

All About Alligators

Presentation by Paul Pacter



Two parts to our discussion of the American Alligator:



1. Lots of information about alligators.
Size, quantity, location, habitat, appearance, diet, ectothermy, reproduction, social structure, legal status, etc.
2. Where we can see them safely in the Naples area.

I am an accountant. Not a scientist.

- Presentation is in layman's terms.
- Might be a few technical inaccuracies.



With one or two exceptions (which I will point out) I took all of the photos.

We'll look at alligators in these places:

- Audubon Corkscrew Swamp.
- Turner River Rd – HP Williams Park.
- Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk.
- Six-Mile Cypress Slough Preserve.
- CREW Bird Rookery Swamp.
- Oasis Visitor Center.
- Naples Zoo.
- Freedom Park.

If time permits, a few more places.

To whet your appetite: Corkscrew Swamp Back Country, Naples, March 24, 2023



Part 1

Lots of Information about Alligators

American Alligator

Scientific name:
Alligator mississippiensis.

Up to 15 feet.

Up to 1,000 lbs.

Live only in SE USA: From East Texas to North Carolina.



Alligators are aquatic, cold-blooded

- Good swimmers.
- Spend time on land, esp. to get warmth from the sun.
- Valves to close ears and nostrils when submerged.
- Can stay under water 45-60 minutes. **Up to 24 hours in extreme cold.**



Size

Weight in the wild (more in captivity)

- Average adult: 790 pounds.
- Some are over 1,000 pounds.
- Males 30% larger than females.
- Largest in Florida: 1,043 pounds.



Length

- Average male adult 11 ft. Female 8 ft.
- Largest in Florida: 14 feet, 4 inches.
- Largest 19.2 feet (Louisiana). *Not verified.*

Largest Alligators (Males) Caught in Florida (as of Sept 21, 2023)

#	Year	County	Length	Weight (lbs)
1	2010	Brevard	14' 3 1/2"	654
2	2013	Gadsden and Leon	14' 1"	n/a
3	1997	Volusia	14' 5/8"	800
4	1989	Franklin	14' 1/16"	714
5	2001	Polk	13' 11 1/4"	880
6	1989	Marion	13' 10 1/2"	1,043
7	1983	Lake	13' 9 1/4"	870
8	1984	Marion	13' 8"	700
9	2008	Putnam and Flagler	13' 6 1/8"	830
10	2005	Manatee	13' 5 1/8"	800

Female alligators rarely exceed 10 ft length. Largest in Florida:

1	2019	Putnam and Volusia	10' 6 1/8"	n/a
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Where Are Gators Found in the US?



https://www.floridaportfishing.com/freshwaterspecies-spotlight-alligators/article_c2ed848a-6eeb-11ef-b06f-abc0ec2b6f46.html

How Many Gators in the US?

- Estimated 5,000,000 in Southeast United States.
- Largest populations are in:
 - Florida (1,250,000).
 - Louisiana (1,250,000).
 - Texas (500,000).
 - Georgia (250,000).



Freedom Park, Naples

Life Expectancy:

- 30-50 years in the wild.
- 60-80 years in human care.

Habitat

Fresh water.

- Prefer lakes, slow-moving rivers, and wetlands (swamps, marshlands, etc).



Roadside Drainage Ditch, Naples

Low tolerance for salt water.

- But sometimes found in brackish (mixed salt-fresh) water.

Appearance – Color

- Olive-black skin.
- Bony scales (scutes).
- Hatchlings and juveniles are black streaked with pale yellow stripes. Stripes help camouflage. Disappear as adults.



Juveniles - Corkscrew Swamp



Turner River Rd

Mobility

- Mainly swimming (natatorial).
- Can move on land by a variety of means: Walk, run (short distances), and even crawl. *Next Slide*
- Tail: A long, powerful tail helps propel alligators through water.
- Webbed rear feet. Help an alligator swim.

Alligator "High Walk" Tail always drags Turner River Road



Buoyancy

- Float just under water. Only eyes & nostrils visible.
- Control buoyancy by inflating and deflating lungs.
- Hide, sneak up on prey.
- Special muscles around lungs to help them float, dive, barrel roll.



Generalist Carnivores

Diet – Juveniles

- Begin eating insects after birth.
- Then crayfish, small fish, frogs.
- Then other small animals.

Diet – Adults

- Fish, invertebrates, frogs, birds, mammals.
- If gator is big enough, will eat deer, hogs, bear, etc.

Cannibalistic! Eat other alligators.

Use sharp teeth to capture prey:

- Jaws can crack a large turtle's shell.
- But cannot use jaws to chew. Swallow in chunks.
- Strongest laboratory-measured bite of any living animal.

Eating Habits – Adults:

- Lurkers, not hunters.
- Wait for something edible to swim or walk by. Then lunge!

Alligators are LURKERS, not hunters. Wait for lunch to swim by.

Nostrils above water (breathing)

Eyes above water (monitor surroundings)

Standing (ready to pounce)

Seafood lunch (fish)



Alligators Are Ectothermic - Cold Blooded.

- Rely on external sources of heat to control body temperature.
- Regulate body heat by:
 - Basking in the sun.
 - Digging holes in mud to trap heat.
 - Moving to areas with warmer or cooler air or water temperatures.



Alligator Basking at Big Cypress Bend



Dormancy

- Alligators are most active when temperatures are between 82° to 92° F.
- They stop feeding when the temperature drops below 70° F.
- They become dormant below 55° F.
 - This dormancy is called brumation. Similar to hibernation of mammals. Heart, metabolic, respiratory rates drop.
- Alligators are dormant throughout much of the winter season. *Less so in SW Fla.*

Alligator Holes

Alligators dig them for 2 reasons:

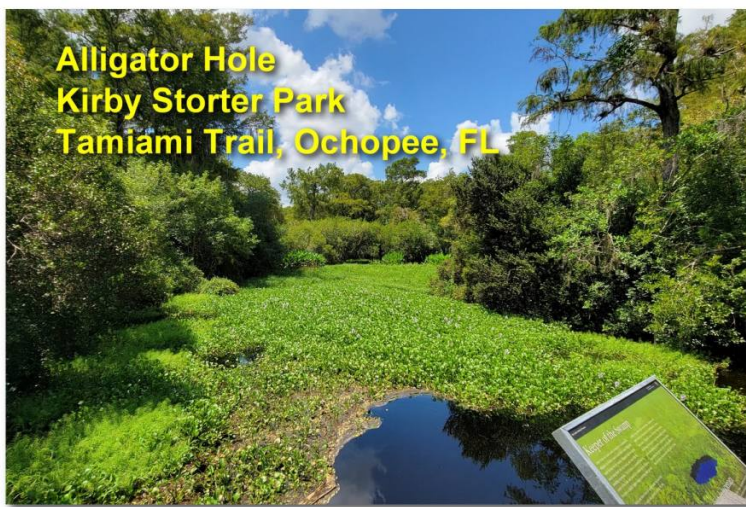
- Insulation when temperatures drop.
- Pool of water during dry season.

