2019 Tampa Bay Region Wading Bird Report

Stepping up protection efforts to combat increased disturbance.

Each nesting season since 1934, Audubon's dedicated biologists have patrolled the mangrove islands of the Tampa Bay region to protect and later survey the region's iconic wading bird population. Since documenting these species pushed to the brink of extinction by plume hunting in the early 1900s, Audubon has tracked the recovery of Roseate Spoonbills, Wood Storks, Reddish Egrets, Little Blue Herons, Brown Pelicans and more, as well as used our data to document new threats to their survival.

In recent decades, disturbance by boaters, declining water quality and freshwater quantity in estuarine systems, and harmful algal blooms have all impacted the success of these sensitive species.

Because of our observations, we've been able to successfully lobby for increased protections at these vulnerable, essential nesting sites. Not only should this help blunt population declines, but we have even documented higher numbers of fledged chicks for some species in recent years.

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While total nesting pairs of all species had a hopeful uptick in 2019, individual species have different outlooks.

**Roseate Spoonbill** populations have been fairly stable in the region since 2011, and **Brown Pelicans** rallied in 2019, likely in response to the recovery of their prey base after the devastating harmful algal blooms of 2018.

**Wood Stork** nesting continues to shift northward as South Florida wetlands have struggled to consistently provide the food storks need to successfully raise young in recent years.

In 2019, **Great Blue Heron** numbers improved, but over time, they continue to decline along with **Little Blue Herons**, **Tricolored Herons**, and **Reddish Egrets**, likely due to loss of freshwater and estuarine foraging habitat as a result of development.

**Our Work**

To protect nesting colonies, Audubon Florida works with local, state, and federal partners to protect habitat with new living shorelines, restore wetland foraging areas, post and patrol islands for disturbance during nesting season, census all colonies annually, and reduce entangling debris through volunteer clean-ups. Audubon’s Florida Coastal Islands Sanctuaries team has been conducting region-wide surveys of nesting colonial waterbirds since the mid-1990s, with the aim of identifying the most important nesting areas to improve management of these sites, and to determine site-specific and regional population trends.

Learn more at: [fl.audubon.org/conservation/florida-coastal-islands-sanctuaries](https://fl.audubon.org/conservation/florida-coastal-islands-sanctuaries)