

Audubon's Coastal Leadership Needed Now More Than Ever

2018 Coastal Bird Conservation



Audubon | FLORIDA

Friends and Supporters,

Coastal birds faced daunting challenges throughout 2018 from red tide to severe storms. State-listed Snowy Plovers, federally Threatened Red Knots, and many other species of shorebirds, seabirds, and wading birds were sickened or killed by brevetoxin exposure. Nests were also washed away after extreme weather. **It was a tough year for beach-nesting birds compared to previous years, but I remain hopeful because of you.**

Your support of Audubon is meaningful because it:

- Puts people on-the-ground to protect beach colonies,
- Gives Audubon a voice in promoting bird-friendly legislation in Tallahassee, and
- Empowers our science that influences conservation decisions.

Our 24-person coastal team in Florida protects, surveys, and manages 114 beach-nesting sites and 169 rooftop-nesting sites. Last year, more than 1,000 volunteers generously invested over 8,000 hours in bird stewardship and public outreach all to protect vulnerable colonies. We all owe our thanks to this incredible team.

In other great news, Audubon secured several grants to restore important rookeries. Two grants support invasive tree removal and native tree plantings in the Alafia Banks Critical Wildlife Area. Additionally, we secured an agreement with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to build wave attenuation devices (WADs) along the last mile of unprotected shoreline at Alafia Banks and at four additional rookery islands in the Tampa Bay region. One of these grants requires Audubon to find to matching dollars, and I'm happy to report that hundreds of online supporters are helping us secure the most we can for restoration.

On behalf of Florida's iconic coastal birds, thank you. Your involvement with support of Audubon make a measurable and direct difference for species that depend on Audubon protection. Your help gives our coastal birds a fighting chance, and for that, we are grateful.



Tricolored Heron chicks nest at places like Florida Coastal Island Sanctuaries, which are protected by Audubon.
Photo: Kelly Lyon/Audubon Photography Awards



Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Marianne Korosy".

Marianne Korosy, Ph.D.
Director of Bird Conservation
Audubon Florida

P.S. - Hurricane Michael caused widespread damage to communities in the Florida Panhandle. Some impacts may be beneficial to beach-nesting and migratory birds, but there is great concern for inland damage to the area's working forests and subsequent effects on the regional watershed. Your support helps Audubon continue our protection of our birds who need us, especially after red tides and extreme weather.

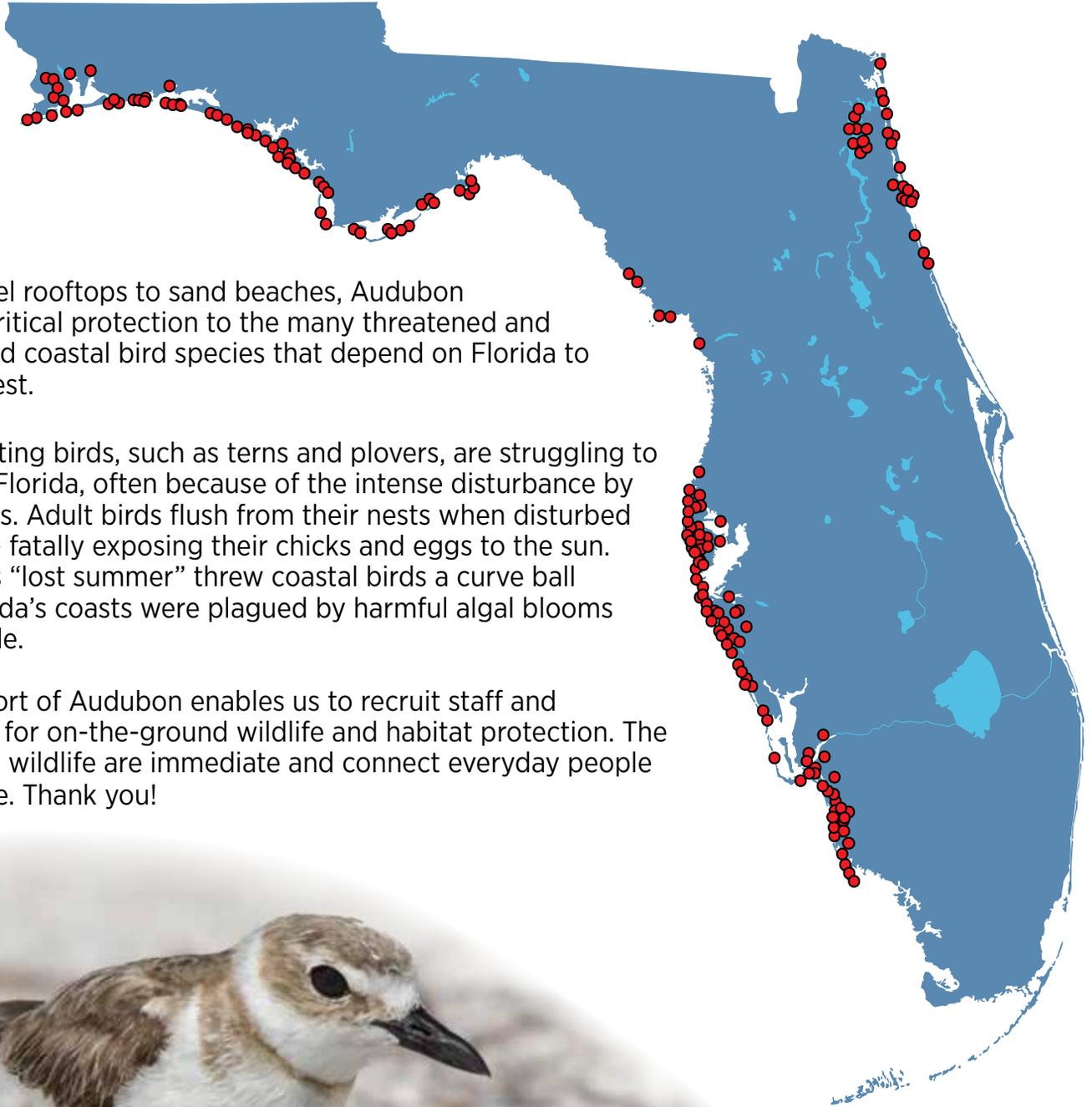
Audubon Advocates Speak Up for North Florida's Topsail Hill Preserve State Park

