and loudly whisper. Stronger air motion set them to talking with a clatter. It was always a special treat for me to have Ranger Shirley spend some evening time with me at my campfires, where we would talk for hours on end to the accompaniment of the sibilant sabal and palmetto palms; where we could watch these fronds, designed for life in tropical storms, make exotic patterns against the moonlit sky.

Ranger Shirley, a wheelchair denizen with no use of her legs, is an excellent driver as well as naturalist. She drove me to Corkscrew Swamp that winter, where I pushed her along the boardwalk. Back in 1954 I was with a group of early conservationists who went to Corkscrew Swamp to help publicize the need to raise funds to save it from the power saws. I and others walked in slough water up to our waists to get out to the cypress and other trees we wanted saved. They were saved, with the help of Audubon and others, and now, here I was, walking high and dry over the slough among tree giants now two to three feet through. I had thought they were big when I'd seen them more than twenty-five years before.

Ranger Shirley, Jack and his wife Juanita, Marcia who is a resident of Miami but spends much of her free time in the Park in her Volkswagen camper, and often another Ranger or two, spent many an evening at my campfire. It was a great way to keep up with who has seen a bobcat where, what unexpected bird migrants have been reported in the Park, and what special programs were being given out at Flamingo.

In mid February I had an adventure with a tree snail. These small creatures, known as Liguus, are found in this country only in the far south tip of Florida; their next nearest range is Haiti and Cuba. During the dry winter months they remain dormant, clamped down tightly to smooth tree trunks. But once it rains they move about. Their food is the microscopic algae and fungi which grow on tree bark. From June to November is their breeding season, when they lay ten to fifty eggs in the soil at the base of a tree. The eggs do not go through a pupa stage when they hatch, but start right off as perfectly formed, though minute, snails, but they grow rather rapidly to full size of one to one and a half inches in length. Just about everything eats them which come upon them, - ^{jays,} crows, /raccoons, even cannibal snails. It takes them four years to get their full growth, and they are known to live to nine years.

But the most destructive predator of these unusual snails is mankind, for the snails are beautifully marked with bright colors. They are an artist's, a collector's, and a photographer's joy. Collectors have diminished them to a dangerously low population. When I take people for trail walks I only point out the tree snails which are in such conspicuous places they are usually spotted anyway.

Two women photography buffs, friends of my camping days and living not far from me in the north, begged me to help them find some hidden, close-to-the-ground tree snails so they could get ~~good~~ good pictures of them in their secluded retreats. I had faith in their devotion to conservation so I broke my personal rule and led them to a snail nook where about five of them were hidden. As a thank-you for my trusting them, some of the most beautiful blown-up photographs of tree snails came into existence, and I'm the proud owner of two copies. I tell Lois and Roz they should submit the most spectacular ones to some nature photography contest.

To get back to my adventure with one of these exotic snails, I needed a new, straighter pole to ~~prop~~^{prop} up a corner of the tarp canopy over my picnic table. There was a tall marlberry shrub nearby, and knowing it was soon going to be burned in the Park's control program for hardwoods, in an effort to preserve the unique Caribbean pines, I cut down the stronger, tallest branch. In cleaning off the side branches I was dismayed to see a handsome yellow and white tree snail fastened down against the main branch. I knew it was impossible to pluck it off and place it on another branch. It just won't grab hold but falls to the ground where something eats it, and there were raccoons around my campsite. So I leaned this marlberry stick against another marlberry shrub, in a way that the snail might move off onto the new stem. There was a heavy shower in the night, so I hoped he traveled.

First thing in the morning I went out to look. No snail in sight. After ^a breakfast I looked again. There ^{he} was hidden up under a clump of marlberry leaves; but he looked uncomfortable for most of his body was out of his shell, wrapped around a skinny twig below the leaves. To protect him from the hot sun, as the leaves were sparse, I tucked a

clump of dead leaves on a large twig up over the green leaves. The next morning, to my worse dismay, he was clutching tightly to the dead leaves. So I arranged the pole I had cut, which he had been on originally, to form a bridge from those dried leaves to the growing marlberry. When I looked for him the morning after that I am sure my smile went around to the back of my face, for there he was, back on the sturdy stick I'd cut, just a couple of inches from the growing marlberry. One more night would do it.