Alligators use their snout and tail to clear muck from base of a pond.

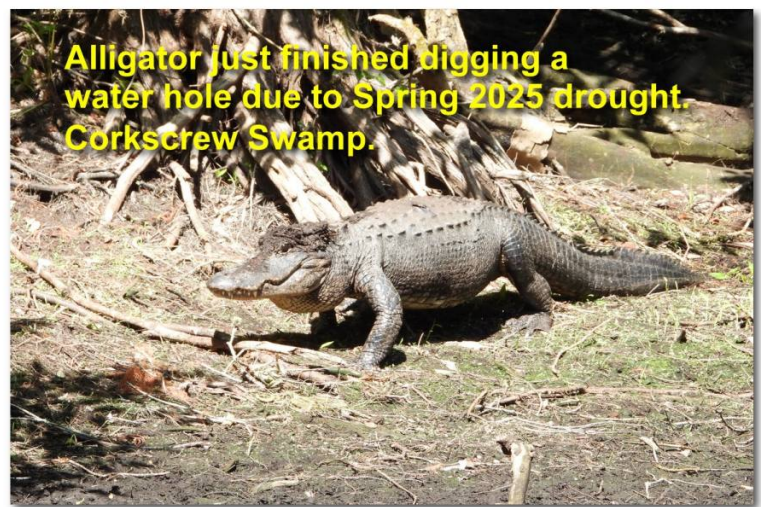
Also dig tunnels up to 65 feet long to protect themselves from extreme heat/cold.

Can stay under water 45 to 60 minutes.

- Up to 24 hours during brumation.



Alligator Hole
Kirby Storter Park
Tamiami Trail, Ochopee, FL



Alligator just finished digging a water hole due to Spring 2025 drought.
Corkscrew Swamp.

Attitude toward humans:

- Become unsettled. Ignore humans. Or walk or swim away.
- Rarely go after a human unprovoked.
- Can outrun human in first 20-30 feet of exiting water.

1948 to 2021: 442 unprovoked gator attacks on humans in Florida:

- 26 fatalities. 277 non-fatal major bites. 139 minor bites. *Over 70 years.*

Do Not Feed Alligators!

It's illegal. Why?

Alligators are wild animals. Naturally afraid of humans.

Giving them food only makes them bolder and encourages them to seek out people. Attack for food.

Also it alters their natural diet in an unhealthy way.



Do you want to taste alligator?

- Cracklin Jacks, Collier Blvd. →
- Gators' Crossroads, US-41-San Marco Rd.
- Alice Sweetwater's, Airport Rd.
- Mudbugs Cajun Kitchen. Sanibel.
- Everglades City Rod & Gun Club.
- Village Pub, Venetian Village, Naples.



Or order on Amazon for a memorable cookout:

Alligator Filets - Farm Raised - Great for Grilling and Frying
\$39.99 for 1 pound



Or get it at Roosters Farm Stand, Route 80, Fort Myers:

\$20 for 1 pound



Elsewhere in the World

Huangsha Market
Guangzhou, China



Menu
Bangkok, Thailand



Saturday Market
Chiang Rai, Thailand



Reproduction

Sexual maturity determined by gator's size (length) rather than age.

Male: 7 feet (ages 8-12).

Female: 6 feet (ages 10-15).

Alligators mate: Once a year.

Normally: April to June.

Alligators Mating
Big Cypress Bend
Green Heron Lake



Nesting

- Female builds nest in vegetation next to water.
- Clutch of 20-50 eggs (average 38).
- Incubation 60-70 days.
- Female stays near nest. Fiercely protective of nest and hatchlings.



Hatchling at
Corkscrew Swamp

Hikers be especially cautious!

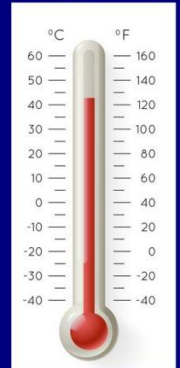


Internet Photo

Sex of offspring

- Temperature in the nest in first 3 weeks after laying eggs determines sex of the offspring.
- Temperatures above 93 degrees will produce males.
- Temperatures of 86 degrees and below produce females.

> 93°F = M
< 86°F = F



Survival

Number of eggs laid by female	38
Number of those that hatch	24
Number of those that live to 1 year	10
Number of those that become sub-adults (> 4 ft long)	8
Number of those that reach maturity (> 6 ft long)	5

Hatchlings Are Born 8 Inches Long

- During the first 4-6 years, gators grow about 1 foot per year (1" a month).
- After 6 years: Males grow around 8 inches/year. Females around 6 inches/year. Until they reach 6 feet.
- At 6 feet, growth slows to about 2.5 inches per year for both sexes.



Juvenile Alligator
Audubon Corkscrew Swamp



Legal status

- By the 1950s: Almost extinct due to endless hunting.
- 1966: Gained protective status under Endangered Species Preservation Act.
- 1980s: Population recovered.
- 1987: Removed from "endangered" list.
- Today: Classified as "vulnerable" due to similar appearance to an endangered animal, namely the crocodile. This allows state regulation of hunting etc.

