

A Story From the Everglades

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*“We have burned and dredged the Everglades
in the name of progress,
we have hunted its fauna to near extinction...”*

As a child of North Florida, even the whisper of its name would send my imagination reeling. Conjuring fanciful lands of verdant forest teeming with orchids, aviaries, predatory cats, and prehistoric reptiles, the Everglades seemed more like a dream scape than an actual place in my home state. By all measures, I was already surrounded by a bounty of natural wonders. Crystal clear springs, live oak canopies, wetland prairies and freshwater lakes were only minutes from my doorstep in Gainesville.

I spent the latter part of my childhood romping through the blackwater creeks and backwoods oases developing a deep bond with Florida’s bottom lands. The humid swamps, full of spirit and verve, became my photographic training grounds and the foundation for a lifelong love affair. Many people feel uncomfortable with the idea of wading into Florida’s blackwater, but this is what I loved about growing up in the Sunshine State. For many of us, we live with a latent but very palpable fear that when we put our toes into the water there might be something much more ancient, much more adapted than we are.

It’s not often in our modern urban age that we get the chance to feel vulnerable or consider that the world may not have been made for just us. So I sought out the areas where concrete yields to forest, and pines turn to cypress. I found refuge in the sodden landscapes and viewed the mosquitoes, reptiles, and various discomforts as the tangible affirmations that I had found true wilderness.

Over the last three years I experienced the vast watershed in nearly every way imaginable. In vehicles from helicopters to air boats to kayaks and single-propeller airplanes, I tirelessly traversed the Everglades from Lake Okechobee to Florida Bay.

I accompanied biologists tagging endangered American crocodiles, searched for invasive Burmese pythons, conducted nest surveys of roseate spoonbills, and wrangled female alligators to count their eggs. On the weekends I would venture into the most remote sections of the backcountry in search of the very soul that makes the River of Grass unique. I lived and breathed the Everglades, and my childlike fascination with this wilderness never fully matured.

I am awed by the vibrant biodiversity and timelessness of this ecosystem. Thus, my immediate inclination as a natural history photographer to celebrate its beauty and candor with every release of the shutter.

But the more time I spent in South Florida, the more I realized that the Everglades is not simply a love story about flora and fauna, or magnificent vistas. Rather, for better or for worse, the Everglades narrative is intrinsically tied to the story of mankind and its ever-changing relationship with the natural world.

THE WILD

Burrowing owl investigates a remote-triggered camera.
Homestead.



An alligator bellows, using low frequency sound, to attract mates and lay claim to his water hole.
Big Cypress National Preserve.



Black-necked stilt.
Everglades National Park.

