

On Safari - Venice Rookery



WOW! I have seen pictures for some time now from the Venice Rookery and they were impressive. I didn't really give it much thought as I had seen impressive pictures from a lot of different locations. That changed after I had the chance to shoot there for myself! Talk about fun, it is now in my top 5 best places to go and it is easy - easy - easy. It is nothing like I expected and even more than I hoped. There are a lot of birds here, but the nesting Great Blue Herons are the stars. The activity starts early here, as in nests are built and chicks are already hatched in late December!

It is small, very small. If you do not know exactly where to look you could not find it...there are no signs. I spoke with several local people and 1 thirty year resident had just discovered its existence. The pond is perhaps 50 yards by 40 yards wide and the island rookery is perhaps 20 yards by 10 yards. This tiny out crop was covered with perhaps 20-30 nesting pairs of birds. There was a large population of singles out looking for love... The shooting gallery extends the distance of the front half of the pond. If you imagine a large clock with the rookery in the middle, you can shoot from about 8 o'clock to about 4 o'clock. My preference is the 8 spot as there is a huge fir tree behind the island that gives great backgrounds from that spot. Don't forget to check the background from the 4 spot as towers may be seen in the distance. There is a large bush at 6 that prevents shooting there. There is also a small slot at 11 o'clock that will hold 1 photographer and this is the only spot that provides access to the rear of the rookery.



You do need big glass here. At the front edge you are perhaps 40 feet from the birds and at the worst maybe twice that. This was mostly the case with the small chicks...these guys were the size of a cotton ball and so could not really be captured. The 200-400mm was great for the flight shots, but was just not quite there for the chicks.



It is easy here...really point and click like. If you can't get good images here either buy better equipment or find a different hobby. I mean, you stand there and you have oh, 20 subjects that you would kill to photograph. There is so much it is often hard to decide what to shoot. The worst is when you are focused on your target waiting for just the right moment for photo nirvana and the guy next to you with lets go with a 20 image burst. Of course, you look to see what the heck you missed just as your bird does its thing...sigh... One, famous photographer actually sat in a chair while shooting. It wasn't me and I refused to go buy a chair.

This man, who was not old enough to need this roost, even had an assistant as a spotter. She would tell him when the night heron was on approach and then he would "spray and pray" about a half gig worth of shots.



Now the magic, it was rockin' with activity. Birds building nests were flying continuous sorties to get their nesting materials. The birds at the rookery were doing their dance, mating, feeding chicks, fighting for their turf....everything that birds do and all within reach of the camera. This is like being at Bosque on the flight deck with different birds. I shot non-stop for about 4 hrs each morning and the high was awesome. As my photo pals like to say, "Serious photo heroin" going on here. The intense amount of activity meant it was constantly changing. The images are infinite. The birds are always doing something that you can shoot. Some images are also predictable. You watch the bird fly off for nesting materials and then you watch/photograph him all the way back to the nest. They do this all day long...it really does not get any easier than this!

There are large numbers of species here. I was able to photograph, Great Blue Heron, Black-Crowned Night Heron, Green Heron, Anhinga, Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Gallinule and White Ibis. It was not all water birds. I also shot Red Bellied Woodpeckers, Grackles, and Red-Winged Black Birds. There is a resident 12 foot alligator. I saw and photographed him (Hmm, could have been her, but I didn't get that close.) very early one morning. I shot a Black Racer snake as well. I saw, but could not photograph because it was too far or I was too slow: Glossy Ibis, Wood Stork, Bald Eagle, Black Vulture, Turkey Vulture, and Osprey. Not bad for standing around this little pond.

Nuts and Bolts

Basic Directions

The Venice Rookery is on Route 41 a short block north of Jacaranda Blvd. The entrance road is an Annex between a Florida Highway Patrol (police) building and the Sarasota County Courthouse. RaceTrac is on the opposite side of the street.

To reach the Venice Rookery from Interstate 75, take exit #35 to Jacaranda Boulevard. Travel southwest for about five miles (pass Venice Avenue, Center Road, Indian Hills, Skiar and Woodmere) and turn right onto Route 41 heading north. As soon as you complete that right turn, get into the left lane and make the first left turn. You'll enter a small street called the Annex between the Highway Patrol building and the courthouse. Proceed for several hundred feet and the rookery will be on the right side. Parking is in an open lot on the left.

GPS: 27° 02' 42.34" N by 82° 24' 03.49" W

There are primitive facilities at the rookery... see: *Race Trac* below.

Airports

Tampa is the largest airport in the area and is 75 miles north on I75.

Sarasota has a regional airport and is 25 miles.

Ft. Meyers airport is 125 miles south. This may be a good option if you include Ding Darling in your visit to the Rookery.

Motels

Motel 6 (\$60) at 281 US 41 Bypass North is 5 miles from the rookery. It was clean and comfortable. The shower was new. Sorry Carolyn - no shampoo.

There is also a *Days Inn* at 1710 S Tamiami Trail (US 41). This is 2.5 miles from the rookery.

Restaurants Within 1 mile of Motel 6

Left Coast Seafood Company - Very good seafood, duh! Entrees \$6-12. The "Bayou Grouper" was a favorite. Wednesday is all you can eat fried shrimp for \$9.95

Fast Food - *McDonalds*, *Burger King*, *Subway*, *Arby's*, *Pizza Hut*

Sonny's Pit Bar B Que – A chain, but they do have a menu and serious BBQ!

We Blew In - \$2.40 for a big breakfast

Ophelia's - Italian. Reservations for 8 or more only and it gets very busy.

Race Trac – This service station is across from the rookery. They have every soft drink, candy and snack known to man or Scott Bourne. Clean bath rooms and surprisingly good deli style sandwiches make this a great survival tool. You have to remember to eat every now and then.

TJ Carney's – Steaks and stuff along with various live music acts. I expect Elvis with his now blue hair sings here on occasion....

Other Stuff

Wolf Camera is at 101 US Highway 41 Bypass. Just in case, and you have to drive past it on the way to the rookery.

Links

[Motel 6](#)

[Days Inn](#)