Difference	American Alligator	American Crocodile
Location	SE US Only	Florida and Caribbean Islands and Coasts
Color	Greenish Black	Dull Gray
Snout	Rounded	Pointy



Gator



Croc

Differences	American Alligator	American Crocodile
Quantity USA	5 million	Only a few thousand
Habitat	Slow moving fresh water	Prefer salt water
When Jaw Is Closed	Only 2 teeth protrude down each side	Many teeth protrude up and down



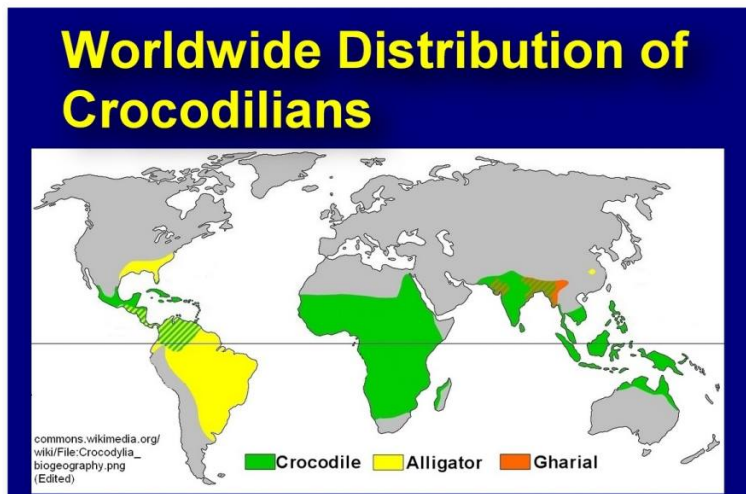
Gator



Croc

American Alligator	American Crocodile
Upper jaw wider than lower jaw.	Upper and lower jaw are same width.

Exhibit at Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge, Sanibel Island, Florida

Grand Egyptian Museum Giza Crocodile Mummy Dating from Greco-Roman Era (332 BC-395 AD)



Internet Photo

Freshwater Crocodiles Ranthambore Natl Park - India December 2025

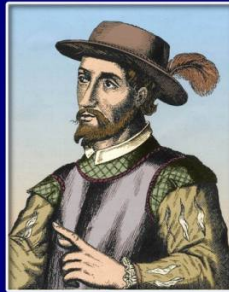


Fun Fact #2

Origin of the Word Alligator

The word "alligator" is an Anglicized form of el lagarto, the Spanish term for "the lizard". That's what early Spanish explorers and settlers in Florida called the alligator.

Modern Spanish: Aligátor. Caimán. Lagarto.



Fun Fact #4

Alligators do not have vocal cords.

But can make loud sounds using their throat:

- Open mouth wide and allow air to escape.
- Can hiss, roar, and growl.



Caimans

- Alligatorid (gator family).
- Small-sized (6 to 8 foot).
- Throughout Central and South America.
- This one Costa Rica Jan 2024.



Fun Fact #1

Alligator Teeth

American alligators have 70-80 teeth.

- All pointy (no flat like humans).
- As an alligator's teeth wear down or fall out, new ones come in. An alligator can go through 3,000 teeth in a lifetime.
- Over 2,000 pounds per square inch of bite force. Most adult humans bite: 120-160 PSI.



Fun Fact #3

An alligator's brain weighs only 8 or 9 grams and would take up only one-half of a tablespoon.

Due to lack of brain power, alligators act on instinct, not thought.

If it's hungry, an alligator will eat anything that moves.



Fun Fact #5

Guess an alligator's total length.

Distance in inches from tip of nose to eyes = Estimated total length in feet.



Photo: Monument Lake Campground, Tamiami Trail, Collier County, FL

Part 2 Some Places Where You Can See Alligators Safely in the Naples Area

Safety

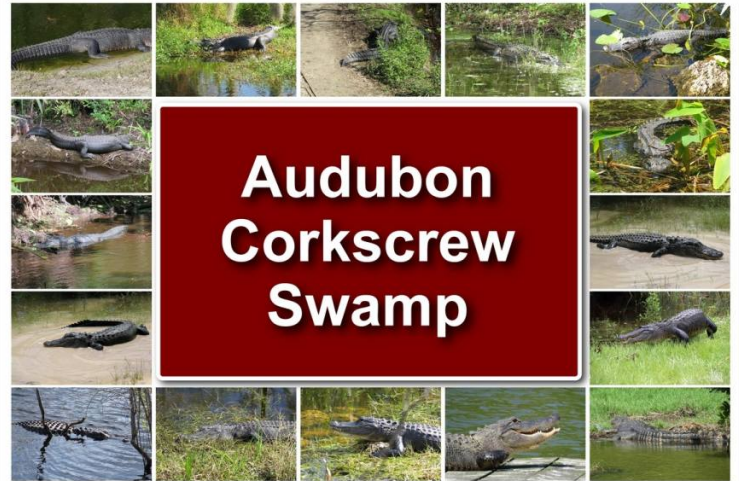
- Always walk at least 30 feet away from an alligator on a footpath.
- Never bring pets to alligator areas.
- Closely supervise children walking or playing around water that may have alligators.



CREW Bird Rookery Swamp



Audubon Corkscrew Swamp



Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary

13,000-acre protected wetlands area.

Website: corkscrew.audubon.org/

Where: 375 Sanctuary Rd W, Naples 34120.

Get There: East on Immokalee Road. 15 miles East of I-75, turn left onto Sanctuary Rd. Follow signs.

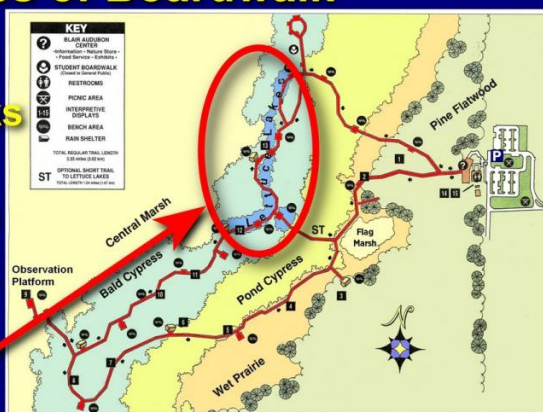
When: Daily 8:00 am to 3:00 pm.

Admission: \$17. College students \$10. Children 6-14 \$6. Book online.

