



Audubon | FLORIDA

Coastal Report

2022 ANNUAL SUMMARY



Friends and Supporters,

As we start another nesting season here on the coasts of Florida, the sea, shore, and wading birds that depend on our coastal areas are threatened by red tide, erosion, human disturbance, and more. Not only did volunteers make a difference for these birds on the beaches, you spoke up to create lasting protections for them.

Thank you for stepping up to improve their habitat now and into the future. Last year, you spoke out when the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) approved permitting guidelines for beach-nesting birds: 1,753 of you told FWC that you supported consequences for habitat impacts, and that the FWC will need additional staff to implement this good program to consult with landowners, review permits, and implement mitigation.

Already in 2023, more than 700 of you asked the FWC to improve fishing regulations at the Skyway Pier to protect Brown Pelicans and other nesting birds in Tampa Bay from entanglement (see pg. 4). Another 700+ wrote to your elected officials in the Florida State Legislature to ask for improved stormwater rules that will reduce the scourge of algal blooms along our shores. On behalf of the birds, I thank you again.

As we review our 2022 season in this report, we breathe a retrospective sigh of relief that the year's hurricanes came after nesting season, even as we grieve with the coastal communities and inland neighborhoods still struggling to recover. We will be paying special attention to hurricane-caused habitat changes in the 2023 nesting season. Stay tuned!



Audrey DeRose-Wilson,
Director of Bird Conservation



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Cover Photo:
Least Terns courting on a rooftop.
Photo: Kara Cook/Audubon Florida.



Wilson's Plover. Photo: Kara Cook/Audubon Florida.

2022 BREEDING SEASON AT AUDUBON-STEWARDED SITES

The 2022 breeding season proved to be successful for beach-nesting sea and shorebirds. Two late-season hurricanes had little impact on nesting birds but did impact coastal habitat in a big way.

NORTHWEST FLORIDA



Navarre Causeway fledged more than 50 Black Skimmer chicks. Dog Island and Little St. George Island fledged 15 Snowy Plovers. Nesting sites monitored by Audubon Florida biologists also fledged seven American Oystercatcher chicks in the region. Fifteen rooftops recorded active nesting by Least Terns. *This region was not impacted by hurricanes this season.*

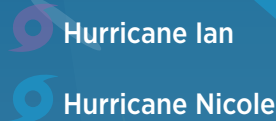
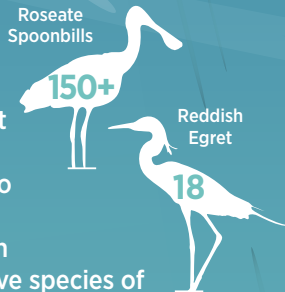
TAMPA BAY REGION



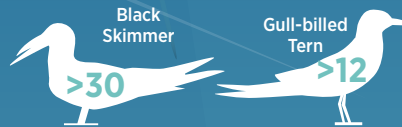
The region fledged 630 Black Skimmers, 15 American Oystercatchers, and multiple Wilson's Plovers, as well as thousands of Royal Terns, Sandwich Terns, Caspian Terns, and Laughing Gulls. Staff monitored 35 active roofs — up four from last season. *Beach-nesting habitat here was not significantly impacted by storms.*

FLORIDA COASTAL ISLANDS SANCTUARIES

Seventy-five sites monitored throughout Tampa Bay and Southwest Florida produced more than 150 Roseate Spoonbill and 18 Reddish Egret chicks. Staff worked with Port Tampa Bay and the Army Corps of Engineers to ensure a productive nesting season for beach-nesting birds including American Oystercatchers, Black Skimmers, and five species of terns at spoil islands in Hillsborough Bay. While staff observed a few broken mangrove branches after the season's hurricanes passed, they saw no significant damage to nesting habitat.

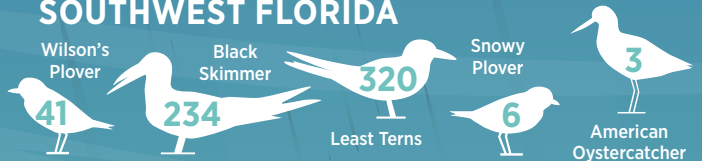


NORTHEAST FLORIDA



More than a dozen Gull-billed Terns and 30 Black Skimmers fledged from new islands that formed in Nassau Sound. Erosion and inundation of some islands hampered the nesting of American Oystercatchers, Wilson's Plovers, and Least Terns. Northeast Florida saw worsening erosion as a result of both Hurricanes Ian and Nicole. Islands that had formed in Nassau Sound in 2022 dropped down below high tide again and are not likely rebuilding quickly enough to host nests in 2023. By contrast, continued erosion and redistribution of sand on other sites from years of nourishment and dune restoration may provide additional opportunities for Least Tern nesting.

