

# florida



1998 Pelagic Highlights Off Marathon			
Species	15 June	17 June	19 June
Cory's Shearwater	3	3	0
Sooty Shearwater	1	0	0
Audubon's Shearwater	30	18	72
storm-petrel sp.	0	1	0
Wilson's Storm-Petrel	0	1	0
boobysp.	1	0	0
Roseate Tern	0	0	12
Bridled Tern	14	15	28
Sooty Tern	280	220	205
Black Tern (first-summer)	1	0	0
Brown Noddy	10	6	77

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Most Florida summers are characterized by mild phrases like "wetter than normal" or "unusually warm." Not so this year! This was a season of extremes. Temperatures in the triple digits seared the state in June as a ridge of high pressure stalled over Florida for most of the month. The heat was paired with extreme drought even in areas that had been seriously flooded as recently as March. As a result, the most intense fire season since at least the 1930s scorched over 500,000 acres, with fires in every county. None was harder hit than *Volusia*, where over 2000 fires affected 150,000 acres. Fires were most severe where decades of suppression had allowed the unnatural accumulation of fuel and understory. In properly managed natural areas where prescribed burns already had been carried out, fuel was reduced and wildfires caused little damage.



One at the usual n. *Greene*, GA, site June 18 (PS,GB) was most likely a summering bird. Rare and unexpected in summer in the Region, a W. Kingbird was found at L. Horton, *Fayette*, GA, June 16 (BHu). Amazingly this was that state's 3rd sighting of a Western this year (two were found in spring)! Cape Lookout, NC, continued to have Gray Kingbirds since the spring season. One was found June 6 (PB, CRe) and one, maybe two, were there July 2 (NM). No nesting evidence was found. Another Scissor-tailed Flycatcher was seen, thereby extending the seasonal streak for a couple of years running now. This one was found near Townville, SC, June 28 (D&SCo). The Com. Ravens reported in downtown Greensboro, NC, during the spring season must be there to stay, as at least two were seen during the entire summer (H&ELi). Also on the edge of their breeding range were the Horned Larks with a fledgling seen in *Peach*, GA, July 27 (PJ). A Wood Thrush in the Valdosta, GA, area July 18 (BBe) seemed to be singing on territory. This species is quite rare in that part of the state as a breeder. Amazing was an extremely late Am. Pipit heard calling at C. Hatt. June 1 (RK). This is probably the latest ever for the species as a spring migrant in North Carolina. Cedar Waxwings are sometimes found nesting in e. North Carolina during summer. This year a pair was seen building a nest s. of Moncure, in e. *Chatham* June 21 (RD).

## WARBLERS TO ORIOLES

A very late spring migrant was the Chestnut-sided Warbler found in the Alligator River N.W.R., Dare, NC, June 3 (MLy). A N. Waterthrush found near Bethel, *Fairfield*, SC, June 23 (DB) was probably a very early fall migrant. The pair of Louisiana Waterthrushes on territory in the Green Swamp, *Brunswick*, NC, June 14 (RD) were on the extreme edge of their breeding range. Quite unexpected was the ad. Lark Sparrow found on Hutchinson I., GA, July 7 (SC). This individual must have been a wandering non-breeder; it was too early for this regular fall migrant. Song Sparrows returned to the L. Wildwood, Macon, GA, area, making it two consecutive years as a summer resident (PJ).

Dickcissels were once again found at scattered locations throughout the Region. Some of the more interesting reports included three singing males in e. *Washington*, NC, June 20 (HL, JP); one male in *Dillon*, SC, June 14 until mid-July (LG, SP); and two-four in *Henry*, GA, June 6-7 (v.o.). Bobolinks in e. North Carolina

during summer are quite rare. This year a male was e. of *Greenville* June 19-20 (EM, *fide* JW) and two males were at the VOA-B site s.e. of *Greenville* July 30 (JW). Always rare away from the immediate coast, one was at Grassy Pond, Valdosta, GA, June 16 (GB, BBe). There was a mini invasion of Shiny Cowbirds this summer. During June one was on Cumberland I., GA (*fide* DC); three (two males and one female) were at the Savannah Spoil Site, *Jasper*, SC, June 18 until at least June 25 (SC); one was in *Glynn*, GA, June 25 (*fide* GB); and a male was at the Ft. Fisher, NC, Aquarium feeder July 8-11 (PS, m.ob.).

Baltimore Orioles were found on the e. edge of their breeding range with one near Rutledge, GA, June 11 (GB); one seen carrying food at L. Cunningham, *Greenville*, SC, June 9 (LG); and three confirmed nestings in the Winston-Salem, NC, area (*fide* RS).

## CORRIGENDUM

In the Fall 1997 *Field Notes* (Vol. 52, p.48), the name Baltimore Oriole was left out of the sentence concerning "a flight of 200 going N at Pea I., N.W.R., NC.