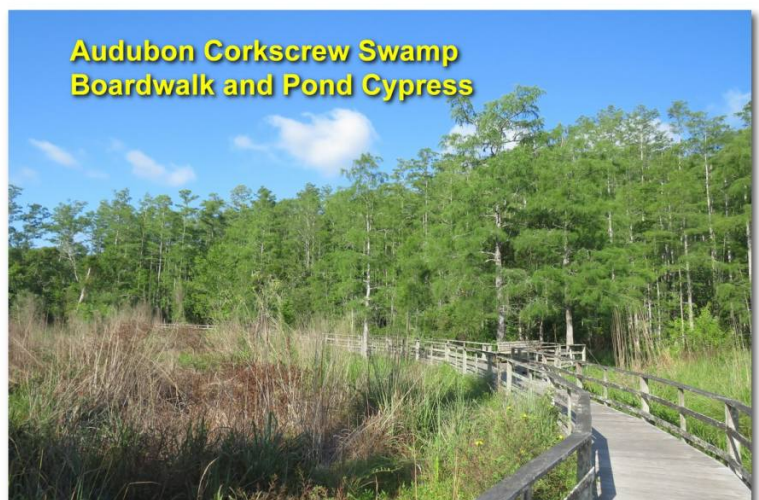


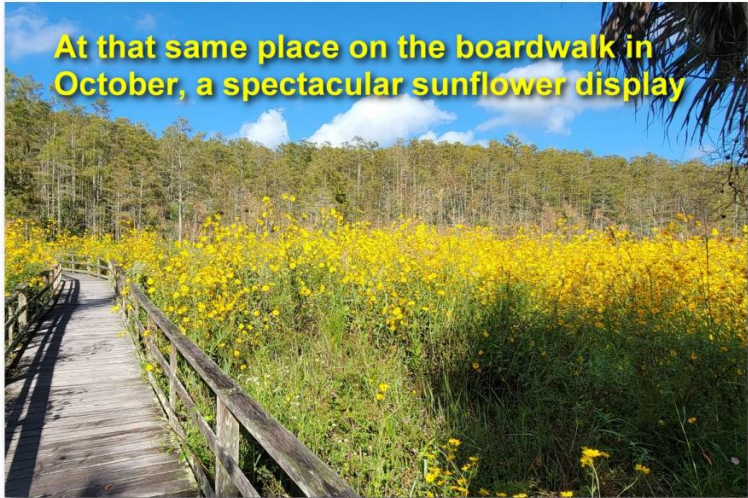
2.2 Miles of Boardwalk

Benches
Overlooks
Rain
Shelters
Shortcut
Gator Area



Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Boardwalk and Pond Cypress





At that same place on the boardwalk in October, a spectacular sunflower display



Many of the ancient cypresses at Corkscrew Swamp PRE-DATE COLUMBUS!

1451-1506

OLDER!



Alligator at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary



Alligator Sunning - Corkscrew Swamp



Audubon Corkscrew Swamp
Two Juvenile Alligators



Several of the Many Birds at Corkscrew Swamp

Ibis

Yellow-crowned Night Heron

Sandhill Crane

Anhinga

Roseate Spoonbill

Barred Owl

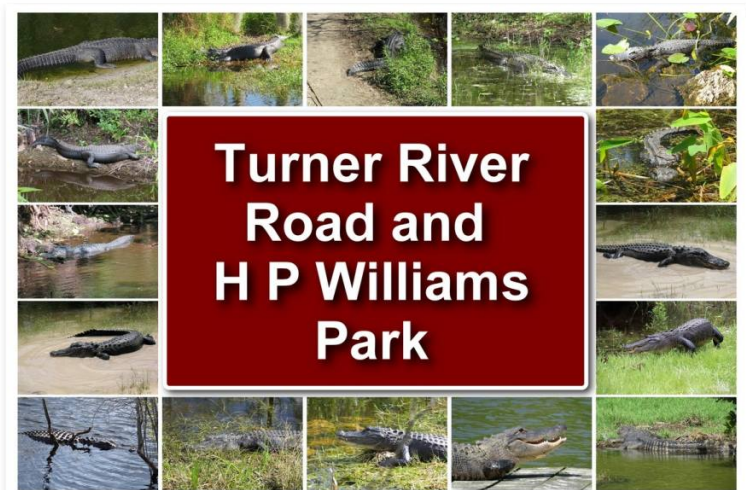
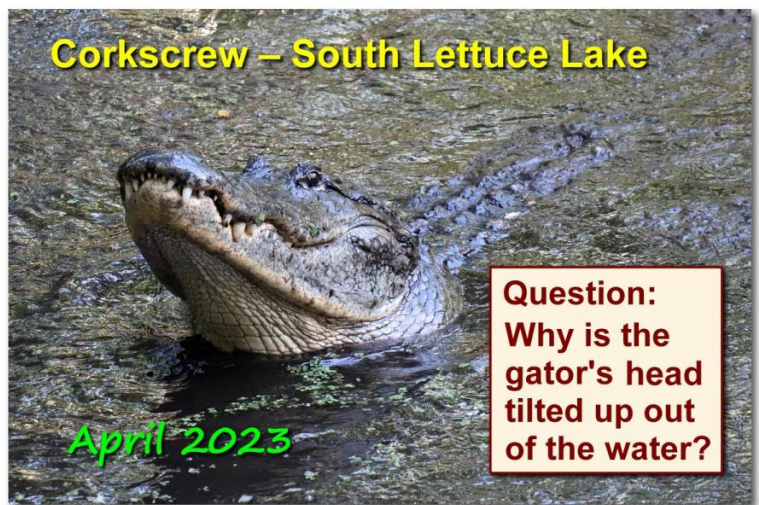


