



# Resilient Birds, Devoted Advocates

2016 Coastal Bird  
Conservation Results

*Spring 2017*

American Oystercatcher | Photo by Matt Flosa



Florida's coastal birds face long odds, but Audubon support gives them a fighting chance. This report features the results of the 2016 nesting season, as well as examples of our innovations and successes. Congratulations to our coastal bird community for all we accomplished together. You are what hope looks like to a bird!

## AUDUBON'S SUCCESSFUL FORMULA for COASTAL CONSERVATION

- **Conserving Places**

Preserve & manage the most important nesting, foraging, and migratory sites.

- **Protecting Species**

Guard bird colonies and nesting sites to limit disturbance and predation.

- **Engaging People**

Enlist volunteer stewards, citizen scientists, and advocates led by staff scientists and policy experts.



Wilson's Plover chick | Photo by Paul Brooke

## Audubon Action Secures New Protections for Vulnerable Bird and Wildlife Habitat

In November 2016, Audubon's science and advocacy inspired the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to create 13 new and expand 5 existing Critical Wildlife Areas (CWAs). These protections allow the posting of in-water buffers around nesting and roosting islands to protect rare and declining birds. Species like Roseate Spoonbills, American Oystercatchers, and Wood Storks will benefit from clear signage providing them with space to nest.

This unanimous move by FWC was the culmination of more than a year of efforts by Audubon staff, chapters and partners who participated in public hearings. From Lanark Reef and Flag Island in the Panhandle, to Nassau Sound in Northeast Florida to Rookery Bay in Naples and Stick Marsh near Vero Beach, the future is brighter for Florida's nesting coastal birds to coexist with recreating Floridians and visitors.

