

Spring 2018

PERSEVERANCE

Birds and Stewards Weather Record Storms

2017 Coastal Bird Conservation Results



Audubon FLORIDA

Least Tern Chick | Photo: Jim Verhagen

Audubon Florida's Dynamic Coastal Team Reports Good Year for Florida's Iconic Coastal Birds

Just like Floridians, Florida's coastal birds demonstrated perseverance and persistence last year. Audubon support and stewardship gave the birds a fighting chance despite extreme weather, disappearing habitat, and crowded beaches. Biologists report that 2017 was an encouraging breeding season for state threatened Least Terns and Black Skimmers, especially in Southwest Florida. The diversity of Florida's long-legged wading birds fared well, especially in West Central Florida. Volunteer stewardship programs protected many beach sites from disturbance with rewarding results. Unfortunately, Snowy Plover and American Oystercatcher nests struggled, largely due to predation and catastrophic weather.

Stormy Season

Tropical weather was especially challenging for nesting in Florida's western Panhandle. Birds persistently re-nested and, chaperoned by Audubon stewards and volunteers, fledged chicks in September and October. Immediately after storms struck Florida, brave Audubon volunteers and biologists took to the beaches to survey damage and report on how the birds were doing. Sadly, chicks and eggs were lost. But some beaches received restorative overwash, refreshing habitat and making it ideal for nesting in 2018. Powerful Hurricane Irma swept Florida's coasts, reshaping and eroding shorelines in ways that may affect nesting success for years to come. Read more about Hurricane Irma's impact on Florida's habitats at FL.Audubon.org/Irma.

Growing Conservation Capacity

Thanks to the Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund and generous donors, Audubon Florida's coastal program nearly doubled in 2017. The expanded team allows Audubon to meet the protection and stewardship challenges of beach, rooftop, and tree-nesting birds along Florida's Gulf Coast and Northeast Florida's Atlantic Coast. Audubon's 12 full-time and 13 seasonal staff oversee:

- Beach, rooftop, and mangrove island site and habitat management,
- Disturbance monitoring for predators and human intrusion,
- Year-round bird surveys,
- Volunteer-supported stewardship programs, with more than 1,000 volunteers and
- Coordination with partners at 283 beach and rooftop nesting sites.

In this report, enjoy the updates focusing on Florida's coastal waterbirds and Audubon's work to protect them.

Development so dramatically alters much of Florida's coasts that active intervention by Audubon is required to recover and protect coastal birds and their habitats. Your support makes this possible. Thank you for helping Audubon strengthen our coastal stewardship network to ensure that Florida's most important habitats and the amazing birds that depend on them will benefit long into the future.



Left to right: Chris Lipps, Holley Short, Chris Farrell, Jacqui Sulek, Bonnie Samuelsen, Ann Paul, Dr. Marianne Korosy, Jeff Liechty, Laura Garey, Mark Rachal, Adrienne Ruhl, Brandon Boehm, Dr. Caroline Stahala, and Adam DiNuovo.

Audubon stewards **283** of Florida's beaches and gravel rooftops- supporting our state's iconic coastal birds. Join us in celebrating some of the Sunshine State's brightest nesting season successes in 2017.



1

Audubon partners with Gulf Power to accurately count Least Tern nests and chicks on gravel rooftops. Thanks to Gulf Power's bucket trucks, more than 110 nests and 7 downy chicks were surveyed that are not visible from the ground.



Least Tern with chicks on an Audubon-protected roof. | Photo: Michelle Landis

2

The remnant island of the Old St. George Island Causeway is posted with signs conveying the island's status as a Critical Wildlife Area to protect more than 3,000 pairs of ground-nesting Brown Pelicans, seabirds and American Oystercatchers.



American Oystercatcher | Photo: Harry Collins

3

Audubon partners with Clearwater Audubon and Florida Park Service at Three Rooker Island to protect more than 5,000 pairs of 13 species of nesting birds on this offshore barrier island, including Royal Terns.



Royal Tern | Photo: Dr. Marianne Korosy

4

On a crowded, urban beach, Audubon protects a large Black Skimmer colony with strong support from Sarasota County. Amazingly, more than 230 chicks took flight by the end of the season.



Black Skimmer | Photo: Thomas Jennings

5

Beach outreach by Audubon bird stewards makes a difference at Big Marco Pass Critical Wildlife Area. Hurricane Irma arrived too late last year to thwart 550 pairs of Least Terns from fledging more than 500 chicks and 750 pairs of Black Skimmers from fledging over 600 chicks here. Audubon depends on the vital partnership with Rookery Bay Reserve and FWC to help protect this place.



