

Jerry Bell

[the-village-birders] Bird walk on the boardwalk at Gatorland

To: Village Birders <The-Village-Birders@googlegroups.com>

Reply-To: Jerry Bell

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A little over three dozen enthusiasts from The Villages, including members of The Village Birders, Brownwood Birders and a Villages photography plus some assorted friends and family, hit the road in what seemed like the middle of the night to drive down to Orlando to be at Gatorland at roughly sunrise. And this was despite weather forecasts calling for the distinct possibility of thunderstorms in the AM! These brave and foolhardy folks were rewarded with over two hours of *gorgeous* weather before the park officially opened to the public and all at a discounted entrance price to boot.

This being an unusually informal birding walk, no official lists of species seen or counts of birds seen were made (though estimates ranged from "lots" all the way to "bunches"). *Unofficially*, it was the usual suspects: Great Egrets, Snowy Egrets, Tricolored Herons, Great Blue Herons, Little Blue Herons, White Ibis, Black Vulture, Anhinga and Double-crested Cormorant were the most common, but some also saw Green Heron, Osprey, Wood Stork, Gray Catbird, Black & White Warbler, Cardinal and a few others. The wading birds were definitely strutting their breeding plumage finery, with green and blue faces on Great Egrets, dark yellow and even reddish-orange faces and feet on Snowy Egrets and white head feathers on Tricolored Herons that would pop up like snowy crowns when they greeted one another. Stars of the show were the eggs and chicks of all sizes in the nests, particularly those very close to the boardwalk. Everybody got a chance to hear just how *noisy* a nest full of Great Egret chicks can be and how *goofy* sounding Snowy Egrets can be (kind of thick gurgle). A resident male Peacock and a leucitic or albino female Peahen that he was trying to impress were also nice to see. Of course, the other main attractions were the hundreds of alligators, ranging in size from "pretty darned big" to "you gotta be kidding me huge", several of whom were in *very* amorous moods.

At 10:00, the park opened to the public and the early birds (or birders, to be precise) from The Villages were allowed to leave the boardwalk and explore the

rest of the park, which houses several hundred younger alligators, some Cuban crocodiles, a huge tortoise, a captive Great Horned Owl, a number of snakes, several emus making great drumming noises and several kinds of colorful parrots and other creatures. When my wife Linda and I left, some of our group were talking about taking the train ride and maybe even one of the zipline rides. We didn't stick around to see whether anybody made good on those threats.

It was a fun morning and I thank everybody who came and enjoyed themselves!

Jerry Bell
The Village Birders

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