

Photo Journal: September 2, 2007, Biscayne Bay (near the Deering Estate)

Two things would be different for me today; I would be shooting from a kayak with my SLR camera and telephoto lens, and I would have a photography companion who would be using my canoe. My companion is Daniel Cedras, a talented young photographer who has a genuine love of nature and an artistic eye. He also has a deep understanding of the “science” of photography that often gets lost on most people. He loves to teach people about photography and will expertly explain exposure to you. Today would be a new experience for Daniel as well; he had never photographed in Biscayne Bay from a canoe.

We arrived at the Miami-Dade county kayak/canoe launching site near Deering Estate at 6:30 am. Once again, the cumulus clouds were hanging heavy over the horizon where the sun would soon be rising. As we got our boats prepared, we noticed a couple funnel clouds or water spouts coming out of the clouds above the water. Wow, this is Florida at its most interesting. Daniel got his camera out and took a couple shots of the spouts. Here is one of them.



As the sky began to look more ominous, my fishing buddies headed south as Daniel and I headed north toward the bird rookery. It was low tide and we would have access to several wading birds all along the bay this morning. The lighting was low as the clouds filled the horizon and began to look menacing. One of my fishing buddies had her internet phone with her and she got the radar picture of the area to see where the clouds were heading. With the southerly winds, it looked as if the clouds would be moving in a northward direction. We would be fine, but to be safe, we stayed close to the mangrove shoreline as we headed toward the channel near Chicken Key.

The usual crowd was hanging out in the shallows feeding, groups of ibises and nighthérons and along the mangroves we could spot the snowy egrets and green herons. The lighting was not great as the clouds were covering the morning sun. I decided we should head directly to the bird rookery before the weather turned on us. To get to the rookery, we would cross a channel and today there was an ultra-light flying around in the area. We saw a couple large boats but it seems the dark clouds hanging over the water may have scared off some boaters. So it was a calm crossing for us as we approached the bird island rookery. We could here the loud raucous noises of the birds some 500 feet or so away. As we approached, I wondered if the low tide would allow us to get close enough to the island before our boats ran aground. It did and it never got too shallow for us to approach, it was a perfect set up.

It was the same sight I captured a couple weeks ago. The bird island was full of young little blue herons, cattle egrets, tricolor herons and green herons. Immediately we spotted a young blackcrown

nightheron and apparently it was young enough to not be wary of these two humans and boats that were sitting quietly near by. It came out from under the mangrove roots onto the sandbar and began feeding. We managed some shots from our boats. Daniel decided to get out of the boat so he could get closer, but the bird was uncomfortable with that and promptly went back into hiding among the mangrove roots. Here's one of my shots.



We hung out around the island for a couple hours or so. Near by there was a large flock of cormorants in the bay and I decided to get closer for a few shots. Around that time the ultra-light was landing and I was directly in front of it for a shot. It was quite a distance a way, but with the telephoto, it looks uncomfortably close.



The island of birds is a bit challenging for photography. The birds go into hiding very easily with plenty of branches and leaves to hide behind. The young ones are learning to fly, so they would leave the canopy and circle around a few times before landing back down on their perch. Every once in awhile a couple birds would feud over a branch, one would fly up and move to another spot. This is what Daniel attempted to capture most of the morning, birds in flight. I was able to get a couple flight shots, but also managed a few shots of birds perched in the trees. Near the island is the mangrove shoreline where several dozen birds were residing as well. Here's a shot of a couple tricolor herons feeding along the shallows. I headed back to the bay where the cormorants had come back. I didn't manage to get any decent shots of these birds today, they were skittish and began flying away as I approached from what I thought was a comfortable distance. I had my camera settings all wrong, with a low depth of field, some birds were in focus, but most were not. I should have bumped up the ISO to 800, but instead had it set at 400. Overall, those shots were a bust. But, here are a couple of shots of the birds residing in and around the island:



More clouds were forming in the south so we decided to head back. While hanging out near the put-in, I asked Daniel about his experience out here. Let's see, what was his comment? Oh yes: "Too much paddling and not enough photographing". Well, I suppose it's not for everyone, but he did say he would do it again. I think he likes the challenge of it. And that's what is appealing to me as well. If I can get a decent shot from my boat, I consider that an accomplishment. It takes skill to maneuver a canoe for photography and mostly, it takes patience. Yes, you do have to paddle and sometimes you have to paddle the long way in order to get set up with the right lighting and current. But then again, you can sometimes get out of your boat for that perfect shot. In tribute to those photographers who prefer to be outside of a boat and are not afraid to get wet, here's a shot of Daniel.



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