a world negotiator!
ethiopian stimulant—
arabian, italian, french, brazilian,
american trade titan (we love you).

emperor’s demitasse—
peasant’s pasttime—

need a lift? any clime?
try her iced in ceylon
spiced in pari
russian kahlua on the rocks
will surely do the trick—

roasted little beauty,
drunken java gem,
too bad you can’t run for office.

WILL THE REAL FLORIDA PLEASE STAND UP

Chris Katterjohn

Sunrise on Florida Bay. We are the first campers awake, first witnesses to the virgin morning. The sun rises a clear, distinct ball in the east sending its pink-orange light over the water in fresh waves of morning. The salt air smells and feels good. The breeze is stiff, as it always is on the ocean.
We are camped in a space called Flamingo in the Everglades National Park. Our tents are pitched in a sacred place, the southernmost tip of mainland Florida, and we are still in them. When we’re camped on the bay, we make it customary to lie in our bags for a while before coming out. Lord knows what’s out there and we don’t want our activity to scare it away. We scan the periphery for some fantastic sight. This morning, wonder of wonders, a Great White Heron dominates our view. He is on some pilings, at one time part of an old fishing dock, just fifteen feet from land. We are close.

I hear some rustling in the other tent. It’s John getting his movie camera with super-zoom and slow motion. We can’t miss this. God bless you, Canon. And God bless you, John, for being on your toes.

Pleased, my attention is drawn back to the bird. He could look at a man’s chest eye-to-eye, as he is a good four feet tall. His snow white feathers are in sharp contrast with his bright orange, six-inch bill and orange broomstick legs. His black eyes are calm and alert. He is a surprise because these birds rarely come in from the outer keys. He is so large his flight looks like slow motion even without the aid of a movie camera. He stands like a vision, almost without substance . . . a big white omen to start the day. We wallow in his presence. His white feathers grow yellow-pink around the edges as the sun rises higher.

We get some good footage of him, but we can’t stay in our tents forever, so I get up. All the while, John trains his camera on the Heron. As he flies away in two kinds of slow motion, his own and man’s, we hope he knows we mean well. I didn’t want to scare him, but now we are up.

The sounds of boisterous humans and clanking pots and pans are not wanted here. Man is the outsider. Nature’s noisy silence is the only soundtrack for this place, so our actions are tempered with respect and silence. We fix our breakfast in a calm, just three more critters starting our day in the curious Glades. We are unimportant.

The bay stretches for miles seaward before it gets any deeper than ten feet. So when the tide is out, as it is this morning, a vast, flat muckland is exposed in certain places, spotted with small pools of seawater that shine silver in the morning sunlight. These pools are feeding places for the large wading birds. And their
silhouettes are everywhere in the expanse. The ocean here is a grey muck that oozes between the toes when walked upon. It is busy with the smaller silhouettes of shorebirds and gulls.

The sky, a blend of pinks and blues curtained with clouds around its edges, is dotted with birds. After a peaceful night in the keys, they are flying mainland to feed in the many lakes and channels here. Turkey Vultures soar from as low as ten to as high as a hundred feet, while flocks of Spoonbill and Egret appear from time to time at higher levels, bellies glowing pink and white respectively. Along with them fly solitary Herons (Great Blue, Little Blue, and Louisiana) who rarely move in flocks. They are the loners. Still higher, highest of all, the Wood Ibises, better known as storks, soar like giant B-52 birds, only silent.

And the sea gulls are everywhere, in Heinz 57 varieties. I never knew there were so many kinds until I came here. And down on the ground right in front of us, crowds of sandpipers and beach-boppers of all kinds skitter business-rush-hour-like all over the shoreline, deliberately avoiding the small gang of Vultures, both Black and Turkey, that has gathered to pick at a fish carcass. And beyond them, hanging as if by strings just over the water, flying "V" wedges of two kinds of pelicans (White and Brown) cut through the air like so many gliders surveying the water for anything that moves. The Arabs call them River Camels. Swimming in groups on the ocean, with humplike backs and their long necks compressed into curves, they look like camel trains on the desert. Their large glaring eyes witness and endure. Strong and patient, with a storage sack beneath their bill, they are the dromedaries of this marine-air complex.

We’ve been up for about an hour now and truly feel like just another animal. Our breakfast has been had and our cleaning up has been done, all to the tune of the musical ballet of this incredible place. The dawn migration en masse from the keys is over, but there is always something to see. You need only open your eyes.

Behind our backs as we face the ocean, the campground has its own maneuvers. Literally hundreds and hundreds of gulls and blackbirds fly and land throughout the grounds in search of human crumbs from the night before. Anything! Bread, beans, fat. You have to store your food and trash well here if you don’t want to wake up to a dump on your campsite. If it doesn’t fall prey to coons during the night, then these birds will zero in at
daybreak.

Rufus the Red-shouldered Hawk is here too. He’s always here. We spiritually adopted and named this bird because he was like a fixture that came with the place. He has a mysterious band on his left leg that no ranger knows anything about. He is not afraid of humans. He perches on barbecue grills and, with repeated kamikaze dives of three and a half feet, stomps on grasshoppers and bugs. He is the clown of the camp.

Vultures swoop around and through the palm trees so low you would step on one if it ever got that close. And among the fallen coconuts, plastic cocoons are strewn everywhere. Once dormant and silent, in loud blues and oranges, the tents begin to emit sounds of humans and humans themselves.

But the show is never over in spite of human interruption. The Osprey, or Fish Eagle, fishes in Florida Bay all day long. You can see at least one every hour. They usually come in pairs. Today, just after I’ve made my coffee, I see a pair approaching from the keys. I take my coffee, light a cigarette and lean against the front pole of my tent and relax to watch their art. This is so much better than Wild Kingdom! Soaring circles high above, the Ospreys use their scalpel vision to dissect the water and probe for fish. I isolate the one emitting high shrieks and watch him dive, wings back, so fast you can’t believe. But he pulls up just before he hits the water. Abort! Abort! He rises, circles some more, dives again and splashes feet-first into the water. Bull’s-eye! After a split-second delay, he ascends from the water awkwardly, weighed down by his catch and excess water. But he’s done this before. He stops three feet from the surface, hovers, and resembling a drenched dog, shakes himself free of all water, then labors upward. Fish gripped firmly in talons, he homes to his destination.

And with the human buzz increasing all the time and our morning meal consumed, we want to leave the bay area too. Today it’s Bear Lake Canal by canoe. Tomorrow it’s Snake Bite Trail by foot. It doesn’t matter where you go here, because the place is teeming with life. This is the real Florida, the one DeSoto found. As we leave the campground laden with canoe, paddles, binoculars, cameras and other gear, almost everyone else is just starting breakfast. The calm and spectacle of the early morning was long before their eggs were even scrambled.