Audubon Corkscrew Swamp
February 16, 2026

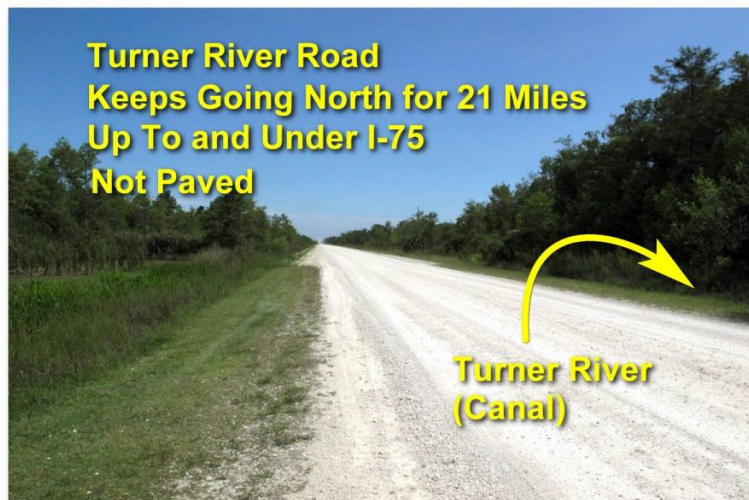
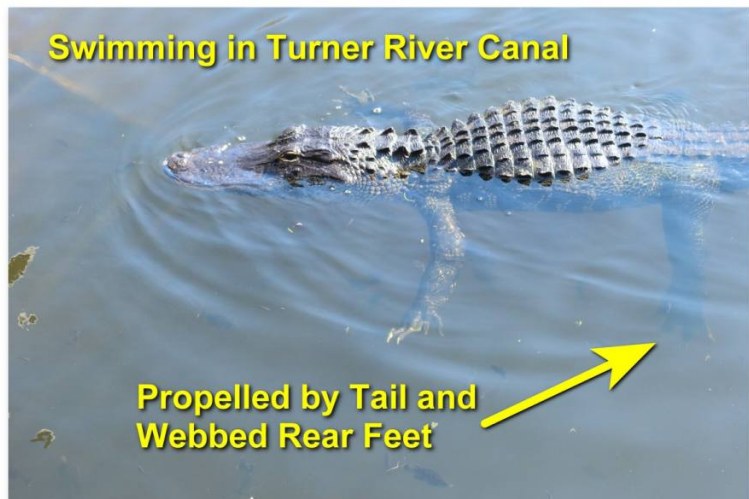


Audubon Corkscrew Swamp
South Lettuce Lake

April 2023



Turner River Rd & H P Williams Park
Websites: hp-williams-roadside-park.htm
 and www.nps.gov/bicy/planyourvisit/
Where: Ochopee, Florida.
Get there: US-41 Tamiami Trail 30
 miles east of Collier Blvd.
From there: Turner River Road runs
 21 miles due north to I-75.
Admission: Free.



If you do decide to drive up Turner River Road to see wildlife, some tips:

- It's a dirt and gravel road. Dusty.
- River & wildlife on the right driving north.
- 2 or 3 miles is usually all you need.
- Be very careful if you get out of your car.
- Best to take photos from the car window.
- Good photo ops where you see these signs →
- **Obey the sign!**



Taken from the Window of My Car



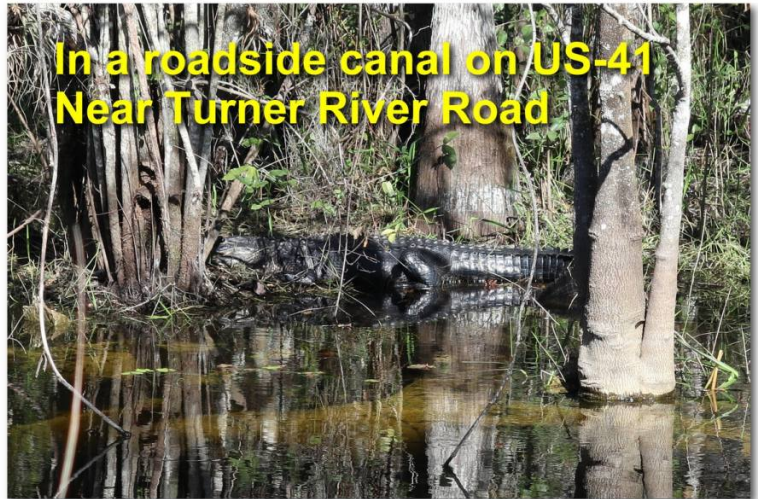
H P Williams Park Separated by Chain Link Fence



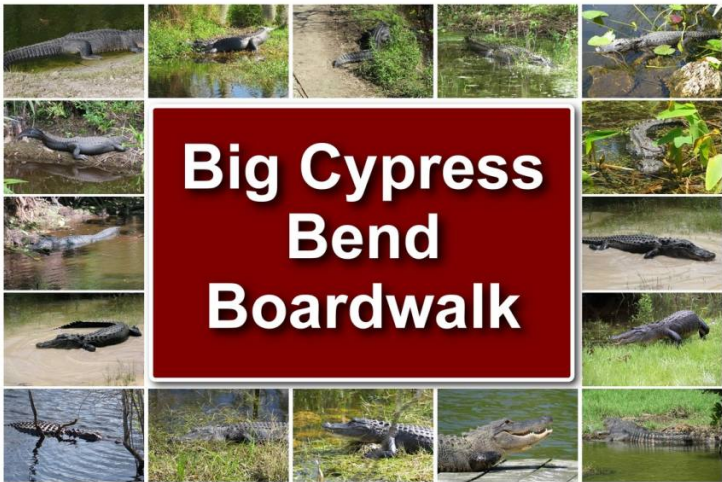
In the Canal Along Turner River Road



In a roadside canal on US-41 Near Turner River Road



Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk



Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park
Largest State Park in Florida (175 parks).
Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk is one feature of the Park.

- Currently, the Boardwalk is 2.3-mile round trip walk from parking at US-41.
- An additional 1.6 mile Boardwalk is planned.
- Eventually will be a 2.7 mile loop.

Map on next slide...

Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk

When the planned boardwalk is completed, will be a 2.7-mile loop. Part of the yellow is planned as a canopy walk.



