

240309 BRA Wildlife Everglades National Park

Flamingo campground is at the base of the Everglades national park. It's very isolated and is at the dead end of route 9332. You would expect that in such an area wildlife would be abundant. We were not disappointed.



If you go to Flamingo, please go to the visitor center. It's like any other national park, well done, professionally curated, and informative. Spend some time and look at the exhibits. You really get an idea for what the park has to offer and especially some of the history for how the park was formed.



I had to take this photo and tell the story. When we launched our canoe earlier and entered the Cottonwood canal on a backcountry trek, we were barely 200 yards north of the marina when a manatee appeared in front of us. It was a large,

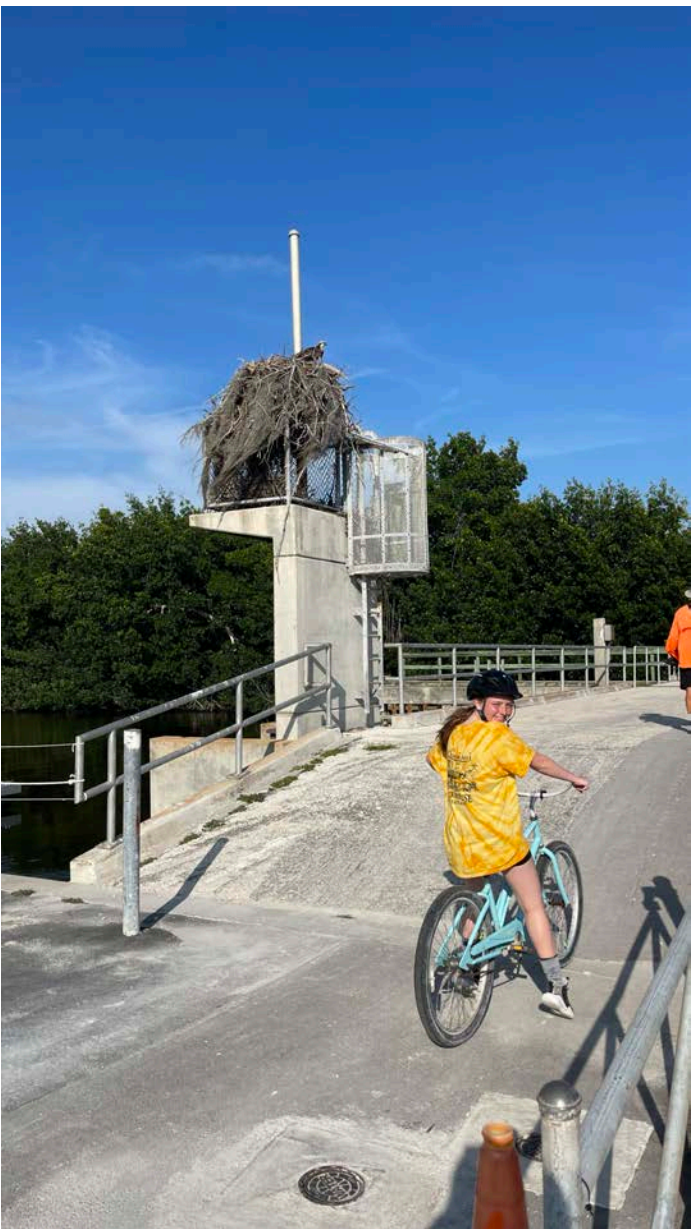
female or male. It came at the boat and three times did a barrel roll. It bumped against the side of the canoe hitting its tail on the right side, rolled and did the same on the left side, then finally rolled and hit the right side. I would have a picture, but I did not take it because I really thought he was going to tip us over. I think if we were in a kayak, we would have been hard-pressed not to have rolled over. I still don't know if the manatee did this out of being playful or protective. I didn't really fear anything other than getting wet, but it was an experience.



The visitor center describes the eco systems that are present in the park. There is a wide variety of estuary, freshwater and saltwater habitats. It's worth some time reading through the different exhibits to get an idea for what is around you.



Then we had two hours of bike rentals that we wanted to take advantage of in the late afternoon. The park personnel had basically left at 5 PM and we had it all to ourselves. That's when we were really amazed at the wildlife that came out in the late afternoon. It was really worth that extra time that we spent at the end of the day.



There were osprey everywhere. One pair had set up a nest on top of a gauge that controlled a spillway for the Cottonwood Canal. It was a massive nest. There were two adults, male and female with two chicks. And they were screeching out into the mangroves. Their calls were returned by other osprey that you could hear in the distance. Then one of the adults took off, and as it was flying, was dipping his talons into the water. I was hoping to see it lift up a fish, but it did not. Really cool.