Then I did a stupid thing. I tried moving the bridge stick closer to the marlberry so he'd have an even less distance to travel. Instantly, when I moved the stick, he dropped off to the ground. I was back to square one. All I could think of was to drip some water on the base of the trunk of the growing marlberry and place him at the foot of ~~it~~ ^{the wet spot.} The next morning, by golly, there he was, right where I had last tried jockeying him to be, - two thirds of the way up the growing marlberry. Much of him was out of his shell so I tried to get acquainted with him without touching him, I had to admit I couldn't tell his eyes from anything else, assuming he had eyes. I stood staring at him, studying him from two points of view: as a darling little bit of inscrutable life which I had rescued, after nearly ~~missing~~ ^{killing} it, and as a toothsome morsel if I could but dip him in butter and roast him. As I wasn't starving to death the former prevailed. Such is the dichotomy of life.

As the sun rose he pulled into his shell. By afternoon he looked as if he had been aestivating all winter on that marlberry stem. After dark I dripped a few more water drops above him, hoping to lure him up higher out of harm's way. The next morning he was just where I thought he should be, up high enough to be hidden by the ^eaves. I named him, "My Little Wanderer." For nine days and

nights that little snail had to travel, without any real legs or feet, up and down and among those bushes, to find a natural home. All because of me. But I did help him, and between us he made it to a relatively safe niche. I'm positive, however, he never knew I existed.

I went out to Flamingo one of my last days that winter, to spend some time with Ranger Bobbie. The dry season was advancing. Mrazek Pond, on the way out, was but a mud hole with no birds in sight. At Eco Pond, however, several spoonbills, blue-winged teal, and a few white ibis stood around or were busy rummaging for food. A great white heron, known to have been hanging around that area for about ten years, was standing on a dock, trembling, with a badly twisted leg and blood on some of his white feathers. Was a bobcat, or an alligator, which was responsible? Bobbie felt it could have been a large dog she had seen splashing around out there shortly before the bird appeared with its injury. She took me to see an amazing nearby area, where there were five osprey nests, all with young in them. Most birders consider it a red letter day to see just one such occupied nest.

One last trip out to Anhinga Trail for that spring was especially rewarding, for there were three anhinga nests now well advanced; the young were quite visible. I'd been watching their progress off and on as I happened to be present the day the males first brought twigs to the females for nest-building. Now I watched a male and a female start the ~~w~~ swing shift, one being released to go hunt for food, the other to settle down as protector. The tall mother of one nest stood up, and hovered over her three young, whose necks were waving about like tan-colored snakes; it was easy to see why they were often called snake birds. One of the three young was smaller than the other two,

which wasn't surprising, as two young per nest is the more usual. I observed them from the boardwalk, again having that feeling of watching birds on a stage from a front seat. As usual, extra unmated males sat around in the bushes, back of the front line of nests, very well-behaved pachelors. Marcia brought me the sad news just before I left that the third, smaller, baby nahinga had died, trampled in the nest as the others moved about.

Most of the older campers were heading for their northern homes in their snug, often too fancy, camper vehicles. They arrive back in Ohio and Michigan, Indiana and Illinois, and all through New England, just as the April showers bring May flowers and all signs of snow and ice are gone. I found it a little harder to leave than usual, for friendships have a way of deepening with time; also, I wasn't sure that I would ever get back that way again, to once more live among my subtropical wildling friends. But none of it would be forgotten. My journal notes would see to that.

After I was back home awhile, Ranger Bobbie informed ^{me that} ~~mat~~ the egret with the badly damaged leg had healed; he was back to standing around in Florida Bay, spearing any fish which dared dart near his legs.