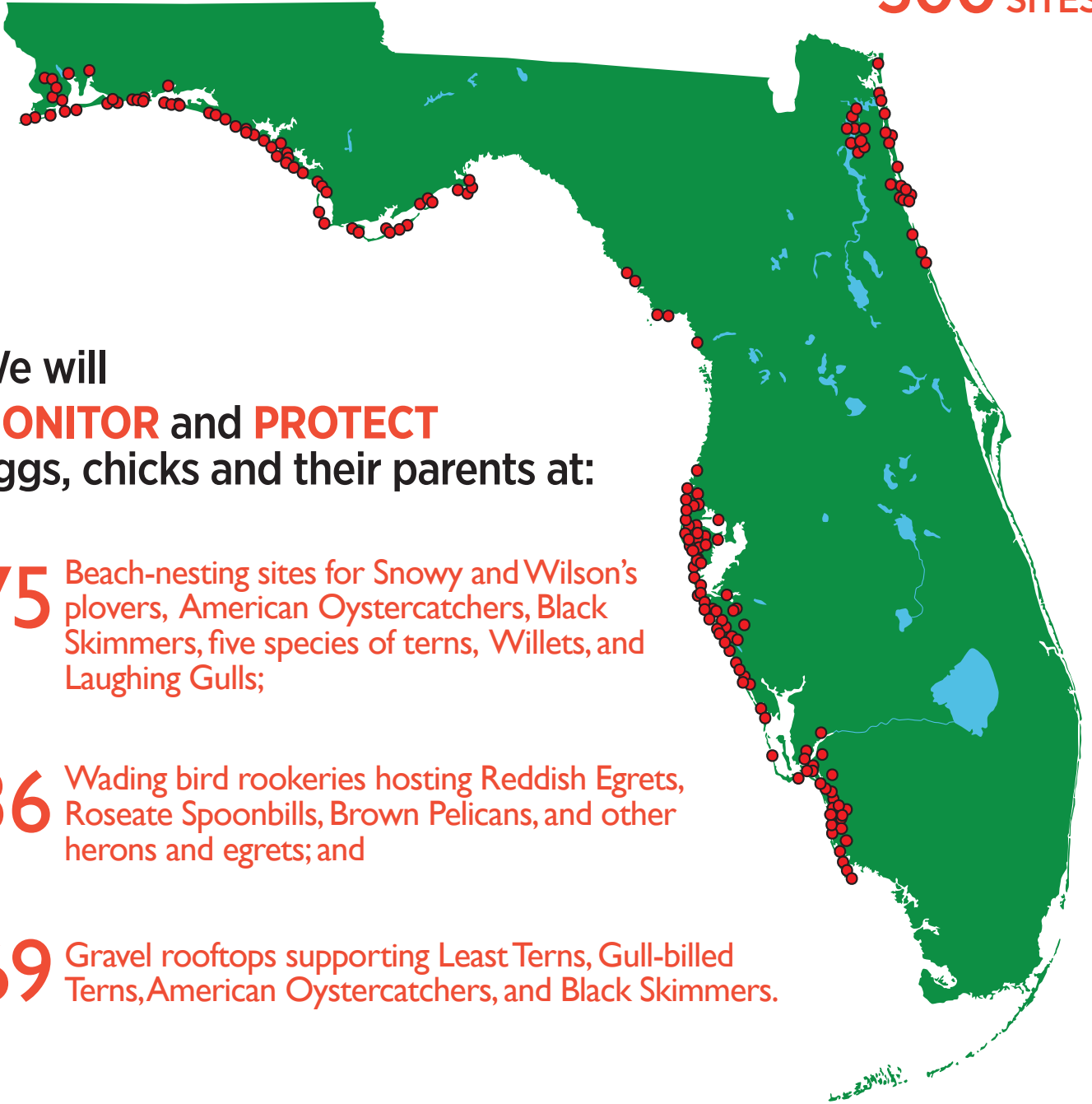


Roseate Spoonbill | Photo by Cynthia Hansen

# Protecting, Monitoring & Stewarding Coastal Waterbirds

*Thanks to YOU, this year Audubon will have a presence at almost*

**300 SITES.**



We will

**MONITOR** and **PROTECT**  
eggs, chicks and their parents at:

**75** Beach-nesting sites for Snowy and Wilson's plovers, American Oystercatchers, Black Skimmers, five species of terns, Willets, and Laughing Gulls;

**36** Wading bird rookeries hosting Reddish Egrets, Roseate Spoonbills, Brown Pelicans, and other herons and egrets; and

**169** Gravel rooftops supporting Least Terns, Gull-billed Terns, American Oystercatchers, and Black Skimmers.

## Safeguarding the Flyway's Migrants

Our work isn't over once nesting season winds down. In late summer, migratory shorebirds like Red Knots, Piping Plovers, and sandpipers begin passing through Florida. Audubon works with partners and volunteers to conduct a census of shorebirds and seabirds through fall and winter until the next nesting season begins. Resightings of banded birds help us unlock the secrets of these globetrotters. Beginning in late summer 2017, Audubon will expand migratory shorebird surveys from the Panhandle to the Tampa Bay Region and Southwest Florida.



Piping Plover  
Photo by Jean Hall



# 2016 Nesting Season Results (February 2016 - September 2016)

Last year's nesting season ended with thousands of baby birds taking flight. Halfway through the 2016 nesting season, Tropical Storm Colin overwashed most of Florida's Gulf Coast nesting habitat. However, Florida's beach-nesting birds didn't give up and started nesting all over again mid-season with help from Audubon staff, shorebird partners, and volunteers.

## Panhandle

The Panhandle's sprawling sugar sand beaches and remote islands are ideal habitat. Despite tragic losses to Tropical Storm Colin, the Panhandle still managed to fledge chicks in 2016. Seabird colonies and solitary nesting shorebirds occupied 29 ground nesting sites from Pensacola Beach to Alligator Point. Audubon biologists found more than 1,200 Least Tern nests but only 170 fledged chicks. Black Skimmers did better with 503 nests fledging 303 chicks. Snowy Plovers fledged more young overall than in 2015 especially in state parks, with 20 chicks fledged on remote St. Joseph Peninsula State Park alone.



American Oystercatcher | Photo by Christopher Ciccone

## Pinellas and Sarasota Counties

Three Rooker Island successfully fledged young including 80 Black Skimmers, 1,400 Royal Terns, 375 Sandwich Terns, 12 Caspian Terns, 8,400 Laughing Gulls, 470 White Ibis, and 8 Reddish Egrets. In the rest of Pinellas County, 40 to 60 percent of initial Black Skimmer nests were washed out by T.S. Colin. With the hard work of stewards, Audubon staff, and partners, Sarasota beaches had an encouraging year. Around 280 Black Skimmer chicks fledged from a single Lido Beach colony. Eight Snowy Plover nests on Siesta Key fledged five chicks, the largest number in years.

## Collier and Lee Counties

Despite initial setbacks caused by Fish Crows and Tropical Storm Colin, beach nesting birds had a wildly successful season in Collier County. Least Terns produced more than 460 chicks while 480 pairs of Black Skimmers produced more than 500 chicks. Twenty-two pairs of Wilson's Plovers fledged a total of 16 chicks. In addition to Audubon volunteers, Rookery Bay's Team Ocean volunteers and FWC were instrumental in this success. In Lee County, Tropical Storm Colin and predators made for a tough year. Local bird stewards are especially proud of each of the 31 Least Terns fledged.

## Northeast Florida

The region's star was Huguenot Memorial Park once again, where seasonal beach driving closures made all the difference. Thousands of Royal Terns nested among the dunes, fledging more than 2,300 chicks. Major erosion from Hurricane Matthew in October reshaped the park's beach habitat and access. In other areas, Least Tern ground colonies fledged small numbers of young. Stewarding by Audubon volunteers has greatly reduced disturbance from visitors and pets, but predators contributed to poor performance. Good news at Summer Haven in St. Johns County: more than a dozen Wilson's Plover nests were reported, and plover families were a frequent sight.