In Walton County, imperiled shorebirds are almost exclusively found nesting along state park beaches, and Audubon advocates are fighting to protect their habitat at Topsail Hill Preserve State Park. These species are extremely sensitive to disturbance from humans, predators, and pets. In December, park officials held a public listening session to receive input on a proposed new entry into the heart of the park for a private, gated neighborhood. A private access point like this would endanger rare nesting beach birds, unfairly restrict public access, and provide no Park staff to ensure pets are not illegally brought into the park. Thousands of Audubon advocates spoke out, and park officials reported that the overwhelming majority of comments were against this type of unmonitored, private entrance to a state park. While we await final results, Audubon feels that our action network made a real difference for this important state park.



Topsail Hill Preserve State Park currently supports the nesting of state-threatened Snowy Plovers and Least Terns.

Audubon Protects 300 Important Coastal Sites Across the Sunshine State



From gravel rooftops to sand beaches, Audubon provides critical protection to the many threatened and endangered coastal bird species that depend on Florida to nest and rest.

Beach-nesting birds, such as terns and plovers, are struggling to survive in Florida, often because of the intense disturbance by beachgoers. Adult birds flush from their nests when disturbed by people- fatally exposing their chicks and eggs to the sun. Plus 2018's "lost summer" threw coastal birds a curve ball when Florida's coasts were plagued by harmful algal blooms and red tide.

Your support of Audubon enables us to recruit staff and volunteers for on-the-ground wildlife and habitat protection. The benefits to wildlife are immediate and connect everyday people with nature. Thank you!



Wilson's Plover. Photo: Reinier Munguia

Audubon Projects Near Tampa Improve Resilience of Coastal Rookeries

The islands of Florida's west coast have long been refugia for waterbirds. Herons, egrets, pelicans, and spoonbills blanket the trees with nests in the thousands, and the breeze carries the clamor of chicks. Audubon wardens and biologists have protected these vulnerable places from disturbance for 85 years and are now mounting a new defense against climate change.

At the Richard T. Paul Alafia Bank Bird Sanctuary in Tampa Bay—leased from and managed in collaboration with The Mosaic Company and Port Tampa Bay—Audubon is overseeing essential restoration. Invasive trees are being removed to restore more than 20 acres. Replanting them with native trees maximizes the island's ecological value. With support from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), Audubon is also building offshore structures to prevent erosion and create habitat for fish and oysters. By ensuring this critically important habitat is performing at its very best, we can help buffer these vulnerable species from the effects of climate change.



White Ibis chick and pipped egg in nest on one of Audubon Florida's Coastal Islands Sanctuaries. Photo: Dr. Marianne Korosy/Audubon Florida

In Wake of Hurricane Michael, Audubon Rebuilds and Restores Important Nesting Site at St. George Causeway Critical Wildlife Area

The St. George Island Causeway Critical Wildlife Area (CWA), located in Apalachicola Bay, provides nesting habitat to thousands of seabirds. American Oystercatcher, Least Terns, Royal Terns, Sandwich Terns, and Brown Pelicans all depend on this mile-long, man-made island to nest. Formerly part of a bridge connecting St. George Island to Florida's mainland, the old causeway was saved. The site now provides a predator-free, disturbance-free seabird nesting site and is closed to boaters during the nesting season.

For more than a decade, nesting here has yielded huge successes. But a failing seawall is putting this great habitat at risk. Crumbling seawalls are allowing tidal and storm waves to erode the uplands nesting area and even completely wash-over during extreme weather events like Hurricane Michael.