SOUTHWEST FLORIDA



Wilson's Plovers fledged 41 chicks, Black Skimmers had 234 fledges, and Least Terns fledged 320 chicks, including 19 at Big Marco Pass — a first since 2019. Six Snowy Plover chicks fledged (Lee County). Importantly, Audubon assisted with the creation of a new stewardship program at Cayo Costa State Park this year, which ended up being the site of Lee County's only successful American Oystercatcher nest. Lee and Collier counties bore the brunt of Hurricane Ian's destructive storm surges that swamped coastal communities. One notable change was a loss of vegetation on the dunes from overwash and sand accretion, potentially providing additional nesting habitat for Least Terns and Black Skimmers.

Hurricane Ian proved to be one of the most destructive storms in Florida's history, devastating both coastal and inland communities along the southwest coast. A few short weeks later, Hurricane Nicole hit northeastern Florida — a sure reminder that climate change will continue to bring stronger storms to our shores.



Jeff Liechty carefully bands a Brown Pelican.

“The project is off to a great start. We are beginning to learn about how these pelicans behave after being rescued. Unfortunately, some of the birds have already been entangled in fishing gear a second time.”
— Jeff Liechty, Audubon Florida Coastal Biologist

Audubon Combines Science and Action to Protect Brown Pelicans

Brown Pelicans are one of Florida’s most iconic species: They’re large, commonly seen, and known for their acrobatic plunge dives after fishy prey. Unfortunately, they are learning to find fish in the same places that anglers do and often find themselves entangled in line and other gear.

Audubon works with partners in the Tampa Bay region to use both science and action to protect the region’s pelican population.

BANDED PELICANS TELL A STORY

Entanglement occurs at various locations throughout Tampa Bay, but fishing piers are hotspots for this conflict between anglers and pelicans. Rescuers with Friends of the Pelicans and the Skyway Fishing Pier State Park are documenting hundreds of pelicans hooked in a single month. In the past two years alone:

- 3,600+ seabirds have been rescued.
- 1,000+ pelicans have been rehabilitated from severe injuries.
- 500+ pelicans died from entanglements.

The Community Foundation of Sarasota County granted Audubon Florida \$5,000 to begin banding Brown Pelicans in the region to learn more about survival rates following accidental hooking and learn more about repeat entanglements for released birds.

So far, Audubon Florida Coastal Biologist Jeff Liechty has banded more than 50 Brown Pelicans rescued from entanglement in Manatee and Sarasota counties. He has already received reports of pelicans with his bands sighted along the Gulf Coast, from Pinellas to Collier counties.

AUDUBON ADVOCATES SPEAK OUT FOR PELICANS

Thousands of pelicans have been injured by fishing line, especially at the Skyway Fishing Pier in Tampa Bay. When an entangled Brown Pelican is cut free and returns to its roost with yards of fishing line attached, it then poses the threat of entanglement to the other birds using that roost, including State-designated Threatened Roseate Spoonbills, Reddish Egrets, and Little Blue Herons.

Since 2013, Audubon Florida, local Audubon chapters, and partnering wildlife rescue groups have educated anglers using the Skyway Fishing Pier about avoiding entanglement. While angler education remains an important tool, a decade of education efforts has proven insufficient in addressing the issue at the Skyway Fishing Pier. Regulatory changes are long overdue.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) proposed new fishing rules to reduce the entanglement of pelicans and other seabirds in fishing line at Skyway Pier. Audubon Florida supported the proposed rule changes, including restricting the use of multi-hook rigs on a year-round basis and limiting users to two rods, as good first steps in reducing the incidence of severe entanglement at the pier.

Many thanks to the 778 Audubon Florida members who signed our petition supporting the rule changes while urging the FWC to protect Brown Pelicans. Commissioners agreed to move forward with proposed rule changes in February, but asked FWC staff to come back with modifications for final approval at the July meeting. Audubon Florida will continue to work with FWC and other partners to help protect pelicans from entanglement at the Skyway Fishing Pier.