Least Tern | Photo by Nancy Elwood



## Greater Tampa Bay

Richard T. Paul Alafia Bank Sanctuary, managed in collaboration with The Mosaic Company, hosted more than 7,000 pairs of nesting birds. Roseate Spoonbills at this site fledged more than 200 chicks from 145 nests. Throughout the region, nesting continued late into the season and young Brown Pelican, Great Egret and Black-crowned Night-Heron chicks were all seen well into September 2016!

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## Panhandle Rooftops: Home for the Nesting Season

Gravel-surfaced rooftops look like a beach to Least and Gull-billed terns, American Oystercatchers, and Black Skimmers. Rather than dodging volleyballs, people, and off-leash pets on Florida's beaches, many coastal species nest directly on rooftops.

When unprotected roof edges expose tiny chicks to fast falls onto hot parking lot pavement, Audubon's Emily McKiddy, Panhandle Rooftop Coordinator, comes to the rescue. In 2016, 27 Audubon-supported gravel rooftops from Pensacola to Tyndall Air Force Base, hosted nearly 1,000 active Least Tern nests. Already this year nine of the region's largest rooftop nesting colonies have been "chick-proofed" and stand ready for Least Terns expected to return from South America in early April 2017.

Audubon cooperates with each building owner before our crew steps onto a roof. Thanks to our supporters and partners, we are able to install each specially designed system to make the rooftops safer for both chicks and parents.



**Help monitor and return fallen chicks to rooftop nesting sites!**  
**[FLConservation@Audubon.org](mailto:FLConservation@Audubon.org)**

*Photo by Nick Tomecek*



## Audubon Helps Complete Century's First Statewide Reddish Egret Survey

Reddish Egrets were nearly hunted to extinction by plume hunters in the early 1900s. With the end of persecution, their population began to recover with support from Audubon wardens and biologists. Today, Audubon staff in Tampa Bay and Florida Bay continue to manage some of the state's most important nesting sites. In recent years Reddish Egret population estimates hovered around 10 percent of pre-hunting numbers, but no one knew for sure.

To get to the bottom of this mystery, Audubon was enlisted by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to help survey the state's Reddish Egrets in 2016. The survey confirmed that roughly 30 percent of the state's population nests in Tampa Bay, and the majority of those 85-92 pairs use islands protected by Audubon. Audubon's Everglades Science Center surveys also found 54-88 Reddish Egret pairs in upper Florida Bay. Final statewide results are still being tabulated. This essential data will help drive conservation policy for Reddish Egrets and their allies.



Reddish Egret | Photo by Christopher Elliott

## Your Support is Essential to the Future of Coastal Birds and Their Habitats.

### **VOLUNTEER**

Steward coastal birds in your area:  
[FLConservation@Audubon.org](mailto:FLConservation@Audubon.org)

### **INVEST**

Audubon's efforts depend on you. Give online:  
[FL.Audubon.org/SupportCoasts](https://FL.Audubon.org/SupportCoasts)

### **LEARN**

Explore coastal conservation and our efforts:  
[FL.Audubon.org/Coasts](https://FL.Audubon.org/Coasts)

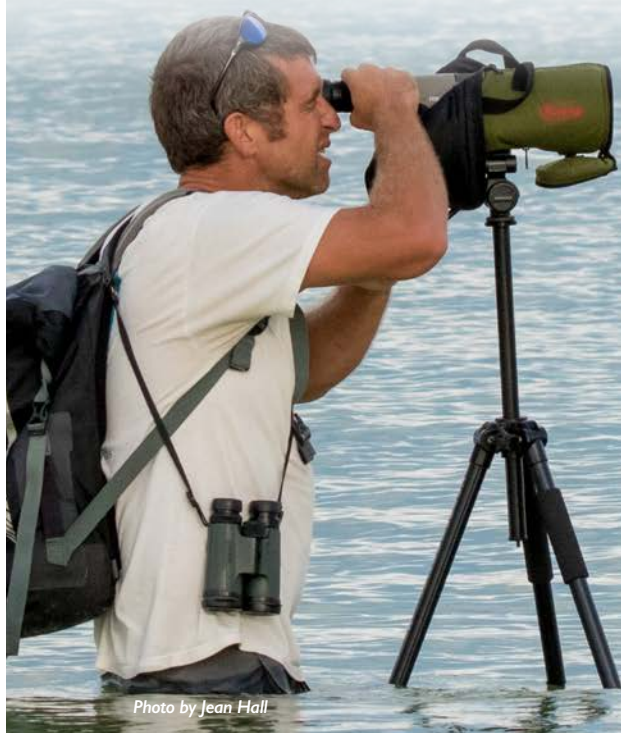


Photo by Jean Hall



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