Everglades

National Park
Florida

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Tropical life from Caribbean islands blends with temperate species in the Everglades. The result is a rich mixture of plants and animals in a unique setting. The Everglades, never wholly known, invites you to explore its mysteries. Give this park half a chance, take the time, and you will discover wonder itself. You can drive through its skinny pine trees and miss its forests, or drive through its sawgrass and miss the glades. Many take such a hurried look. But try it another way. Talk and walk with a ranger. Slow down. Be moved by the slow, sure movement of this river of grass.

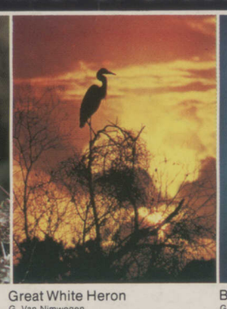
A freshwater river 15 centimeters (6 inches) deep and 80 kilometers (50 miles) wide creeps seaward through the Everglades on a riverbed that slopes ever so gradually. During the wet season the water may seem to be still, but it is flowing. Along its long course, the water drops 4.6 meters (15 feet), finally emptying into Florida Bay. Everglades . . . the name suggests a boundless refreshment. It actually means a marshy land covered with scattered tall grasses. The national park's 566,000 hectares (some 1.4 million acres) contain only part of the watery expanse for which it is named. Despite the park's size, its environment is threatened by the disruptive activities of agriculture, industry, and urban development around it. There is no guarantee that the endangered species protected in the park since its establishment in 1947 will survive. The importance and uniqueness of the Everglades ecosystem have been recognized by its designation as an International Biosphere Reserve and a World Heritage Site. But it will take both human concern and prudent management to preserve the park's natural treasures. The Everglades' subtropical climate governs its life. The nearly uniform warm, sunny weather makes the park a year-round attraction, but there are two distinct seasons. Summer is wet; winter, dry. Heavy rains fall during intense storms from late May through October. Warm, humid conditions bring abundant insects, including mosquitoes, which are important to intricate food webs. Precipitation can exceed 127 centimeters (50 inches) a year.

Life hangs by a thread in the Everglades. The problem? Water, freshwater, the life-blood of the Everglades. It appears to be everywhere but man has drastically blocked its free flow through south Florida. Conflicting demands compete for this precious water, leaving the Everglades, at Florida's southernmost tip, struggling to survive. Life hangs in the balance, a very delicate balance. Despite an apparent lush richness, water supplies are critical and porous limestone underlies the entire park. Rooting plants have only a thin mantle of marl and peat atop this limestone for their support. If not protected the Everglades' fragile richness would quickly vanish.

Problems persist. Agricultural development and the continued mushrooming of metropolitan Miami demand increasing amounts of water, depleting water supplies. This, in turn, increases the threat of fire, which can destroy thin soils, inviting the invasion of exotic plants and animals that upset natural habitats. Native vegetation critical to Everglades ecology is depleted. The diversity and complexity protecting the fabric of life are diminished. The problems are linked and mutually reinforcing. The continued unchecked population growth of south Florida poses severe ecological problems. An aerial view of the region and its canals looks today like a plumber's schematic diagram. Once the benefactor of south Florida's naturally well-watered richness, the Everglades now competes at the end of a man-controlled supply line. To the north, flood prevention, agriculture, irrigation, frost protection, pest control, drinking water, and sewage dilution systems siphon off shares. Proper water delivery to the park in the summer wet season and winter dry season is critical for the survival of wildlife. Man is as much a part of the Everglades as the alligator, but our conflicting actions as consumers and conservers have irrevocably changed south Florida and altered the Everglades ecosystem. Concern for protecting rookeries of herons, ibis, and other wading birds from commercial plume hunting and other human impacts motivated the creation of the park. Ironically, millions of people now seek sanctuary here. Ultimately places like the Everglades may be the last refuge, not just of eagles, crocodiles, and wood storks, but of people, too.

