

STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION OF THE PIN-TAILED WHYDAH (*Vidua macroura*) IN FLORIDA

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The Pin-tailed Whydah (*Vidua macroura*) is native to forests and wooded grasslands of sub-Saharan Africa. Popular in aviculture in many parts of the world and raised locally for the pet trade, escaped and/or released whydahs have been breeding in Puerto Rico since the 1960s (Raffaele et al. 1998, Oberle 2000) and have recently begun to breed in California (K. L. Garrett in litt.). Non-breeding whydahs have been observed in several other regions, including Florida. The whydah's status in the state is relatively recent, being first reported in an unpublished list (Neville 1990) that provided no location, date, or observer. Robertson and Woolfenden (1992) and Stevenson and Anderson (1994) cited Neville's list without providing additional information. The first detailed Pin-tailed Whydah observation in Florida was from Volusia County in June 1994 (Pranty 1995) and the first verifiable (e.g., photographic) record, also from Volusia County, was in June 1999 (Pranty 2000, Table 1). Through 2011, there had been at least 31 observations and 13 verifiable records of whydahs in Florida, with most of these very recent (Greenlaw et al. 2014). Here, we update the status of the Pin-tailed Whydah in Florida based on verifiable records.

We used five sources to locate whydah records: (1) the FOS Field Observations Committee seasonal reports published in *Florida Field Naturalist*; (2) eBird <ebird.org>; (3) the Early Detection and Distribution Mapping System (EDDMapS) website for Florida <eddmeps.org/florida>; (4) the Miami Bird Board <tropicalaudubon.org/tasboard/tasbb.html>; and (5) a request for information that we posted in October 2014 to the BRDBRAIN listserver <listserv.admin.usf.edu/listserv/wa.exe?A0=BRDBRAIN>. We used Greenlaw et al. (2014) to determine regional boundaries in Florida.

For reasons of quality-control, we restrict this paper to verifiable records, all of which represent photographs. Despite the plethora of

Table 1. Photographic records of Pin-tailed Whydah in Florida ($n = 32$), listed alphabetically by county and location. “Female plumage” refers to whydahs in non-descript plumage (i.e., adult females, adult males in basic plumage, and juveniles). BPA (Bill Pranty archive) catalog numbers are provided for all records. Records first mentioned on eBird or EDDMapS are listed here with their original source followed by the BPA number. +NSRA = North Shore Restoration Area. + = EDDMapS erroneously listed the photographer as M. Gardler.

#	County	Location	Habitat	Date	Observer	No.	Sex	Source
1	Broward	Davie	yard	23 Apr 2011	L. Sassi	1	female plumage	eBird; BPA 8643
2	Broward	Everglades Holiday Park	parklike	24 Aug 2013	B. Roberts	1	female plumage	BPA 6873
3	Broward	Fort Lauderdale	unknown	Jul 2002	S. Epps	1	alternate male	BPA 211
4	Broward	Fort Lauderdale	yard	8 Nov 2009	A. Wiley	1	female plumage	BPA 472
5	Broward	Pompano Beach	yard	6 Nov 2011	B. Acker	1	female plumage	BPA 8653
6	Clay	Orange Park	yard	25 Jun 2011	B. Simpler	1	alternate male	BPA 661
7	Escambia	Pensacola	yard	21 Feb 2012	M. Louy	10	female plumage	BPA 3343
8	Henry	Clewiston	yard	~16–23 Sep 2012	K. Willis; M. England	2	alternate males	BPA 4454–4455
9	Hernando	Hernando Beach	yard	15 Aug 2008	D. Hutchinson	1	alternate male	BPA 654
10	Hillsborough	Brandon	yard	29 May 2012	L. LaPaz	1	alternate male	EDDMapS; BPA 8082
11	Hillsborough	Brandon	yard	25 Oct 2014	G. Veazey	1	alternate male	eBird; BPA 8664
12	Hillsborough	Egmont Key NWR	preserve	28 Sep 2002	M. Hett	1	female plumage	BPA 225
13	Hillsborough	Tampa	yard	27–29 Aug 2008	S. Roghair	1	alternate male	BPA 2945
14	Lake	Leesburg	yard	14 Sep 2013	L. Streeper	1	alternate male	BPA 6974
15	Lake	Mount Dora	yard	30 Sep 2013	B. L. Vanzant	1	alternate male	EDDMapS; BPA 8283
16	Lee	Captiva Island	residential	15 Jul 2005	C. Ewell	1	female plumage	BPA 320
17	Lee	Samibel Island	city park	21–23 Oct 2011	V. McGrath; K. Rose; R. Parks	1	alternate male	BPA 9645; BPA 1497; BPA 2368
18	Miami-Dade	Homestead, “Dump Marsh”	industrial	22 Oct 2011	C. Goodrich+	1	alternate male	BPA 7994
19	Orange	Lake Apopka NSRA+	preserve	20 Jul 2013	T. Kalbach	1	female plumage	eBird; BPA 8099