Big Cypress Bend – More Info

Website:

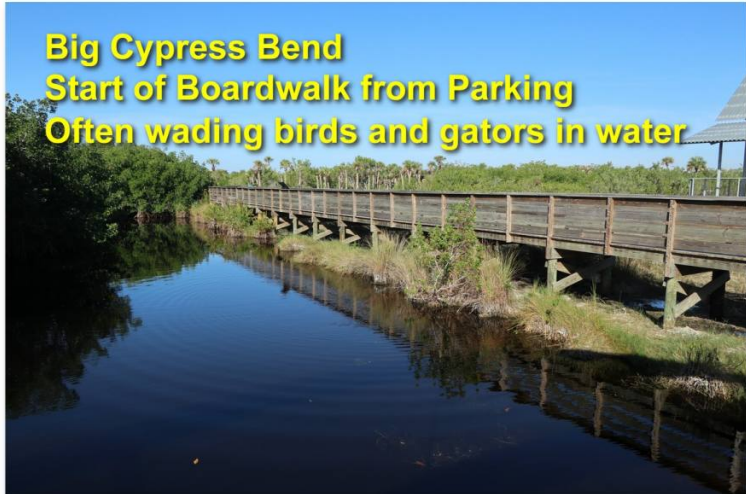
<https://www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/fakahatchee-strand-preserve-state-park>

Where: US-41, Copeland, FL.

Get There: US-41 East 17 miles from Collier Blvd. 7 miles West of SR-29.

When: 8am to sunset.

Admission: \$3.



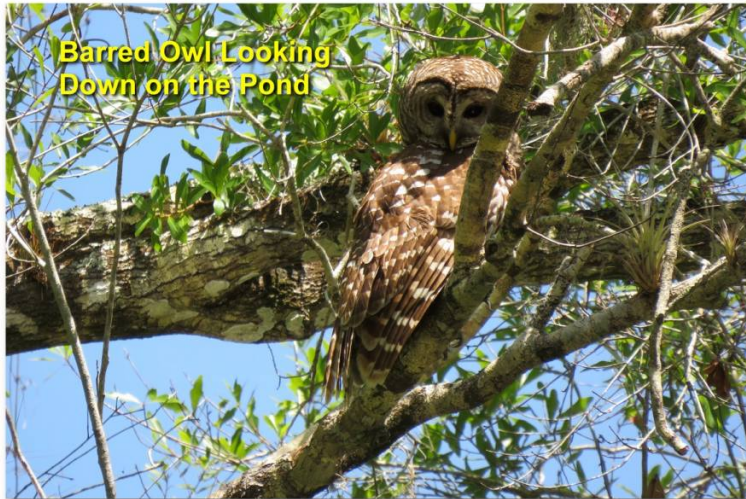
I got much too close taking this photo. Didn't see babies.



New boardwalk opened November 2025.
Replaces part destroyed by Ian, which
was closed for 3 years.



Big Cypress Bend Pond



Barred Owl Looking
Down on the Pond



Six-Mile
Cypress Slough
Preserve

Six Mile Slough Preserve "Sloo" = Fresh
water swamp

Website: www.leegov.com/parks/preserves/sixmilecypress

Friends of Six Mile Slough:
www.sloughpreserve.org/

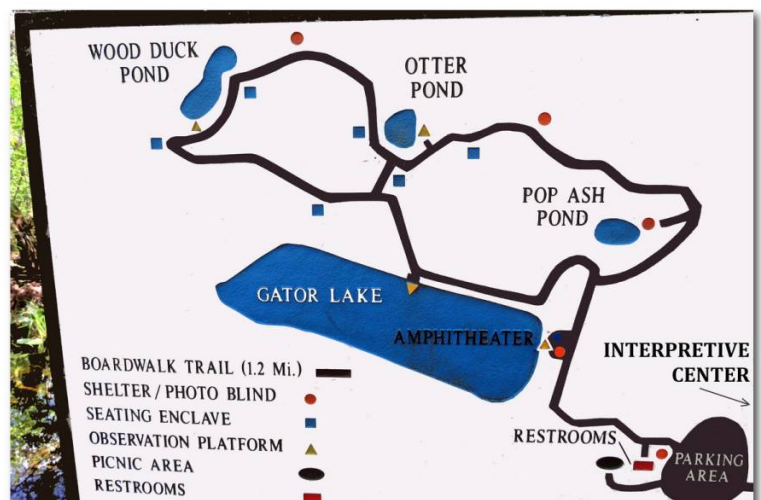
Where: 7751 Penzance Blvd at 6 Mile
Cypress Pkwy, Fort Myers, FL. 33966.

Get There: I-75 Exit 131 Daniels Pkwy.
West 2.7 mi to 6 Mile Cypress Pkwy.
Right onto 6 Mile Cypress Pkwy.
Then 1.8 mi to entrance, on right.

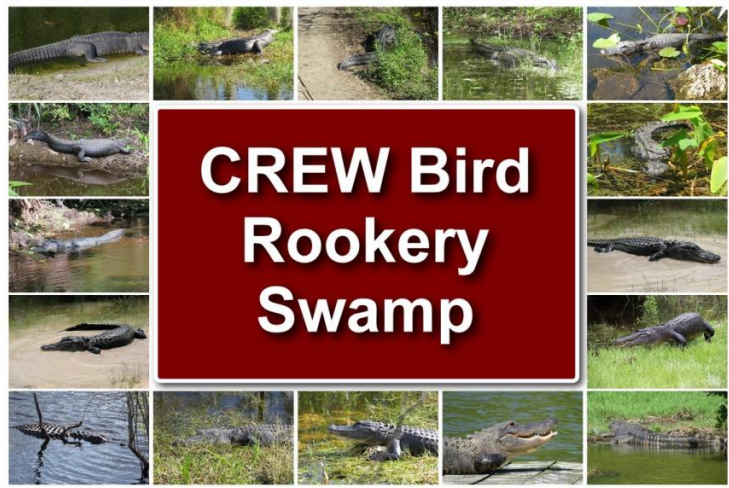


What's there:

- 3,500 acres of protected wetlands.
- Approx. 11 miles long, 1/3rd mile wide.
 - 2-3 feet of water in wet season.
 - Still mostly wet in dry season.
- 1.2-mile boardwalk over the water.
- Fully accessible.
- Four viewing platforms onto lakes.
- Many benches and shelters along the boardwalk.







Crew Bird Rookery Swamp Trail (CREW = Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed)

Website: <https://crewtrust.org/bird-rookery-swamp-trail/>

Where: 1295 Shady Hollow Blvd W, Naples 34120.

Get There: Immokalee Road then left (shortly past County Fair Grounds) on Shady Hollow Blvd. On the right shortly after Shady Hollow becomes gravel.

When: One hour before sunrise to one hour after sunset.