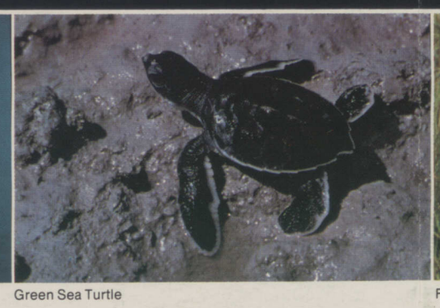
Wildlife Treasures in a River of Grass

Osprey
C. Singletary



Great White Heron
G. Van Nimwegen

Brown Pelican
G. Van Nimwegen



Green Sea Turtle

Florida Panther

Crocodile

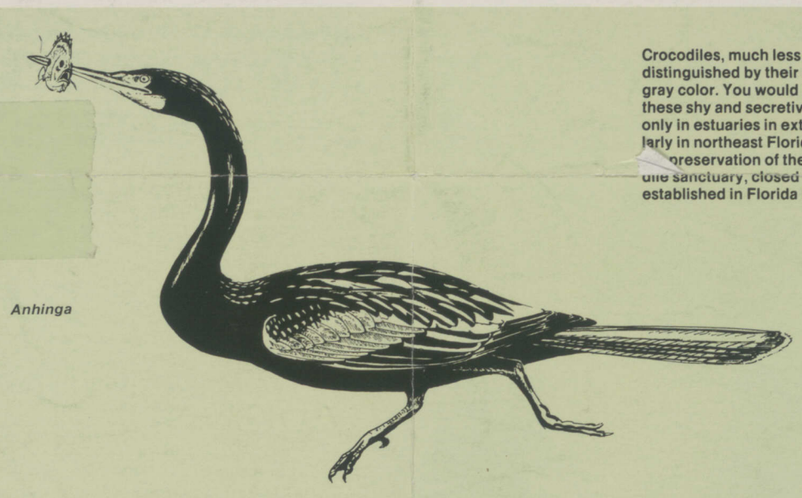
Wood Stork
C. Singletary

Southern Bald Eagle
A. Sprunt IV

Manatee

Summer's high water levels enable animals to range throughout the park. You will not then see the concentrations of wildlife that are typical of winter months. Summer offers different attractions—mountainous cumulus clouds, lush vegetation, spectacular sunsets, calm waters. It means rebirth and replenishment for the Everglades, and natural change. Violent winds and torrential rains of hurricanes may sweep northward from June to November. The Everglades winter is mild, with inclement weather rare and insects less bothersome. With winter's dry season, wildlife must congregate in and around the waterholes. Many are visible from nature trails. Birds change their feeding habits as food grows scarce toward the end of the dry season. They leave roadside ponds they frequent early in the season, moving northward to more abundant food supplies.

The continued survival of the Everglades now depends on careful, complementary management programs carried out by the National Park Service and other agencies. These programs often promote positive economic values. Recently new fishing regulations have been adopted to limit the taking of fish to protect against overharvesting. Research into the role of fire in some plant communities, into the ecology of endangered species, and into the ways in which exotic plants might be controlled is continuing.

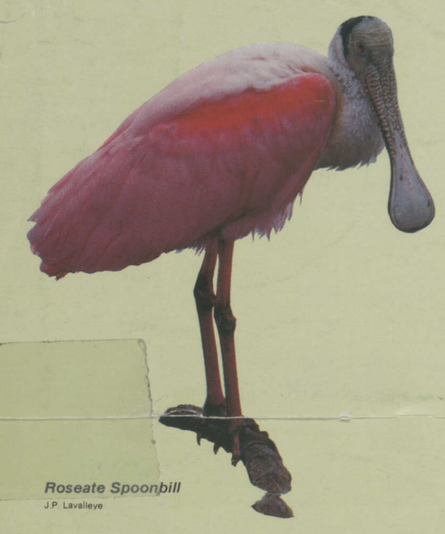


Anhinga

Crocodiles, much less common than alligators, are distinguished by their narrower snouts and greenish-gray color. You would be very lucky to see one of these shy and secretive creatures. They are found only in estuaries in extreme southern Florida, particularly in northeast Florida Bay. Their survival hinges on the preservation of their dwindling habitat. A crocodile sanctuary, closed to public access, has been established in Florida Bay for their protection.

The rare, shy, harmless manatee weighs close to a ton and measures more than 4.6 meters (15 feet) in length. Also called a sea cow, the animal is entirely herbivorous, feeding on aquatic plants. Man's motorboats and propellers kill many manatees yearly and pose this easy-going creature's greatest threat. The Florida panther, or cougar, is among North America's rarest mammals. The major threat to the survival of these big cats is loss of the extensive habitat over which they stealthily stalk their prey. They are still seen, though rarely, in the pinelands and along the main park road.