Table 1. (Continued) Photographic records of Pin-tailed Whydah in Florida ($n = 32$), listed alphabetically by county and location. "Female plumage" refers to whydahs in non-descript plumage (i.e., adult females, adult males in basic plumage, and juveniles). BPA (Bill Pranty archive) catalog numbers are provided for all records. Records first mentioned on eBird or EDDMapS are listed here with their original source followed by the BPA number. +NSRA = North Shore Restoration Area. + = EDDMapS erroneously listed the photographer as M. Gardler.

#	County	Location	Habitat	Date	Observer	No.	Sex	Source
20	Palm Beach	Boynton Beach	yard	14 Jul 2009	T. Smith	2	alternate males	BPA 8665; BPA 8666
21	Palm Beach	Lake Park	yard	Sep 2012	fide S. Bollinger	1	alternate male	BPA 6917
22	Palm Beach	coastal	yard	18 Aug 2014	L. Baltunado	1	alternate male	EDDMapS; BPA 8641
23	Pasco	New Port Richey	yard	17 Jul 2008	K. Tracey, B. Pranty	3	female plumage	BPA 394; BPA 6127
24	Pinellas	Honeymoon Island SP	preserve	27 Apr 2010	S. Mann	1	alternate male	BPA 2698
25	Pinellas	St. Petersburg	yard	19 Sep 2008	L. Margeson	1	alternate male	BPA 473
26	Pinellas	St. Petersburg	unknown	30 Aug 2010	S. Geiger	1	alternate male	BPA 650
27	Pinellas	Seminole	yard	6 Jul 2014	T. Palik	1	alternate male	BPA 8081
28	Pinellas	Tarpon Springs	yard	13 Nov 2008	T. Woods	1	alternate male	BPA 474
29	Santa Rosa	Milton	parklike	26 Aug 2009	J. Higginbotham	1	alternate male	BPA 5991
30	Volusia	Deltona	yard	Jun 1999	M. Tilghman	1	alternate male	BPA 210
31	Volusia	Deltona	yard	8 Jun 2010	E. Parks	1	alternate male	BPA 655
32	Volusia	Deltona	yard	2 Sep 2013	B. Schmidt	1	alternate male	BPA 7698

bird identification guides published for North America, perhaps none includes Pin-tailed Whydah. Whydahs in female plumage are very sparrowlike and probably are often identified. In at least two instances, whydahs photographed in Florida were initially identified as Clay-colored Sparrows (*Spizella pallida*) or a White-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*). Furthermore, two photographic records found in the EDDMapS database of “Pin-tailed Whydahs” (#615494, Sarasota County and #3944422, Palm Beach County) refer in whole or in part to House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*). We have archived all records of Pin-tailed Whydahs in Florida (Table 1) into Pranty’s personal archive (BPA catalog numbers).

We compiled 32 records of 45 Pin-tailed Whydahs in Florida through December 2014 (Table 1, Fig. 1), a total that represents a great increase from the 13 records published by Greenlaw et al. (2014) as having occurred through 2011. Except for the first record, in 1999, all have occurred since 2002. Most records (28 of 32; 87%) have occurred since 2008, with 17 records (53%) occurring during 2011–2014 (Table 1). Whydah records by year follow: 1999 (1), 2002 (2), 2005 (1), 2008 (5), 2009 (3), 2010 (3), 2011 (5), 2012 (4), 2013 (5), and 2014 (3). Seasonality of occurrence is nearly year-round (February, April–November), but 22 of the records (68%) have occurred during the four months of June–September, a clustering that seems to be coincidental.