Black Skimmer | Photo: Jim Gray

6

A record-setting Least Tern beach colony in Northeast Florida nested at Anastasia Island State Park in 2017 after Hurricane Matthew deposited white sand in formerly vegetated sand dunes. With Audubon-led stewardship, the colony fledged more than 220 chicks.



Least Tern | Photo: Ray Hennessy

Even with our dynamic coastal team, Audubon couldn't do it all without the support of our partner agencies and organizations. Thank you to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's biologists and law enforcement officers, the Florida Park Service, and Florida's coastal municipalities.

Found! First Pennsylvania Great Lakes Plovers Fledged in 60 Years, Resighted Wintering in Florida Protected Areas

The equivalent of Piping Plover royalty were spotted wintering in Florida this year! In 2017, for the first time in 60 years, two pairs of Piping Plovers nested in Pennsylvania on the shores of Lake Erie. One nest fledged two chicks; the other was overwashed but the eggs were collected and hatched in captivity. Pennsylvanians followed the story eagerly as the two incubator chicks returned to the lake shore, all four chicks were banded, and they departed in August on their first migration.

Where would they winter? And would they survive? Imagine the relief and excitement when the first of the two naturally-reared youngsters was spotted on October 3, 2017 by Audubon Florida biologist Laura Garey at Phipps Preserve in the Panhandle. Biologist Anne Mauro, Rookery Bay Reserve, spotted its sibling (pictured below) just 20 days later on Keewaydin Island, south of Naples.

One of the incubator-hatched birds was resighted at McClamory Key near Cedar Key on Halloween morning by Pat and Doris Leary. The fourth bird remains a mystery. Did it survive? Did it winter somewhere unseen? You can help Audubon biologists track these amazing birds too! Keep your eyes peeled, record what you see, and report your sighting on Audubon's Florida Banded Bird Resightings Facebook page or email: FLConservation@audubon.org.

Banded bird resightings help biologists identify the habitats migrating birds need to feed and rest while in Florida.



Piping Plover | Photo: Anne Mauro

Audubon Leads Habitat Restoration for Important Wading Bird Rookery

The Richard T. Paul Alafia Bank Bird Sanctuary is the crown jewel of wading bird rookeries on the Gulf Coast, with 16 species nesting there, including our most iconic Florida species - Brown Pelicans and Great Egrets - and some of our rarest birds - Reddish Egrets, Roseate Spoonbills, and American Oystercatchers. More than 8,000 waterbirds depend on this special place as a nursery to safely raise young. It has survived this long thanks to the generosity of its owners, the Mosaic Company and Port Tampa Bay, and the management of Audubon biologists.

Unfortunately, invasive non-native trees have overtaken upland portions of the Sanctuary. Leadtree, so weak-limbed that birds won't build nests in it, is an aggressive tree that out-competes native coastal hammock species. Brazilian peppers shade out native mangroves, the preferred nesting habitat of pelicans, egrets, herons, and spoonbills. Removal of both invasive trees and replanting with native shrubs and trees will encourage greater mangrove foliage density and provide the coastal hammock habitat so valuable for migrating songbirds.

In 2017, Audubon Florida obtained a matching grant from Hillsborough County's Environmental Protection Commission to remove the harmful invasive trees and replace them with beneficial native plants. Work will get underway later this year so stay tuned to our website and social media for updates!

Audubon Helps Secure State Protections for Port Orange Rookery, Protecting Rare & Endangered Birds

In December 2017, Port Orange bird rookery became the state's 32nd Critical Wildlife Area (CWA) established by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). This important protection was advanced by Halifax River Audubon and Audubon Florida to buffer nesting American Oystercatchers, Brown Pelicans and several species of herons and egrets from disturbance by boaters. Data collected by Audubon volunteers was used to successfully justify the protection, and as a result, nesting birds enjoy a 10-150 foot buffer while the island is closed from January 1-August 31. CWAs protect the places where Florida's most imperiled wildlife are at their most vulnerable. Thank you to the FWC commissioners for their leadership!



American Oystercatcher | Photo: Jesse Gordon

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

VOLUNTEER

Steward coastal birds in your area: FLConservation@Audubon.org

INVEST

Audubon's efforts depend on you. Give online: FL.Audubon.org/SupportCoasts

LEARN

Explore coastal conservation and our efforts: FL.Audubon.org/Coasts



American White Pelicans and Roseate Spoonbills
Photo: Patrick Leary



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