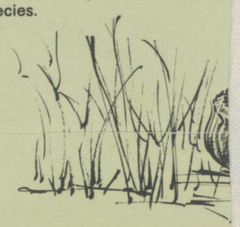
Tree Snail



Roseate Spoonbill
J.P. Lavalleye

The Everglades is best known for its abundance and variety of birdlife. At Flamingo you may be able to watch roseate spoonbills, large pink birds often mistaken for flamingos. Reddish egrets and rare great white herons live and breed in Florida Bay. About 50 pairs of southern bald eagles nest along the coast. Some of the endangered birds can sometimes be seen from the breezeway of the Flamingo Visitor Center. Other rare and endangered species found in the park include the Florida panther, manatee, Everglades mink, green sea turtle, loggerhead turtle, Florida sandhill crane, snail kite, short-tailed hawk, peregrine falcon, Cape Sable sparrow, and crocodile. Other species also require the special protection Everglades National Park provides. These include the alligator, reddish egret, spoonbill, Florida mangrove cuckoo, osprey, brown pelican, and roundtail muskrat. But for this protected habitat, many would soon be threatened.

Large populations of Cape Sable sparrows once found at Cape Sable and Big Cypress are almost gone. Only widely scattered individuals remain. Taylor Slough's muhly grass prairie supports an active population, but exotic, non-native plants threaten to close in the open prairie this sparrow needs for survival. Short-tailed hawks prey on the sparrow. When abundant habitat fostered an abundance of Cape Sable sparrows this natural predation posed no to the species.



The alligator is the best known Everglades citizen. Unfortunately, its hide has been greatly prized for high fashion shoes and handbags. The alligator once waged a losing battle against poachers and habitat loss, but it has now staged a comeback, aided by nation-wide protection. Recently, 75 percent of the nation's alligators were removed from the endangered species list and reclassified as threatened.

The alligator has earned the title "Keeper of the Everglades." It cleans out the large holes dissolved in the Everglades' limestone bed. These serve as oases in the dry winter season. Fish, turtles, snails, and other freshwater animals seek refuge in these life-rich solution holes, which become feeding grounds for alligators, birds, and mammals until the rains come. Survivors, both predators and prey, then quit the holes to

Things to See and Do

Visitor Centers Stop by a park visitor center and pick up park information. A short introductory film is shown regularly at the main visitor center, 17 kilometers (10.8 miles) southwest of Homestead. Books on the Everglades are sold here, too. An entrance fee is charged only if you enter the park through the main entrance. Descriptions of trails and points of interest appear above the map on the reverse side.

Birdwatching The chance to see rare birds, such as the American bald eagle and the snail kite, and spectacular seasonal displays of water birds lure people to the Everglades. Some species that are uncommon or endangered throughout the United States or the world are relatively common in the park. Early morning and late afternoon are the best times for birdwatching.

Ranger-Guided Activities Naturalists give hikes, walks, canoe trips, tram tours, demonstrations, and campfire programs during the year. Activities change daily. One day there may be a sunrise bird walk or a paddle out into Florida Bay or a crosscountry slough slog or a moonlight tram tour. Ask at the visitor centers for schedules.

Hiking Trails range from easy walks of less than 400 meters (0.25 mile) to more strenuous ones 23 kilometers (14 miles) long. For more information, see "Walking Trails" on the reverse side or ask a park ranger. See the map for trail locations.

Fishing Inland and coastal waters of the Everglades are popular fishing grounds. There is largemouth bass fishing in freshwater ponds. The most sought-after saltwater species are snapper, redfish, and trout. Freshwater fishing requires a Florida state license; saltwater fishing does not. Florida fishing regulations apply in most cases, but special additional federal regulations must be followed within the park boundary. Special bag limits have been established. The taking of spiny lobster, or crawfish, is prohibited. Spearguns are not allowed. Some freshwater and saltwater areas are closed to fishing. For a list of closed areas, and a copy of the park's fishing regulations, ask at visitor centers or ranger stations.

Boating The park's many inland and coastal waterways lead to remote parts of the Everglades. Several marked canoe trails near Flamingo, rivers near Everglades City, Whitewater Bay, and other areas also offer good boating opportunities. Boaters can explore the shallow waters of Florida Bay, too. Most bay islands are closed to boat landings to protect nesting birds. A small portion of the bay has been closed to protect the endangered American crocodile. Boaters must always be on the lookout for manatees and should slow their boats when entering known manatee areas. See "Marina and Boats" for additional information.

Information To find out more about the park, write: Information, Everglades National Park, P.O. Box 279, Homestead, FL 33030; or call (305) 247-6211. (TTY/TTD service—Persons with a teletypewriter, a telecommunication device for the deaf, can use this number, too.) The non-profit Everglades Natural History Association sells publications at the main visitor center and by mail. Write the association at P.O. Box 279, Homestead, FL 33030, for a catalog.