Twenty-eight records (87%) refer to single whydahs, with the remaining records referring to two (twice), three, and, exceptionally, 10 individuals (Table 1). The latter flock contained 11 whydahs (Pranty 2012) but one of these is not visible in the photographs. Distributed by sex, males in alternate plumage represent 23 (71%) of the records and 25 (55%) of the individuals, while whydahs in female plumage represent 9 (28%) of the records and 20 (44%) of the individuals. The preponderance of records of adult males may simply be due to their much more noticeable and distinctive plumage. Male whydahs in alternate plumage have been recorded in Florida from 27 April to 13 November (Table 1), with the number of records by months as follows: April (1), May (1), June (3), July (3), August (5), September (6), October (3), and November (1).

Unlike many of Florida’s exotic birds, which tend to be most widespread in—if not restricted to—the southeastern peninsula (e.g., Greenlaw et al. 2014), most Pin-tailed Whydah records in Florida are from outside this region, occurring in 15 counties statewide (Fig. 1). Geographically, the records are from the western Panhandle (2), northern peninsula (1), central peninsula (17), and southern peninsula (12), with only nine records from Palm Beach, Broward, or Miami-Dade counties (Table 1, Fig. 1). No whydah records to date are from the eastern Panhandle or the Florida Keys. Heavily populated counties contain most whydah records,



Figure 1. Distribution of Pin-tailed Whydah records in Florida, 1999–2014. Whydahs have been recorded in 15 counties in Florida, primarily in regions with large human populations.

but other individuals have been found in rural counties such as Clay and Hendry (Table 1, Fig. 1). Five records each are from Broward and Pinellas counties, four from Hillsborough County, three each from Palm Beach and Volusia counties, two each from Lake and Lee counties, and single records are from eight other counties (Table 1, Fig. 1).

We analyzed habitats occupied by Pin-tailed Whydahs in Florida based primarily on whydah images archived in the BPA and information published in the Field Observations Committee reports. We separated the habitats into three types: (1) residential neighborhood/city park; (2) preserve within a suburban/urban area; and (3) unknown. We determined the habitat for all but two of the whydah records in Florida; the exceptions involved whydahs perched overhead in metropolitan areas (Fort Lauderdale and St. Petersburg) where the habitat below

is not visible. Habitats of the other 30 records were residential yards (27, with 10 records involving whydahs perched below bird feeders or on a bird bath) and preserves located within urban areas (3). No Pin-tailed Whydah in Florida has yet been recorded outside areas of human development; it seemingly is a human commensal in Florida—as are many other exotic species in Florida (e.g., Greenlaw et al. 2014).

The rapid accumulation of records of Pin-tailed Whydahs in Florida—with a majority of the records having occurred since 2011 (Table 1)—may suggest to some that whydahs are now breeding in the state outside of captivity. However, no breeding report in Florida is known (Greenlaw et al. 2014)—all whydah records to date seem to represent unrelated and independent releases or escapes. Pin-tailed Whydahs are obligate brood parasites, laying their eggs in the nests of estrildid finches such as waxbills. Because none of the whydah's native hosts have ever bred in Florida, breeding of whydahs in the state was considered by Greenlaw et al. (2014) to be unlikely. However, Pin-tailed Whydahs in California are thought to be brood-parasitizing Scaly-breasted Munias (*Lonchura punctulata*; K. L. Garrett in litt.), a species not found within the whydah's native range. Because Scaly-breasted Munias are breeding in Florida, especially in the Pensacola area (Duncan 2009, Greenlaw et al. 2014), it seems possible that Pin-tailed Whydahs could breed in the state. But to date, most whydah records in Florida have been found in areas outside the munia's regular breeding range (Greenlaw et al. 2014).

Through personal contacts, BP was aware of 23 Pin-tailed Whydah records in Florida through 2014 (Table 1). Additional records came from our examination of the EDDMapS and eBird databases (Table 1). Although these projects contain considerable unvetted material that in some cases is erroneous (e.g., the two EDDMapS records of House Sparrows misidentified as whydahs), each website allows for the uploading of photographs to help verify identification. As such, eBird (for all species) and EDDMapS (for exotic species) can be helpful in documenting the distribution of birds in Florida once appropriate quality-control cautions are taken.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank all who contributed whydah observations and other information to us: Brenda Acker, Brian Ahern, Sonia Bollinger, Margaret England, Charlie Ewell, Kimball Garrett, Tim Kalbach, Stephen Mann, Vince McGrath, Liane Sassi, Tom Smith, and Monte Stickel. Steven A. Johnson improved a draft of the manuscript.

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