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# region

Wading bird nesting was affected by El Niño, which brought drenching rains and widespread flooding to the state until late March. Some nesting birds may have shifted from the freshwater Everglades to coastal sites, suggesting that coastal colonies were less affected by the delay in drydown conditions (Dale Gawlik). The summer banding station at Wekiwa Springs State Park recorded five-year low numbers of young-of-the-year, indicating poor reproduction of local songbirds (Parks Small).

**Abbreviations:** C.P. (*County Park*); D.T. (*Dry Tortugas*); E.N.P. (*Everglades National Park*); F.O.S.R.C. (*Florida Ornithological Society Records Committee*); G.F.C. (*Fla. Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission*); Jax (*Jacksonville*); PPM (*Polk Phosphate Mines*); S.R.A. (*State Recreation Area*); S.R.S.T.F. (*Springhill Road Sewage Treatment Facility*); W.C.A. (*Water Conservation Areas*).

## LOONS TO FRIGATEBIRDS

A Com. Loon in alternate plumage June 4 at S R S T.F., *Leon*, was a late migrant (GM), while three more at Anna Maria June 11 (BC) may have summered. As last year, Hess conducted 3 pelagic counts out to the "Hump" off Marathon (table). Audubon's Shearwaters were present in considerably higher numbers in 1998.

Masked Boobies continued to nest at Hospital Key, D.T., with a remarkable 19 nests (GS, JH). Brown Pelicans declined to 8450 pairs statewide, 1400 below the recent average, in the biennial G.F.C. survey (SN). In the Tampa Bay region, pelicans increased 50% to 2400 pairs and nesting success was near normal (RTP, AFS). In s.w. Florida, many nests failed following a strong early nesting effort (TB). Inland, 15 Brown Pelicans over L. Arbuckle June 21 were unusual (DL). The sole U.S. colony of Magnificent Frigatebirds, at Long Key, D.T., numbered 78 nests. (GS, JH).

## HERONS TO STORKS

High water levels associated with El Niño delayed nesting of most wading birds in s. Florida until March or April (DG). For the 5 species receiving priority monitoring attention in the W.C.A. plus E.N.P. (Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Tricolored Heron, White Ibis, Wood Stork), nesting numbers were 15% below even last year (JCO). Only Great

Egrets held their own, increasing to 4100 pairs (JCO). White Ibis totaled just 1408 pairs (JCO), but returned to the W.C.A. during the spring and by June numbered 20,000 birds (C. Theriot, D. Nelson). In s.w. Florida, Great and Snowy egrets increased to 326 and 347 pairs, respectively (15-year means: 170 and 324), but Little Blues (38 pairs) declined 51% (TB).

The dramatic April–May dry down coincided with the normal nesting period in the Tampa Bay area, and numbers of most waders at coastal colonies increased from 1997 levels. Great Egrets nearly doubled to 1895 pairs, Snowies were up 38% to 1370, and Tricoloreds up 70% to 860. White Ibis nearly tripled to 18,000 pairs, 15,700 at Alafia Bank alone, while Glossy Ibis increased 65% to 550 pairs. Roseate Spoonbills increased to 186 pairs at 4 sites, the most since at least the 1870s. Great Blues (500 pairs), Little Blues (325), and Reddish Egrets (71) were unchanged. Populations of White Ibis, spoonbills, and perhaps other species were likely augmented by birds from the s. Florida system (RTP, AFS). Reddish Egrets and spoonbills nesting at Mullethead I. (a.k.a. Haulover Spoil), Merritt Island N.W.R., also increased. On June 10, 112 young Reddish and 21 young spoonbills were counted along island margins, yielding estimates of 75 and 15–20 pairs, respectively (AFS, RTP, CH). Observers n. of Titusville should start looking for nesting of both species.

Just 25 pairs of Wood Storks nested in E.N.P. (SB). At Corkscrew Swamp, 450 pairs produced over 1000 young, excellent considering the winter water conditions (A. Mackie). At the Tower Rd. colony, *Leon*, 200–260 young storks were found July 27 (GS).

In other wading bird news, a lone Am. Bittern at Palmdale June 19 (RB) constituted a rare summer report. Six adult and two large young "Great White" Herons were found in a small Estero Bay heronry April 29 (PHI, RTP, AFS, TB). Most surprising was the **Snowy × Cattle Egret** pair found May 7 at Little Bird Key, near Ft. DeSoto. The pair reared two young; one was collected for genetic analysis (RTP, AFS).

## DUCKS TO CRANES

The usual reports of summering ducks included Blue-winged Teal at Zephyrhills June 28 (BP, DR et al) and at P.P.M. July 5 (CG, PT); an Am. Wigeon at P.P.M. July 19 (PT); three Ring-necked Ducks at Carr L., *Leon*, June 6 (JCo), plus a male "in full molt (no primaries)" in w. Jax July 28–31 (HH, PP); three male Lesser Scaup and a female

Ruddy Duck at S.R.S.T.F. through the period (GM, JCa); and another Lesser Scaup at Palm Harbor July 26 (AGS, RS, BH).

