

15 December 2018

Dear Friends and Family,

Eileen and I hope that you and your families are doing well. We've had a very good year. I've described our travels in some detail in 15 blog posts, so this letter will just hit the highlights. Details of how to follow the blog are given at the end of the letter.

Our international birding this year consisted of two weeks in central Panama in Dec. 2017 and Jan. 2018. We went with Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Aside from a couple days in Panama City, our bases of operation were at the Canopy Lodge, about 2.5 hours southwest of the city, and at the Canopy Tower, about half an hour northwest of the city, in the canal zone. The birding was excellent, and we worked hard on mammals, making ultrasonic recordings of bat echolocation calls and using our new night-vision thermal scope to detect a fine selection of nocturnal species. We finished the trip with a personal list of about 274 species of birds, 48 of which were lifers; and 24 mammals, 15 of which were lifers.

We left El Paso in mid-January and returned in mid-November, driving the camper about 24,000 miles during the 10-month trip. We passed through 27 states and 3 Canadian provinces/territories, all except Texas being east of the Great Plains. The primary focus during winter and early spring was seeing new plants and plant families in the southeastern coastal plain, with particular emphasis on subtropical habitats in southern Florida including the Keys. In late spring and early summer we explored southeastern uplands, including the Ouachita, Ozark, Great Smoky, Blue Ridge, Amphibolite, and Allegheny mountain ranges. Eileen selected a series of Civil War battlefields to visit on this leg of the trip: Corinth and Brice's Crossroads, MS; Shiloh and Davis Bridge, TN; and Pea Ridge and Prairie Grove, AR. Late summer found us in an extremely remote area of Quebec east of James Bay, from which we were able to canoe to islands in the Nunavut Territory. Fall was spent in New England and at Cape May, NJ, the latter for songbird and raptor migration. On the way back to El Paso we drove most of the Natchez Trace (a great reference being "A Way through the Wilderness: The Natchez Trace and the Civilization of the Southern Frontier" by William C. Davis), and also spent a couple weeks in the Lower Rio Grande Valley for butterflies.

The primary goal of the year was to reach 95% of all native vascular plant families in North America north of Mexico, and this was met by finding 28 new families, leaving only 11 families remaining out of 254. We also made good progress on bats, adding four southeastern species, leaving six of 47 species in North America to go. In total we saw about 519 new native species during our 10-month "wander": 408 plants, 31 dragonflies and damselflies, 26 butterflies, 18 reptiles and amphibians, 16 fish, 6 mammals, and 14 species from other groups. These additions bring my grand species total to 9591, so I should reach the goal of 10,000 next year. We don't have an exact total for Eileen at present, but she probably has a few years to go to this milestone.

Our plans for 2019 are to visit Ecuador in January, Madagascar in November, and the western U.S. and Canada in between, with an emphasis on Alaska and northwest Canada.

Our contact info, which has not changed, is given below. We'd love to hear from you! Happy holidays --

Brian and Eileen Keelan

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Nomadic Naturalists: Blog Details

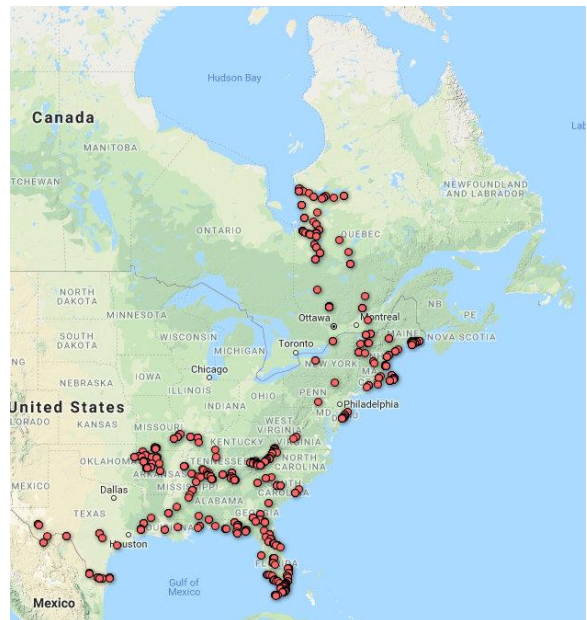
Blog entries with photos are posted about once every three weeks when traveling, and are normally kept short enough to be read in roughly five minutes. To subscribe to our blog, [click here](#) to reach our cover page, then click on "Show" in the top left corner. In the panel that appears at left, enter your e-mail address in the field near the bottom (you may need to scroll), and click on "Follow". You will get an e-mail requiring a simple response and then you're done. No info other than your e-mail address is required, and you can unsubscribe easily.



White Peacock butterfly, McAllen, TX.



Eileen and Brian in Panama, courtesy of Kimberly Higgins.



Places visited on our 10-month road trip.