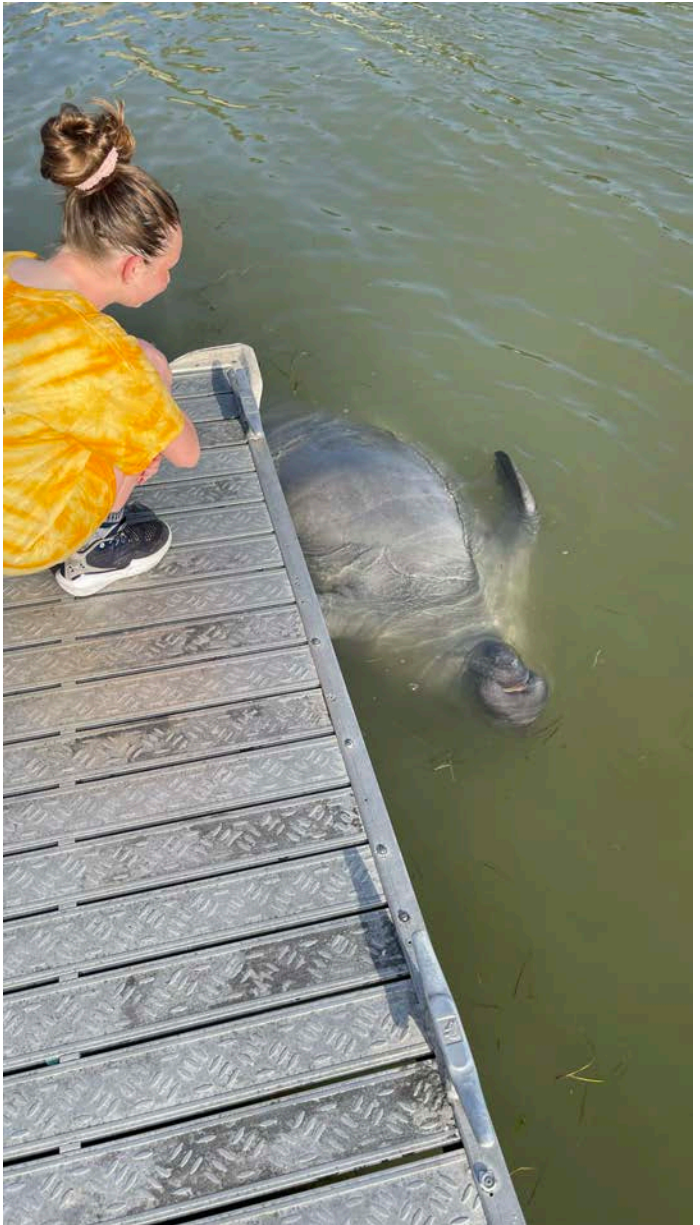
And then we found what my daughter was looking for, either an alligator or a crocodile, and we saw both. This one had come ashore to sun itself, and the park staff immediately put up a barrier there to keep people from approaching it. It's sad to say that if the barrier was not there, I am sure somebody would've tried to come up and get too close with either a camera or a stick. So I'm glad the barrier was there. It didn't move. It just laid there getting warm.



You can't see here, but an older man held his hand up to the sun behind him, and as he waved it overhead it cast its shadow onto the crocodiles head. As the shadow went back-and-forth, it woke it up. The shadows movement caused it to open his mouth. So you see why the barrier is such a great idea.



Finally, my families favorite is the manatee. We saw a group of manatees at least four or five swimming near the base of the cottonwood canal. Seagrass had piled up against The Canal spillway and they were just having a feast. It's so rare to be able to get this close to these animals. You cannot do so commercially anymore in tours and to be able to be right next to one is quite special.



The gentle giant just laid there on its back. I was able to bend down and scratch it, just under the front flipper. This is a favorite place for manatees because it's that itching location that you can never reach, if you know what I mean. We used to be able to do this when we took tours but from what I

understand you can no longer get close to these animals anymore. I suppose that's good because for every person that's responsible you're gonna have some dummy that will do something stupid.



But my daughter really enjoyed it. The manatee just kept coming back over and over again. It also was licking and working its way along the bottom of the aluminum structure that we were standing on. I'm sure that it was to collect salt that had accumulated through the evaporation of the brackish water from the metal surface. All animals need salt. There can be no other explanation because it wasn't eating the aluminum. It was getting something off of the surface.



Be happy!