Ospreys nesting s. of Marco I. suffered a high rate of nesting failures, perhaps due to El Niño (TB). A casualty of the recent skirmish over ownership of Fisheating Cr., the 2000-bird Am. Swallow-tailed Kite roost near L. Okeechobee has been largely abandoned because of disturbance by airboaters (PG). A roost of 317 kites was reported from Lake Woodruff N.W.R. (CH). This year's 980 active Bald Eagle territories was the highest total since G.F.C. surveys began in 1973, but the number of young produced (1120) was 8% below last year's all-time high, perhaps due to the wet winter (SN). Cooper's Hawks fledged young near L. Pierce, *Polk*, in early June (TD, JA) and in n.e. Cape Coral, *Lee*, July 1 for the 2nd consecutive year (CE, WW).

A Purple Gallinule in Key West June 6–7 was apparently a late spring migrant (JAO). At least three Am. Coots summered at L. Jackson (GM), while one with two chicks at the *Hernando* landfill July 25 (CB) furnished possibly the first county breeding record. Rare n. of Jax, a Sandhill Crane was found July 6 (RC). Whooping Cranes from the newly reintroduced population continue to delight birders; this year one was seen near Pasco Trails June 17–18 (DR et al.).

## PLOVERS TO PHALAROPES

Snowy Plovers nested successfully at 2 sites, with three chicks at Sanibel June 16 (*vide* NP) and one at Shell Key July 1 (PB). Twenty-three pairs of Wilson's Plovers were at Shell Key July 1 (PB), but at *Hernando* Beach they were "barely hanging on" in vacant lots (CB). At Carrabelle Beach July 18, a Piping Plover was the first of the "fall" season (GS). A Killdeer in Key West June 7 furnished a very unusual summer date for the Keys (JAO).

About 150 pairs of Am. Oystercatchers were estimated between Dunedin and Sarasota (RTP, AFS), including a rooftop pair at the Palms of Pasadena Hospital (PB). Another pair nested successfully in Estero Bay, for a slight southward range extension (RTP, AFS, PHI, TB). At P.P.M. June 3, 365 Black-necked Stilts represented a high number (CG, PT). A pair of stilts with a downy chick at Kanapaha Prairie July 24 represented only the 2nd *Alachua* nesting report (SS, RR). American Avocets were noted across the state, with 11 at n. Jax July 6 (RC), two at Honeymoon Island S.R.A. July 13 (KW), another there July 17 (PK), and 85 at P.P.M. July 19 (PT).

Among early fall shorebirds were one Greater and four Lesser Yellowlegs at P.P.M. July 5 (CG, PT), and four Greaters, five Lessers, and a Solitary Sandpiper at S.R.S.T.F. July 7 (JCa). Also early were a Spotted Sandpiper at Seminole Ranch Conservation Area July 11 (*fide* LM), a Long-billed Curlew at Alafia Bank July 6 (RTP), a Marbled Godwit at Carrabelle Beach July 18 (GS), and two Semipalmated Sandpipers at P.P.M. July 5 (CG, PT). In contrast, a Ruddy Turnstone at P.P.M. June 3 was a late spring migrant (CG, PT), while 130 Semipalmateds at S.R.S.T.F. June 4 were probably the largest north-bound flock recorded in *Leon* (GM). Other early fall migrants were 30 Least and two Pectoral sandpipers at P.P.M. July 5 (CG, PT), and 235 "Pecs" at n. Jax July 6 (RC). Rarely reported, an Am. Woodcock was found in c. *Pasco* June 17 (DR). Two Wilson's Phalaropes were noted at P.P.M. July 5 (CG, PT) and at n. Jax July 6 (RC).

#### GULLS TO SKIMMERS

One Laughing Gull nest with a small chick was found on a Big Marco Pass sandbar July 16, a new locality and a remarkably late date (TB). Ring-billed Gulls summered at P.P.M., with one seen July 5 and two July 19 (CG, PT). Very rare on the Gulf coast in summer, an imm. Great Black-backed Gull was at Shell Key July 1 (PB).

