

**SOUTHWEST FLORIDA WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY GUIDE**  
**BY**  
**TERRY BOYER**



**SANIBEL-CAPTIVA**  
**J. N. DING DARLING WILDLIFE REFUGE**

THIS IS ONE OF THE BEST LOCATIONS IN FLORIDA TO VIEW AND PHOTOGRAPH A WIDE VARIETY OF WILDLIFE. THE BEST TIMES TO VISIT SANIBEL AND SOUTHWEST FLORIDA IS DECEMBER THROUGH MARCH. THIS AREA IS IDEAL AT THIS TIME BECAUSE OF THE NORTH-SOUTH MIGRATORY ROUTES. THIS IS A HEAVLY VISITED AREA WHICH ENABLES PHOTOGRAPHERS THE ABILITY TO GET VERY CLOSE TO THE BIRDS. HOURS FOR THE REFUGE ARE 7:30 AM TO 6:00 PM. PHOTOGRAPHY IS GOOD THROUGHOUT THE DAY FOR A WIDE VARIETY OF WILDLIFE BUT YOUR BEST OPPORTUNITIES WILL BE EARLY MORNING AT LOW TIDE FOR FEEDING BIRDS. YOU SHOULD BE AT THE GATE BY 7:15 AM. THE 5 MILE DRIVE THROUGH THE REFUGE IS OPEN EVERY DAY EXCEPT FRIDAY. THE ENTRANCE FEE IS \$4. PER CAR PER DAY. IF YOU ARE GOING FOR MORE THAN 2 DAYS A SEASON PASS IS AVAILABLE FOR \$10. AT THE VISITOR CENTER. WHEN DRIVING THROUGH THE REFUGE LOOK CLOSELY ON THE BANKS AND MANGROVES OF THE CANAL FOR WILDLIFE. IF YOU STAY IN THE CAR AND DRIVE THROUGH YOU WILL MISS YOU'RE BEST CHANCE TO PHOTOGRAPH YELLOWCROWNED NIGHT HERONS FEEDING ON CRABS ETC. THERE ARE NO RESTRICTIONS ABOUT GETTING OUT OF YOUR CAR TO TAKE PICTURES. PHONE NO. 813-472-2329

**EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENTS:**

- 500MM IS IDEAL
- 300MM WITH A 1.4 OR 2X CONVERTER IS GOOD
- WIDE ANGLE LENS FOR SUNSETS AND SCENICS
- FILM PROVIA F 100 OR EKTACHROME VS 100 ARE MY CHOICE
- TRIPOD IS A MUST
- SUNTAN LOTION
- INSECT REPELANT BETTER SAFE THAN SORRY

**BAILEY TRACT**

PART OF DING DARLING REFUGE AND IS LOCATED A SHORT DISTANCE AWAY ON TARPON BAY ROAD. IT HAS A PARKING AREA AND YOU WALK ON THE TRAILS ALONG A NUMBER OF PONDS AND WATERWAYS. WADING BIRDS ARE OFTEN FOUND FEEDING IN THESE PONDS. LONG LENSES WILL BE NECESSARY.

### **LIGHTHOUSE PARK**

LOCATED AT THE SOUTH END OF SANIBEL IS A GREAT PLACE FOR PHOTOGRAPHING BEACH BIRDS. PLOVERS, WILLETS AND OTHER SMALL BIRDS CAN BE SEEN AT ALL TIMES AND ARE VERY TAME. THE FISHING BRIDGE ATTRACKS EGRETS, HERONS, AND PELICANS. THESE BIRDS ARE SO CLOSE YOU CAN ALMOST TOUCH THEM. THIS IS ONE OF THE BEST PLACES FOR PORTRAITS. LENSES IN THE 300MM RANGE ARE GOOD FOR THE BEACH AND AN 80-200 ZOOM WILL WORK WELL ON THE PEIR.

### **CORKSCREW SWAMP SANCTUARY**

OWNED AND OPERATED BY THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY. IT HAS A 2 ¼ MILE BOARDWALK THAT LOOPS THROUGH THE LARGEST BALD CYPRESS TREES IN THE STATE. SOME OF THESE TREES ARE OVER 500 YEARS OLD AND HARBORS, WHEN WATER LEVELS ARE RIGHT, THE LARGEST WOOD STOCK ROOKERY IN THE NATION. A GOOD DEAL OF THE WALKWAY IS IN WATER AND YOU COULD SEE A GOOD VARIETY OF REPTILES AND WADING BIRDS. LENSES SHOULD INCLUDE AT LEAST A 300MM LENS AND A MACRO LENS FOR TREE FROGS. TO REACH THE SANCTUARY FROM SABIBEL TAKE I75 S TO EXIT 17 ( NOT CORKSCREW RD ) AND GO EAST RT 846 TO ENTRANCE SIGN. THIS IS A MUST STOP FOR PHOTOGRAPHY. PHONE NO. 941-657-3771

### **SIX MILE CYPRESS SLOUGH PRESERVE**

THIS IS A 1.2 MILE BOARDWALK THAT PASSES OVER A WETLAND SYSTEM THAT HAS BLINDS AND OBSERVATION PLATFORMS TO VIEW A VARIETY OF WADING BIRDS AND REPTILES. WOODED AREAS SUPPORT PILEATED WOODPECKERS. LONG LENSES ARE NECESSARY 300 AND UP.

