

TEXT

America's Everglades – The largest subtropical wilderness in the United States

Everglades National Park protects an unparalleled landscape that provides important habitat for numerous rare and endangered species like the manatee, American crocodile, and the elusive Florida panther.

An international treasure as well – a World Heritage Site, International Biosphere Reserve, a Wetland of International Importance, and a specially protected area under the Cartagena Treaty.

The Everglades is an expansive area of land in south Florida, which consists of 1.5 million acres of wetland. Since the park covers such a large area of south Florida, planning is a must. There are three entrances to Everglades National Park and they are not connected, they are accessed through different areas of south Florida.

All these areas offer a wide range of activities. You can take a short walk on the Anhinga Trail to spot abundant wildlife – turtles, herons and alligators! Climb atop Shark Valley's 65-foot observation tower for a bird's eye view of the glades.

Glide over Florida Bay by tour boat or kayak for a chance to glimpse a crocodile, manatee, or dolphin. Watch as the sun sets over Flamingo, the southernmost point in mainland Florida. Explore the pinelands by bike, paddle amongst the mangroves on Nine – Mile Pond, or tour the historic Nike Hercules missile base. Join a ranger on a slough slog deep into the heart of a cypress dome. Find solitude on your own on a week-long canoe trip, camping along the 99-mile Wilderness Waterway. With countless opportunities for discovery the following quick links will help you plan an adventure that's right for you!

It is important to know that the Everglades has two very distinct seasons: dry season and wet season. Dry season lasts from November to March and wet season lasts from April to November. Dry season is also the busy season because of the warm winters that attract the largest variety of wading birds and their predators. Wet season is buggy and many ranger programs are no longer offered. This is why it is important to check ahead of time the current schedule for ranger programs.

The winter dry season, which lasts from December to April, is the best time for wildlife viewing in the park. Weather conditions are generally pleasant during the winter and

standing water levels are low, causing wildlife to congregate at central water locations. Shark Valley, the Anhinga Trail (at Royal Palm), and Eco Pond (one mile past the Flamingo Visitor Center) are good for viewing alligators, wading birds, and other freshwater wildlife. Canoeists can paddle into Snake Bight (near Flamingo) and Chokoloskee Bay (Gulf Coast) before low tide to witness large numbers of water birds feeding in the shallows and on mud flats. A productive freshwater canoeing area is Nine Mile Pond and adjacent borrow pits (11 miles, or 18 km, up the road from Flamingo).

The name Everglades has always been associated with birds. The warm, shallow, and vast River of Grass has attracted all types of birds to this region for thousands of years. In the 1800s, the well-known naturalist and artist, John James Audubon, wrote during a visit to south Florida:

“We observed great flocks of wading birds flying overhead toward their evening roosts... They appeared in such numbers to actually block out the light from the sun for some time.”

In Everglades National Park, more than 360 different species of birds have been sighted. Though there are many different ways to identify one group of birds from another, generally birds can be placed into one of three groups: wading birds, land birds, and birds of prey.