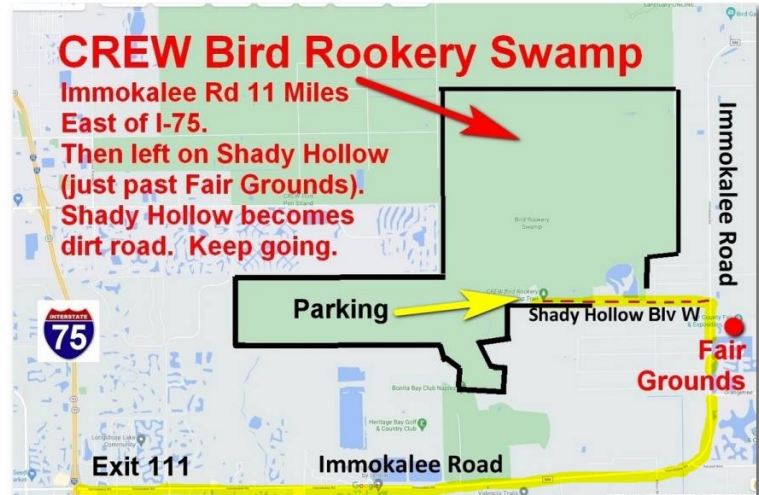
Admission: Free. Don't walk dogs even on leashes.

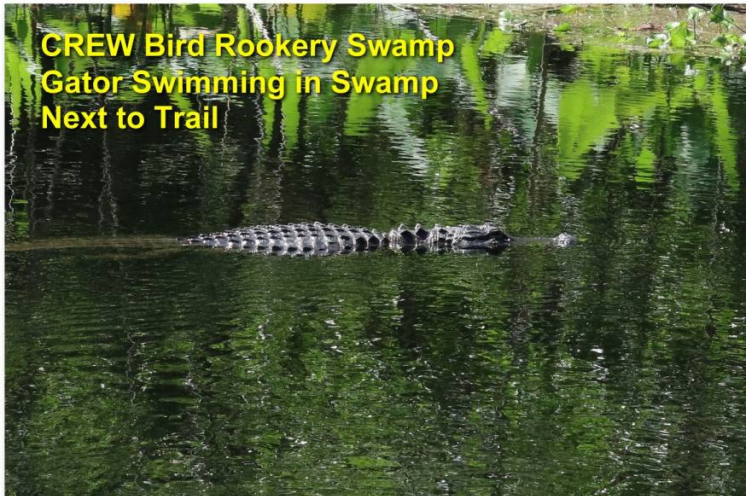
What: 12 miles of hiking and biking on nature trails, including a 1,500-foot boardwalk with wheelchair access.

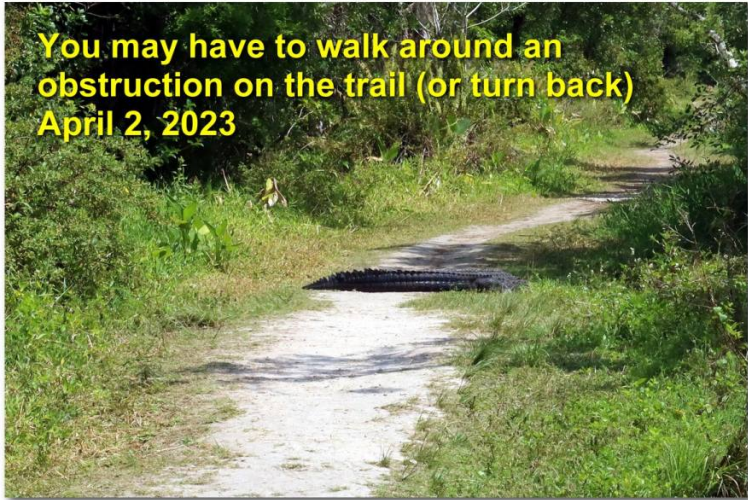
The trails are actually old logging tram roads.

Bird Rookery Swamp is closed until September 2026 for renovations:

- Replace boardwalk.
- New bathrooms.





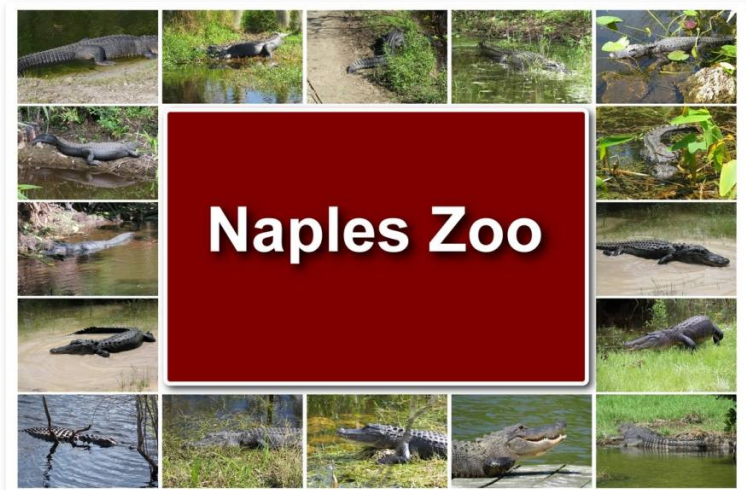


You may have to walk around an obstruction on the trail (or turn back)
April 2, 2023



Big Cypress National Preserve
Oasis Visitor Center
 33100 Tamiami Trail East
 Ochopee, FL 34141
Info and exhibits, plus...
 Great boardwalk to see
 lots of alligators
 swimming in a canal.
 On US-41
 45 mi East of Collier Blvd.
 Website: nps.gov/bicy



Naples Zoo

Website: www.napleszoo.org/

Where: 1590 Goodlette Rd, Naples 34102.

Get There: Just south of Golden Gate Pkwy on Goodlette Road.

Admission: Adults \$23. Children 3-12 \$15. Free parking. 9 am to 4:30 pm daily.

Formal name: The Naples Zoo at Caribbean Gardens.

What: 43-acre zoo and historic botanical garden. 70 species. 375,000 visitors/year.



Freedom Park

Website: <https://www.collierparks.com/>

Where: 1515 Golden Gate Pkwy, Naples. Just east of the intersection of Golden Gate Parkway and Goodlette-Frank Road.