Facilities and Services

	Visitor center/information	Motel, cabins	Restaurant	Gasoline station	Marina, store, gifts	Campground	Sewage dump station	Showers	Private campground	Picnic area	Boat rentals, tours	Tram tours	Insect repellent	Film
Main Visitor Center	●											●	●	
Royal Palm Visitor Center	●											●	●	
Long Pine Key					●	●			●					
Flamingo	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Shark Valley	●										●	●	●	
Everglades City/Gulf Coast	●	●	●	●	●			●		●		●	●	

Some services are limited or unavailable between May 1 and mid-December.

Camping in the Park Park campgrounds at Long Pine Key and Flamingo have drinking water, picnic tables, grills, tent and trailer pads, and restrooms. Flamingo also has cold water showers. Recreational vehicles are permitted, but there are no electrical, water, or sewage hookups. Campground stays are limited to 14 days from November 1 to April 30. Fees are charged during the winter season. Group sites can be reserved from November 1 to April 30; write or call for details. Backcountry campsites are accessible by boat, foot, or bicycle. A free permit, issued at ranger stations on a first-come, first-served basis no more than 24 hours before the start of your trip, is required. The number of campers allowed at each designated site is limited to guard against overuse and to increase opportunities for solitude.

Marina and Boats The Flamingo marina rents small powered skiffs, houseboats, patio boats, and canoes. The marina can accommodate boats up to 18 meters (60 feet) long with boat trailer parking and free launch access. Slip fees are based on boat length. Canoes can also be rented from a concessioner in Everglades City. Navigational charts can be purchased at the Flamingo marina, the main visitor center, and in Homestead, Miami, and Everglades City. Boat tours at Flamingo explore the mangrove wilderness and Florida Bay. Sightseeing boats also go into the Ten Thousand Islands region and the mangrove swamps of the northwestern Everglades; these concession-operated tours leave from the Gulf Coast Ranger Station.

Information For general information about facilities and services, contact the park (see "Information" under "Things to See and Do" for address and telephone number). For specific information about concesssion-operated services, contact the following. **Flamingo:** for information and reservations for Flamingo Lodge motel and cabins and for information on the marina and store, boat tours and rentals, tram tours, gift shop, restaurant, and gasoline station, write Flamingo Lodge, Marina and Outpost Resort, Flamingo, FL 33030; or call (813) 695-3101 or (305) 253-2241. **Shark Valley:** for tram tour information and reservations, call (305) 221-8455. **Everglades City/Gulf Coast:** for boat tour and rental information, write Everglades National Park Boat Tours, P.O. Box 119, Everglades City, FL 33929; or call 1-800-445-7724 (in Florida) or 1-800-233-1821 (out-of-state).

Regulations and Safety

Please help us protect the Everglades. Practice good outdoor manners. Put litter in trash receptacles. Backcountry users must carry their litter out with them. Observe safety and courtesy rules. Enjoy your visit in a way that lets others enjoy theirs.

Plants and Animals After years of protection many animals, such as alligators, lose their natural fear of people. You can view them at close range, but this does not mean they are tame. They are still wild. **DO NOT DISTURB THE WILDLIFE AND DO NOT FEED THEM.** Even friendly looking animals, like raccoons, can be dangerous. For your safety, watch for poisonous snakes, including coral snakes, water moccasins, and diamondback and pygmy rattlers.

BE WELL PREPARED FOR MOSQUITOES, particularly in the warmer, wetter months of summer. Bring insect repellent, or plan to buy some when you arrive. A longsleeved shirt, long pants, and a cover for your head will help guard against being bitten.

Do not damage, remove, or disturb any plants. They, like the animals, are protected under park regulations. Watch for poisonous plants, such as poison ivy, poisonwood, and manchineel.

Hiking Off Trails Be careful of your footing. Mucky soil, sharp-edged pinnacle rock, and holes can make walking tricky. Let someone know your schedule and planned route before you leave.

Driving The maximum driving speed is 88 kilometers (55 miles) per hour. Reduced speed limits are posted. Drive slowly; the road is designed for your enjoyment of the scenery. Watch carefully for animals crossing the road to avoid hitting them.

Fire Be careful with fires. Do not smoke on trails. Self-contained cooking stoves should be used at backcountry campsites.

Pets Pets must be under physical restrictive control. They are not allowed on trails or in amphitheaters.

Airboats, Swamp Buggies, and All Terrain Vehicles These vehicles are not permitted in the park. They destroy vegetation, and their noise scares the wildlife.

Hunting Using any firearms or other hunting apparatus that could injure wildlife is prohibited.

Park rangers are here to help you enjoy your visit. Do not hesitate to ask their assistance or guidance. Please report any fire, accident, violation, or other unusual incident to them.

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