Working together, we will learn more about Brown Pelican behavior and entanglement patterns, and use this data to protect the areas they need to survive and thrive.

Current project partners include Seaside Seabird Sanctuary in Indian Shores and Save Our Seabirds in Sarasota. The Hooked Pelican Working Group is a partnership between the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), Audubon Florida, park managers, rescuers, rehabilitators, and anglers that was formed to address this problem.

Celebrating 10+ Years of the Florida Shorebird Alliance

The Florida Shorebird Alliance (FSA) recently celebrated the 10-year anniversary of coordinated, statewide beach-nesting bird monitoring in Florida.

The FSA was formally established in 2009, but it took several more years and lots of work by dedicated partners to standardize data collection and launch the Breeding Bird Protocol for Florida's Shorebirds and Seabirds and the Florida Shorebird Database. In 2011, the brand-new Florida Shorebird Alliance monitored 1,180 beach and rooftop nest sites; by 2021, the FSA had nearly doubled that number with partners entering data from more than 1,870 nesting sites.

WHAT IS THE FLORIDA SHOREBIRD ALLIANCE?

The FSA is a statewide network of 12 local partnerships. These partnerships include non-government organizations, businesses, state and federal land managers, county and municipal governments, as well as dedicated individuals who monitor beach-nesting bird populations and reduce disturbance at nesting sites. Bird stewards educate visitors about the remarkable species that rely on Florida's shores for survival and ensure beachgoers do not enter fragile nesting sites. Rooftop stewards monitor buildings where chicks are falling from unprotected rooftop edges and rain gutters and return them safely to the rooftop. They work with property owners to "chick proof" rooftops by installing chick fencing to reduce the risk of chicks falling.



Black Skimmers. Photo: Michael Ferrara/Audubon Florida.

HOW DOES AUDUBON WORK WITH THE FLORIDA SHOREBIRD ALLIANCE?

Local Audubon chapters and Audubon Florida have a long history of organizing bird stewards in the Sunshine State. In the early years of the FSA, Audubon chapters organized volunteers and funded local efforts to protect and monitor shorebirds and seabirds from disturbance in Southwest Florida.

- 2010: Audubon Florida expanded stewardship and monitoring to beaches in the Panhandle.
- 2015: Audubon Florida received a grant to hire staff to complement and support chapter-led efforts to recruit and coordinate stewards in Southwest and Northeast Florida.
- 2017: New funding by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation allowed Audubon Florida to recruit, train, and support volunteer stewards across the Panhandle, Southwest Florida, and Northeast Florida.

Since 2017, almost 2,000 volunteer stewards have contributed more than 30,000 hours by stewarding and monitoring shorebirds and seabirds and extending protection and outreach to 300+ beach and rooftop sites. With their intimate knowledge of breeding sites, stewards are uniquely positioned to expand our collective knowledge about avian health, predator presence, and habitat management effectiveness around the state.

COASTAL PROGRAM



BREEDING AND NON-BREEDING SEASON VOLUNTEERS



ROOFTOPS SURVEYED



WITH ACTIVE NESTING AND MOST WITH PROTECTIONS

(chick fencing, chick checkers, etc)



BEACH, ISLAND, AND ROOFTOP SITES STEWARDED BY AUDUBON FL



INVESTED IN BIRD STEWARDSHIP AND PUBLIC OUTREACH TO PROTECT VULNERABLE COLONIES

FLORIDA COASTAL ISLAND SANCTUARIES



VOLUNTEERS IN 2022



COLONY MONITORING



VOLUNTEERS



MONOFILAMENT CLEANUP



VOLUNTEERS



WE ALL OWE OUR THANKS TO THIS INCREDIBLE TEAM!

Protect coastal birds and their habitats.

Your support is essential to their future.



VOLUNTEER

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

DONATE

Audubon's efforts depend on you. Learn more about giving by contacting Katie Swann at Katie.Swann@audubon.org

LEARN

Explore coastal conservation and our efforts:
fl.audubon.org/Coasts

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS.

The Batchelor Foundation
Bishop SPCA
Manatee County Community Foundation
Mosaic Company Foundation
Pinellas County Community Foundation
– Tonne Fund and Bushnell Fund
Rayonier
River Branch Foundation
Robert F. Schumann Foundation
Sarasota Community Foundation
The Spurlino Foundation

Thank you for supporting our coastal work!



Brown Pelican.
Photo: Jeff Liechty/
Audubon Florida.

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