### **VENICE ROOKERY**

THIS IS A SMALL BUT EXCELLENT ROOKERY LOCATED IN SOUTH VENICE JUST BEHIND POLICE HEADQUARTERS ON ROUTE 41. FROM ROUTE 75 TAKE EXIT 35 JACARANDA BLVD. TO RT. 41 MAKE A RIGHT TURN AND GET IN THE FAST LANE POLICE HEADQUARTERS IS YOUR FIRST LEFT. YOU WILL TYPICALLY SEE NESTING GREAT BLUE HERONS, BLACK CAPPED NIGHT HERONS, CATTLE EGRET, SNOWY EGRETS, AND ANHINGAS NESTING ON A SMALL ISLAND 30 YARDS FROM THE PONDS EDGE. BALD EAGLES FREQUENTLY WILL CIRCLE THE POND LOOKING FOR FISH. HERE IS A GREAT SPOT TO PHOTOGRAPH BIRDS WITH TWIGS FLYING TO THE NESTS.

### **CARL JOHNSON REGIONAL PARK**

THIS COUNTY PARK IS LOCATED IN TWO ECOSYSTEMS: A MANGROVE ESTUARY AND A SANDY BARRIER ISLAND. ONCE AT THE

PARK YOU CAN TAKE A TRAM TO THE BEACH OR WALK THE HALF-MILE BOARDWALK. ALONG THE WAY IS AN OSPREY NEST. WHEN AT THE BEACH YOU CAN PHOTOGRAPH WADING BIRDS, SEAGULLS, AND RACOONS. YOU WILL SEE RACOONS AROUND THE PICNIC TABLES. THEY COME OUT IN THE DAY BEGGING FOR FOOD. THIS IS A VERY NICE BEACH TO SHELL AND RELAX. THE PARK IS LOCATED ON HIGHWAY 865 SOUTH OF FT MEYERS BEACH, DRIVE ACROSS THE CAUSEWAY OVER BIG CARLOS PASS TO PARK ON THE RIGHT.

### **FT. MEYERS BEACH**

LOCATED BEHIND THE HOLIDAY INN AT FT. MEYERS BEACH ON ESTERO BLVD. IS A GREAT PLACE TO PHOTOGRAPH A WIDE VARIETY OF SHORE BIRDS. IT IS NECESSARY TO WADE ANGLE DEEP THROUGH THE LAGOON SO BE PREPARED TO WEAR WADING SHOES, OLD SNEAKERS ETC. TIMING THE TIDE WITH THE SUNRISE WILL ENHANCE YOUR OPPORTUNITY FOR SPECTACULAR PHOTOGRAPHY. A TRIPOD WITH A 500MM LENS OR EQUIVALANT WOULD BE IDEAL. TRY TO STAY LOW TO THE GROUND AT EYE LEVEL TO THE BIRDS. THE FOLKS AT THE HOLIDAY INN DON'T SEEM TO MIND YOU PARKING IN THEIR LOT AND WALKING BEHIND THE HOTEL. I PARK AS FAR FROM THE FACILITY AS POSSIBLE NOT TO ANNOY ANYONE. DON'T RUIN A GOOD THING.

### **ST. AUGUSTINE ALLIGATOR FARM**

THIS IS WITHOUT A DOUBT ONE OF THE BEST PLACES IN THE COUNTRY TO PHOTOGRAPH NESTING BIRDS. THE BEST TIME TO VISIT IS MID MAY. GREAT EGRETS, SHOWY EGRETS, TRI COLOR HERONS AND CATTLE EGRETS ARE NESTING AS CLOSE AS A FOOT FROM THE BOARDWALK THAT WINDS THROUGH THE SWAMP AREA OF THE ZOO. YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO SEE IBIS, SPOONBILLS AND OTHER BIRDS THAT ROOST IN THE AFTERNOON. THE ZOO HAS WELL OVER 1000 ALLIGATORS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD AND IS A BEAUTIFUL PLACE TO VISIT. THE ZOO OPENS AT 9AM BUT IF YOU HAVE THE ANNUAL PASS THEY WILL LET YOU IN AT 8AM AT THE RED DOOR BY THE PARKING LOT. BE READY AND BE EARLY. YOU WON'T BE ALONE. IN THE EVENING THEY MIGHT LET YOU STAY AFTER CLOSING TO ALLOW YOU TO ENJOY A WARMER LIGHT. JUST ASK ONE OF THE RANGERS IF ANYONE WILL STAY PAST CLOSING. THEY ENCOURAGE PHOTOGRAPHERS TO COME TO THEIR FACILITY AND EVEN HAVE AN ANNUAL PHOTO CONTEST. THE ZOO IS LOCATED ON A1A/ANASTASIA BLVD. PHONE #904-824-3337 OR VISIT THEIR WEB SITE [WWW.ALLIGATORFARM.COM](http://WWW.ALLIGATORFARM.COM)