

The Traveling Nature Photographer Blog

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Shooting Florida: Second in the Series

Shooting in Florida has so many aspects. You have wonderful sunrises and sunsets. You have many kinds of animals from the whitetail deer to the Florida deer to a huge variety of birds that range from raptors to wading birds and all the in-betweens.

There is a pretty varied landscape in Florida as well. The panhandle as the white beaches, forests, and tourist attractions. The inland lakes, caves and mineral springs that dot the landscape. You have a huge prairie that houses many varieties of animals and plants.

You may have noticed that there are some animals I have not listed. That is on purpose. There are black bears in a moderately large quantity, Florida panthers, snakes, insects and of course alligators. Then there is the manatee. I have separated the manatees as they are basically cows in the water. The others can be dangerous and deadly so I put them in a class by themselves.

As I said before I am going to divide this state up because it is so diverse. This installment of the Florida shooting blog is going to be a general area about where to find the animals you may want to photograph.

The very first thing you need to do if you are going to do serious photography work is to decide what images you want and why. There are many standard places to go to photograph the animals in Florida. You have the Alligator Farm in St. Augustine. You have Merritt Island, Ding Darling and of course the Everglades. There are many others as well. I am going to hit some of the less known places.

Honeymoon Island State Park and the Dunedin Causeway are good places to photograph birds. The causeway is a very busy place a lot of the time and I mean crowded. The park beaches are crowded and the wading birds are not so numerous. One suggestion if you are going to a place like Florida, do not call gulls seagulls. They are not. Each type has its own name. The laughing gull is the most common and has that funny loud noise. Then you have the ring-billed gull. The list goes on and so will the locals viewing you as a typical tourist which means very little help finding great places to photograph birds. The sunsets on the west-facing beach up by the trails are magnificent. You should be prepared for insects like mosquitos and noseums. The trails on the island have owl nests, osprey nests, and eagle nests. Depending on the time of year you go the birds may be flying low and slow hauling nesting materials. You may see breeding activity or even young fledglings.

On the causeway to Honeymoon,, you can see various birds and watch the ospreys hunt and shake the water off as they rise from the water. If you spend some time there in the morning or evening you will have a good chance to see dolphins pretty close to the shore. Honeymoon is also the home of some eastern diamondback rattlesnakes. There is a nice visitor center inside the park to get information on the various things on the island.

Manatees are pretty easy to see if you take the time and effort to do so. My favorite place to see them is at Safety Harbor. It is a wonderful small town on the bay in Pinellas County not far from Palm Harbor. I will put a

link to some information about the town. There is a marina with a large fishing pier that is open all the time. Manatees like to come by and see people it seems. You may get one to follow the pier walkway and only be a few feet away from you. As with most places in Florida around the beaches and marinas the birds are ever-present for your enjoyment and for photographing.

There are a couple of county parks in the area also. My favorite is John Chestnut Park in Palm Harbor just north of Oldsmar. Oldsmar has a nice park on the bay with a fishing pier also. I prefer Chestnut to the other parks as it has the weeping oaks as some call them, a lake, a small island area that protrudes into the large lake that is called Tarpon Lake. The locals call it alligator lake. I think you can figure that one out on your own. The park has a nice herd of deer that you can see pretty much any day you wish to go. The back area of the park is where they come out almost every day. When you leave there is a meadow to your left that will almost always have few deer enjoying an evening meal of grass.

The other park is called Walled Spring. It has a large kids playground. It sits right on the Pinellas bike and hiking trail. It also has piers that extend into the Gulf Of Mexico. It is different than Chestnut but has its own charm.

All of these sit in about a ten-mile circle on the west coast of Florida in the Clearwater area of Pinellas County. As I get more time I will compile a list of places to photograph what kind of animals and scenery and how to get there. Until next time, be safe and do no harm.

John Chestnut Park:



Honeymoon Island and Dunedin Causeway:

