

ON THE WATER – May, 2009

BY CAPTAIN DOUG MAPLE

The hurried pace of the springtime boat tour business has come to an end. Ahead stretches the more laid back, take it as it comes, summer routine. I look forward to submitting an occasional article which will magnify the natural diversity and the abundance of our local coastal eco system. The vast expanses of the Cedar Key National Wildlife Refuge and Waccasassa Bay State Preserve which surround Cedar Key provide a wealth of topics and personal experiences, which will, hopefully, promote a greater awareness of the natural treasure which blesses our island community.

The richness of our local estuarine waters abound with an abundance of marine life which, when combined with the remoteness of our marshes and coastline, attract and sustain incredible numbers of birds in a wide variety of species.

While many areas are experiencing a sad and alarming decrease in both the number of species and total number of birds, we still enjoy large numbers of birds in a wide variety of species.

This is especially true when one considers the seasonality of our birds. For instance, when one category of intriguing birds go away for the summer, i.e., migratory shore birds, loons, ducks, white pelicans, bald eagles, peregrine falcons, northern harrier, other birds take the spotlight for the summer months, for example, a large colony of magnificent frigate birds, roseate spoon bills, etcetera. Add to these our resident birds, such as , white ibis, egrets, herons, brown pelicans, swallow tail kites, northern parula, prothonotary warblers, limpkins and anhinga, to name a few.

You may have noticed that all of the birds I have mentioned are those which are associated with water. That is because I spend six days a week in a boat. I will, occasionally, consult with friends who spend more time on dry land and attempt to give you updates on our local passerines.

I have visited many of our State's refuges, parks and natural areas including those considered birding hot spots. St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, Ding Darling National Wildlife refuge, The Everglades, Flamingo, Cork Screw Swamp just to name a few. We should be rated at or near the top when compared to these other areas. Unfortunately, the areas where most of our birds hang out are not readily accessible by land.

That is, of course, where my boats and I come into the picture. Here is a partial list of some of the more interesting, or in some cases, rare birds seen on my last two outings. We saw short billed dowitchers, dunlin, semi palmated plovers, semi palmated sandpipers, Wilson plovers, avocet, western and least sandpiper, sanderlings, piping plover, black bellied plover, wimbrel, marbled godwit, willets, ruddy turnstones, oyster catchers, royal tern, least tern, forester tern, sandwich tern, Caspian tern, laugh gull, ring billed gull herring gull, black skimmer, white pelican, osprey, bald eagles, magnificent frigate birds, white ibis, swallow tailed kites, snowy egrets, great egrets, roseate spoonbills, yellow and black crowned night herons, tri-color herons, great blue herons, and nesting brown pelicans. Add to all this, a beautiful day, pristine waters, dolphin sometimes swimming at arm's length from the boat, a few manatee and you have the makings of an extremely enjoyable afternoon.

See you On The Water!