When: Daily 7am to sunset. Education Center 9am to 10pm Mon-Sat.

Admission: Free.

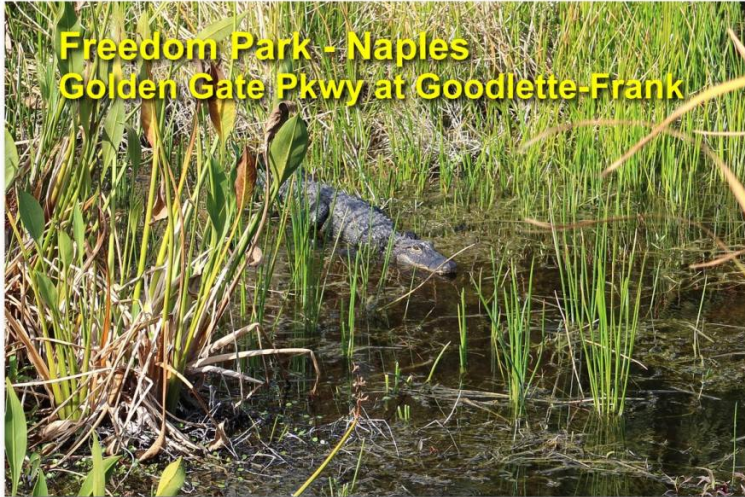
What: 50 acre wetlands.

- 3,500-foot boardwalk over the eastern side of the park.
- Plus trails and six lookout pavilions around the lakes in the western side of the park.
- 2,500 square foot Education Center.
- Freedom Memorial – tribute to the lives lost on 9/11/01 in the terrorist attacks and to the heroes of past and present wars.

**Freedom Park
Across the road from
Coastland Mall
Naples**



**Freedom Park - Naples
Golden Gate Pkwy at Goodlette-Frank**



Freedom Park



**Freedom Park - Naples
January 24, 2026**



Freedom Park



Florida Soft-shell Turtle - Freedom Park



**Let's Finish with a
Few Photos of
Alligators in Several
Other Places Around
Naples**

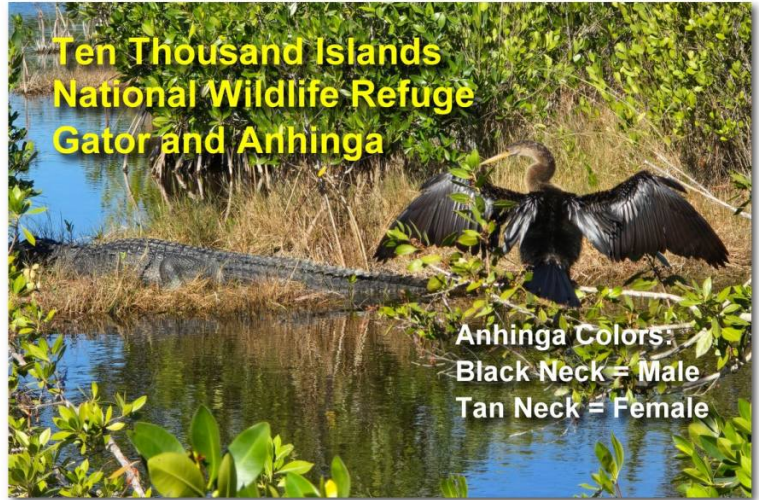


Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge – US41, 11 Mi East of Naples



Turtle? Tilapia? In Mouth

**Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge
Gator and Anhinga**



**Anhinga Colors:
Black Neck = Male
Tan Neck = Female**

**Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge
Sanibel Island**



**Eagle Lakes Park
US-41 Just West of Collier Blvd
East Naples**



**Roadside Canal Along Tamiami Trail
East of Naples**



**Roadside Canal Along Tamiami Trail
East of Naples**



Roadside Canal Along the Tamiami Trail



Fakahatchee Strand State Park

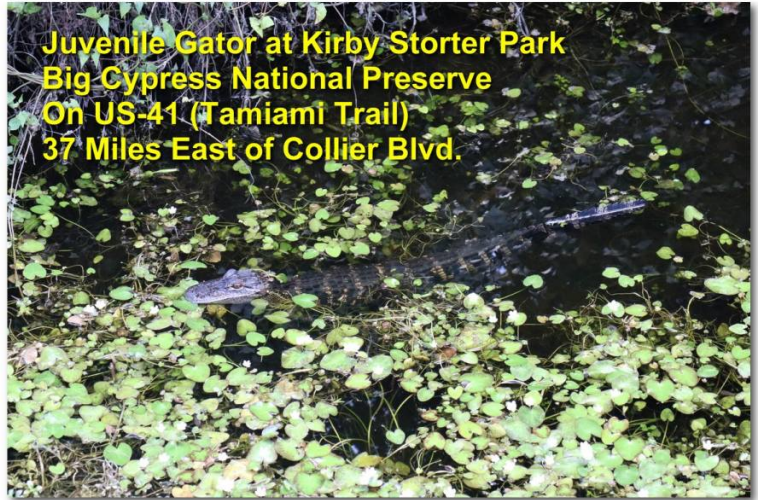


**Along Janes Memorial
Scenic Drive.
From Car Window.**

**Corey Billie's Airboat Rides
US-41 Tamiami Trail - Ochopee**



**Juvenile Gator at Kirby Storter Park
Big Cypress National Preserve
On US-41 (Tamiami Trail)
37 Miles East of Collier Blvd.**



Calusa Nature Center, Fort Myers



**Shark Valley
Everglades Nat'l Park, Tamiami Trail**



On US-41 near Collier-Dade County Line.

**Myakka River State Park - Sarasota
I-75 Exit 205
A bit of a drive, but worth it!**



 Big Cypress Bend	 Bird Rookery Swamp	 Bird Rookery Swamp	 Six-Mile Cypress	 Shark Valley
 Big Cypress Bend	THE END Thanks for Joining Us! ppacter@gmail.com www.paulvisits.com © Paul Pacter, All Rights Reserved			 Corkscrew Swamp
 Corkscrew Swamp				 Turner River Rd
 Turner River Rd				 Turner River Rd
 Turner River Rd	 Turner River Rd	 Turner River Rd	 Six-Mile Cypress	 10,000 Islands NWR