This year 18 nesting pairs of Gull-billed Terns were reported from the Region (plus one from the Panhandle), 17 from Bird I. in Apalachicola Bay (JG) and one from Hillsborough Bay (RTP, AFS). At P.P.M., 11 Gull-billeds July 5 (CG, PT) and 13 including juveniles July 19 (PT) suggested nesting. Among the crested terns, Caspians totaled 181 pairs (highest ever for Fla.) at 3 sites, Royals 3579 at 7, and Sandwich 554 (highest this century) at 4 localities (GS, JH, JG, RTP, AFS et al.). Two Roseate Tern colonies were reported from the Keys, 317 pairs at Pelican I. Shoal and a second—not counted—on the Marathon government building rooftop (GS, JH). In the first year of a 3-year G.F.C. study, 63 colonies of Least Terns were surveyed with a total estimate of 2064 pairs (GS, JH). Many rooftop colonies were identified but not censused, a priority for the 1999 season. A documented Florida breeder only since 1987, four Bridled Tern nests were found at Pelican I. Shoal (GS, JH). Sooty Terns again numbered about 40,000 pairs at Bush Key, D.T., where "many" nests of Brown Noddies were also found (GS, JH). In 3 June pelagic trips to the Gulf Stream off Marathon, numbers of Bridled and Sooty terns and Brown Noddy

**SA** A statewide survey of larids turned up an estimated total of just 18,066 pairs of Laughing Gulls at 12 colonies (GS, JH et al.) While this may omit some small colonies in Florida Bay and the Lower Keys, it is a far cry from the early 1980s when 50,000 pairs were estimated in Tampa Bay alone. This year 14,000 pairs were estimated in that same area (RTP, AFS), 78% of the state total. We often take gulls for granted in Florida, and many consider them ubiquitous. They are not! And our only breeding species has declined by over 60% in 16 years. Why?

exceeded last year's tally (table, PHe). Just over 1900 pairs of Black Skimmers were found at 25 colonies statewide, 2/3rds in the Tampa Bay area (GS, JH, RTP, AFS et al.).

#### PIGEONS TO COWBIRDS

White-crowned Pigeons were nearly all gone from Key West by the end of July, much earlier than usual (JAO). Four Rose-ringed Parakeets were at a nest tree June 11 in Cape Coral, possibly a new locality for this exotic (CE). Migrant Yellow-billed Cuckoos appeared at Ft. DeSoto July 19 (one) and July 20 (two, LA). Now very scarce in Florida, a Smooth-billed Ani was found at the Zephyrhills Airport, *Pasco*, June 11 (DR). A **Tropical Kingbird** at Ft. DeSoto June 7 and July 13 & 20 would provide the first confirmed summer record for the state if it passes scrutiny by the F.O.S.R.C. (LA et al.). Two E. Kingbirds tarried at Ft. DeSoto June 7 (B&LA). The first southbound Purple Martins reported were 95 birds at Rookery Bay June 26, the earliest there since Below began his surveys in 1980. Three Tree Swallows at P.P.M. June 3 (CG, PT) were probably tardy migrants. Northern Rough-winged Swallows nested in *Pasco* ("unprecedented widespread breeding"—DR), *Pinellas* (adults and juveniles at Tierra Verde June 13—B&LA), and possibly *Polk* (109 birds at P.P.M. June 3—CG, PT).

Several years ago Florida Scrub Jays were reintroduced to Rookery Bay. This year, 2 pairs produced a total of three young, the first offspring of locally reared birds (TB). A Gray Catbird at McKay Bay, *Hillsborough*, July 26 was extremely early (AGS, LS). Single Yellow-throated Vireos were sighted at the Peace R. Park June 24 (TP) and Saddle Creek C.P. July 11 (PF). Now virtually extirpated from much of the Gulf coast, a Black-whiskered Vireo sang at Ft. DeSoto until July 14 (LA et al.). A migrant N. Parula passed

through Bonner Park in Largo July 6 (KN), while 21 parulas (including 13 juveniles) graced Saddle Creek C.P. July 11 (PF). Also at Bonner Park July 6 was a Yellow Warbler (KN). A Prairie Warbler at south L. Jackson July 20 was a likely migrant (KM). Louisiana Waterthrushes were abundant, with July reports from 6 localities (m.ob.). A Yellow-breasted Chat was noted at Crystal R. State Buffer Preserve, *Citrus*, to June 26 (A&B Hansen).

From June 28–July 26, an ad. male Chipping Sparrow sang in Key West, as if on territory (JAO). The population of Florida Grasshopper Sparrows at Audubon's Kissimmee Prairie Sanctuary was down to three birds, with no breeding for the 4th consecutive year. With a local flooding issue now resolved, the hope is that sparrows from nearby nesting areas will disperse to the sanctuary next year. Statewide, the subspecies numbers about 600 birds (PG).

In Key West, a Red-winged Blackbird feeding fledged young Aug. 28 and a Com. Grackle doing likewise Aug. 25 were exceeding late breeders (JAO). Shiny Cowbirds turned up in Seminole June 17 (KN) and at Ft. DeSoto July 14 (LA), while in Key West up to eight males and four females were observed through the period (JAO).

#### ADDENDUM

A female N. Shoveler with two ducklings seen July 8, 1997, at Riverview (T. McGucken) was possibly the 2nd state nesting.

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