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## A Grocery Shoppers Guide to Bird Watching in South Florida

### Author Bio

Ricky Finch is a graduate student in the Composition Rhetoric and Digital Media program. He is originally from Nashville and has a BA in English from Lipscomb University. Ricky enjoys writing, wood carving and is an avid cookie enthusiast.

# A Grocery Shopper's Guide to Bird Watching in South Florida

Ricky Finch

Summers in South Florida are hot, humid, even early mornings. I step out onto the back deck to gauge the day and notice the sky seems bigger than I remember. The sun shines and the ever present storm clouds polka dot the sky. Each morning the neighborhood chickens sing a foul song, Cluck *cluck screech cluck cluck*. This morning the clucks are entrancing, my cigarette burns down to the filter singeing my fingers. "Ouch," I yelp, interrupting the concerto of clucks.

Glancing skyward, I notice in wonderment the painted blue sky with big puffs of hanging white clouds mixed with the perfect shade of gray, when lingering burning bacon mist intrudes my thought. The smoke alarm screams in pain. I hurry through the door and turn off the stove and turn the ceiling fan on. The ceiling fan spins fast enough to dislodge small chunks of plaster along the base mixing tiny particles with the floating greasy mist. The fan sucks the smoke up and spits the toxic concoction back in my face. The neighbor's hen walks by the open door, head cocked to the side taking in the sight of flailing arms and deep exhaled futile breaths, watery eyes and the charred skillet still in my hand.

*Cluck, cluck screech cluck,*

"Are you making fun of me?" I say while hopelessly swinging through the smoke.

*Cluck cluck screech,*

"This isn't funny!"

"This is normal," I say.

She wanders off, pecking at the ground, back over the fence, the cadence of clucks and screeches fading into the field behind the house.

**Normal.  
Since moving to South Florida life has not felt normal.**

I walk across the street to the grocery store to buy soap. The chicken won't clean up the congealed bacon grease, so I must. I turn right through the automatic sliding doors, dodging a pyramid of chips and salsa, fresh baked breads and cakes lingering in the air, and the deli. The deli display is filled with hams, turkeys, buffalo chicken and every cheese imaginable. I browse the display for a moment and consider picking up something to make a sandwich.

At that moment, an electric motor growls, and a pain crushes my thigh. I tumble to the ground, my body bouncing off the tiled floor. A tiny elderly woman in a scooter glares down at me.

“Did you take a number,” she squawked.

“What are you talking about” I ask.

She lurches forward, “you didn’t take a number,” pointing at a small red dispenser with the number 42 hanging like a tongue.

Brass Knuckles Betty was not alone. A gaggle of scooters moved swiftly surrounding me on every side. I have never encountered squealing scooters and silver haired misfits in the deli before. I spring to my feet and hurdle Sidecar Susan, looking back only for a moment then smacking into the pyramid of chips and salsa, I tumble to the floor, Betty’s cackle ringing in my ears.

I want to think the ladies meant me no harm, though Betty’s actions would say differently. As I sat covered in salsa and salty chips trying to remember why I had left the house today, I felt isolated. It is not easy connecting with a new city. The street names are strange, the television channels are all different, the trees are palms and where are the squirrels?

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### **People here are polite in a local kind of way.**

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A way I don’t understand. The Cuban culture is vibrant, interesting, present all around, but I cannot find any Cuban food. My neighborhood is quiet and friendly, I think, I really don’t know, they all hurry to get inside when I wave hello. And the grocery store deli has complex protocols I never imagined existed. I wonder, for a moment, if it would be easier to just go home. Buy a one-way ticket back to cozy and enjoy a belly full of disappointment on the flight. An angry red-faced man with a clipboard hovers over me, pointing towards the restrooms in back.

The salsa left a red stain on my white shirt. Leaving the restrooms, I turned right down the automotive aisle, around a corner, then smack. Off my feet again, except this time I was greeted with a smile and a hand reaching down to help me up.

“I am so sorry,” the lanky fellow with big brown eyes said.

His soothing tones and friendly gestures confused me. “Are you ok?” he asked.

“Yes, I am, and excuse me, I did not see you coming.”

“It’s ok” he responded. Placing his hands on my shoulders, he dusts away left over tomato and onion bits. I look at his featureless face.

He moved me to the left, “Duck” he said,

“Quack,” I replied.

“What?” he asked quizzically like the chicken looking at me this morning.

“Never mind, nice to meet you,” he said.

He turned and looked down at a shelf, picking up a large box containing a mobile generator, he gave me a wink, “thanks buddy,” he said waddling away from me with the big box hanging from his arms. The manager walks quickly in our direction, his face red as salsa. Sirens explode in my ears, I see the back door flapping back and forth. Oh...oh my...oh bloody hell. I tuck my chin to my chest and make haste to the exit disappearing out the front door before red face manager sees me.

The parking lot buzzes. Shopping carts synchronized to just miss moving cars, carriages carrying babies with stains on their shirts like mine, and Betty’s gang zooming down a lane in a V formation, her cackle echoing, and me standing on the corner looking out at a small pond adjacent to the building, a car speeds by with a box hanging out the window. The sun shines except for the singular rain cloud hanging out at my corner. I walk a hundred feet to the left, it follows. Laughing rain drops wash the salsa from my pants and hair, then seep into my shoes so every step squelches.

I walk home, wet and squishy. The chicken’s song sings in my head. *Cluck cluck screech cluck*. What it must be like to be a bird, with wings to take you skyward, never knowing where one might land. I landed in South Florida, awkward and searching for my place. So far outside the comfortable I have always known that each day brings a new set of uncomfortable. It is maddening this city in the sun. I want to scream but I know it won’t help. My phone dings, a text from a friend back home. She writes, “Now when I feel myself falling upward to the Cosmos, I tighten my shoelaces, and remind myself the world is right-sized.”

I spend the afternoon cleaning up this mornings mess and drying out my shoes. The chickens cluck and screech in the field. The hen walks by the door, stopping to admire my cleaning work. I walk outside, my friends’ words reverberating. The rain clouds dissipate into the big blue sky just in time for sun set. It is romantic, the South Florida sunset, peering through towering palm trees.

**The reds, oranges and blues mixing together to say good morning to the stars.**