

Eco Pond... Everglades National Park... sunset. The mosquitos are not as fierce in December. A cool breeze from the bay caresses my hair and dries the sweat on my face. The sun is getting closer to the water and the birds' cocktail hour is in full blast.

We've been watching the ibises land on the mangroves and on the few trees around the pond. Like clockwork, the daily ritual begins. Purple gallinules and coots glide elegantly on the shallow water. Blue herons regard it all with indifference. The observers, mesmerized by the sights and sounds of the avian social, come perilously close to stepping on a very big alligator. A little sora hides in tall grass.

The roseate spoonbills take flight, always the firsts to leave, like movie stars, their color enhanced by the fiery sunset. Exquisite, breath taking beauty.

The ibises' gathering has reached critical mass and the birds start flapping their wings nervously. When the color of the sky begins to fade, an explosion of wing beats propels them and the flight of the ibises begins. The observers know that they cannot take in all that beauty, all that spectacle of beating wings. By the thousands they fly by, crossing the water towards the islands on the bay where no predator can reach them, where they can sleep safely, where plentiful food can be found at the break of dawn.

When the last rays of the sun are fading a solitary eagle flies bay.

There is only one Everglades. By the grace of God, the resilience of nature, the vision of Marjorie Stoneman Douglas and the tenacity of the National Parks Service, a portion of the original "river of grass" remains. We who have been gifted by their efforts to preserve it, can do no less to protect it for generations to come.

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