A partnership between Audubon Florida and Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve began in 2014 to stabilize erosion and secure support from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to restore the site. After significant planning and engineering, Audubon scheduled construction to begin October 15, 2018. Hurricane Michael changed those plans when it made landfall a few days before.

Construction was delayed, but Audubon is pleased to report that work to protect this important site began in mid-January 2019. Construction will be completed soon, just as seabirds arrive at the site for the 2019 breeding season. These birds will arrive at a refreshed site with reinforced seawall sections to protect their nesting habitat. Audubon biologists anxiously await this year's nesting results.



Effects of Red Tide Felt by Coastal Birds in Southwest Florida And Why Audubon is Still Determined and Hopeful

The summer of 2018 was marked by water crises throughout the state. Massive amounts of blue-green algae blanketed South Florida's estuaries and beaches. And a record-setting red tide compounded the problem.

In addition to threats to human health and local economies, birds and marine life were also victims. Sick seabirds in Collier County were first detected in July after Audubon biologists noticed unusual characteristics in Black Skimmer chicks. To the naked eye, the majority of the birds looked healthy, but examination of the banding data told a different story. Approximately 70 percent of Black Skimmer chicks were underweight compared to previous years according to Audubon banding data. Necropsy results from one dead chick showed elevated levels of brevetoxin and an acute parasite infestation. Audubon biologists suspect that the parasite was able to flourish given the chick's compromised immune system from red tide toxins. Sadly, only 10 of the 69 Black Skimmers banded last summer have been resighted since leaving the colony.

Audubon biologists in Pinellas County also began reporting impacts from red tide in late August 2018 after discovering sick or dead waterbirds. Sixteen species of waterbirds were observed foraging on dead or dying fish washing up on the beaches including state-imperiled American Oystercatchers and Snowy Plover as well as Brown Pelican, Magnificent Frigatebird, Whimbrel and other shorebirds, herons and egrets, terns and gulls. In addition to the danger posed by brevetoxin exposure from direct consumption of dead marine life, prey shortages likely impacted a variety of resident and migratory birds.

Federally-threatened Red Knots seemed particularly susceptible to red tide. From mid-September to early November, Audubon Florida staff found 42 dead Red Knots and rescued 10 sick Red Knots.

In early November, Audubon biologists sadly reported that Common, Sandwich, and Royal Terns along with smaller numbers of gulls and cormorants began getting sick and dying. During this time more than 150 terns were rushed to a local wildlife hospital with an equal number found dead on the beach. Necropsies of these birds showed increased levels of brevetoxin.

Despite the frustration felt, Audubon isn't sitting on the sidelines.

Our team of biologists and volunteers are constantly on the lookout for sick birds needing to be rescued and our policy team is fighting to reduce pollution that fuels red tide and harmful algal blooms. We work closely with state wildlife officials and decision-makers to learn more about this problem and how we can solve it. The sight of dead birds and marine life along with shuttered businesses has captured the attention of lawmakers, and Audubon is using this momentum to fight for cleaner water policies at the local, state and federal levels. Audubon's momentum stopped the plume trade, enacted the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, sped up Everglades restoration, and protected thousands of coastal nesting on our shores. We're up to the challenge if you'll join us. Sign up to join our action network today by visiting FL.Audubon.org/SignUp.



In 2017, the average weight of 3-4 week old skimmer chicks was 280g whereas in 2018, same age chicks weighed an average of 220g.

Audubon Gives New Hope to Snowy Plover Nicknamed “Triple G”

Florida’s Gulf waters are finally back to brilliant blue and sparkling emerald green. It’s hard to imagine that one of the longest red tides in Florida’s history just ended. For months, coastal wildlife became red tide casualties that littered our beaches. However, among all the disheartening news, a successfully rehabilitated Snowy Plover warmed the hearts of Audubon staff and volunteers.

In August, birds began to show symptoms of toxicity in Sarasota County. Audubon scientists worried about Siesta Key in Sarasota because of its importance for nesting and wintering Snowy Plovers. When one Snowy Plover became ill, Audubon and other caring individuals rescued it from Siesta Key and rushed it to Save Our Seabirds (S.O.S.), a local avian rehabilitation center.



Above: Triple G, after her release at Siesta Key. Photo: Kylie Wilson

For birds suffering from toxicity, timing is crucial. Thankfully quick actions saved this little plover, and it made a full recovery. The plover was banded with the combination -/GG:S/G (G stands for “green”) hence the nickname “Triple G!” and then quickly released with the help of our partners at Save Our Seabirds, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation.

She returned to Siesta Key in September and remained a local bird throughout the winter, right up to the beginning of the 2019 breeding season. Stay tuned to our Facebook as we all continue watching “Triple G” and see where she ends up nesting!

Your support is essential to their future.
Help coastal birds and their habitats.

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