

# AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER

*Haematopus palliatus*



**455** Breeding adults  
in 2019

## Conservation Status in Florida: Threatened

### Site Importance

Oystercatchers will return to the same nest site each year sometimes arriving ~60 days before they initiate a nest. They often stay in one location for at least 150 days during the nesting season!

### Rooftop Territories

Pairs that nest on rooftops will defend a territory that extends to the ground or beach near the rooftop.

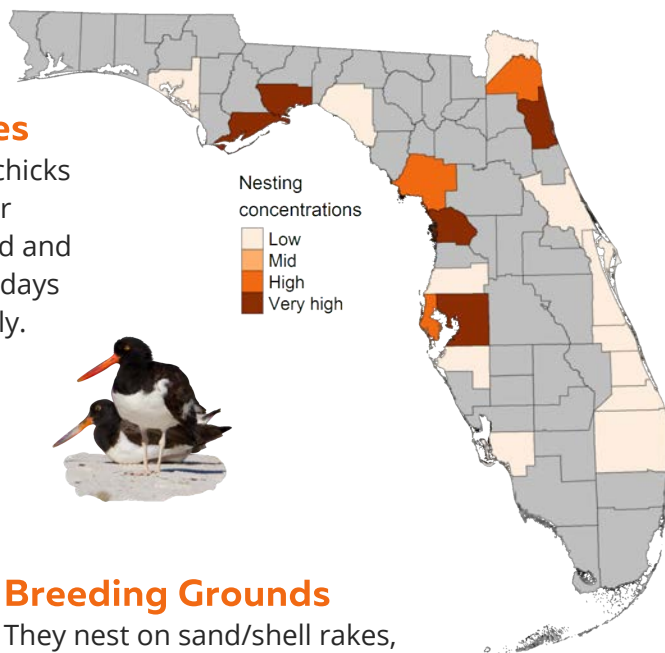


Three percent of the Florida population nests on rooftops.

### Field Notes

A partner documented a flock of 658 wintering oystercatchers on a single shell rake near Cedar Key. This is 5% of the entire population of American Oystercatchers.

### WHERE THEY BREED



### Breeding Grounds

They nest on sand/shell rakes, natural islands, spoil islands, beaches, and occasionally rooftops.



### Movement Patterns

### Immigration

The Tolomato River in St. Johns County is one of the most productive sites in the state and monitors have documented many banded birds from other states entering the FL breeding population here.

### Banding Insights

Banded oystercatchers nesting in St. Johns County have been documented wintering in Central America. Thanks to our international conservation partners for the band resights!



Photos:  
Jean Hall, Pat Leary, Joe Marchionno

August 2021  
www.flshorebirdalliance.org



# BLACK SKIMMER

*Rynchops niger*

6,010 Breeding adults  
in 2019

3% of the Florida population nests on rooftops.

Conservation Status in Florida: Threatened

## Jaw Dropping

Black skimmers are tactile feeders. They use their longer lower mandible to skim the water's surface, feeling for fish instead of relying on sight.

## Chick Development

Chicks hatch with equal length upper and lower mandibles - they do not develop a longer lower mandible until after they learn to fly.

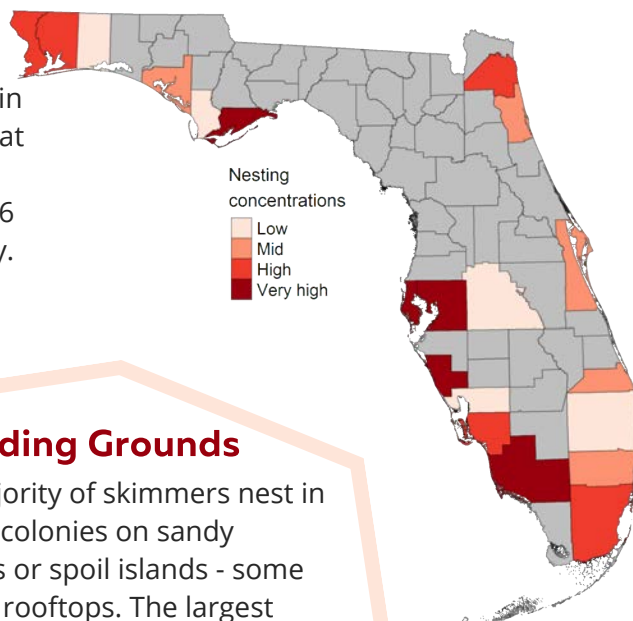
## Field Notes

Male and female black skimmers can be differentiated in the field by comparing size - males are visibly larger and heavier than females. Male chicks are heavier than females at just 23 days old!

## Night Moves

The foraging movements of GPS-tracked black skimmers in coastal Louisiana revealed that skimmers foraged mostly at night and traveled as far as 16 km (~10 mi) from their colony.

## WHERE THEY BREED



## Breeding Grounds

The majority of skimmers nest in ground colonies on sandy beaches or spoil islands - some nest on rooftops. The largest colonies are in Southwest Florida.

Zzz

## Resting Skimmers

### Loafing Around

Resting skimmers often lay their entire bodies on the sand to give their busy neck muscles a break after foraging. This behavior is called loafing. Groups of resting or loafing birds are called a roost.

### Vital Rest

Like sleeping, loafing is a vital part of a bird's survival. Help loafing skimmers by giving them space to rest and replenish energy stores.



Photos:  
Jean Hall, Mia McPherson

August 2021  
[www.flshorebirdalliance.org](http://www.flshorebirdalliance.org)





# LEAST TERN

*Sternula antillarum*

14,382

Breeding adults  
in 2019

## Conservation Status in Florida: Threatened

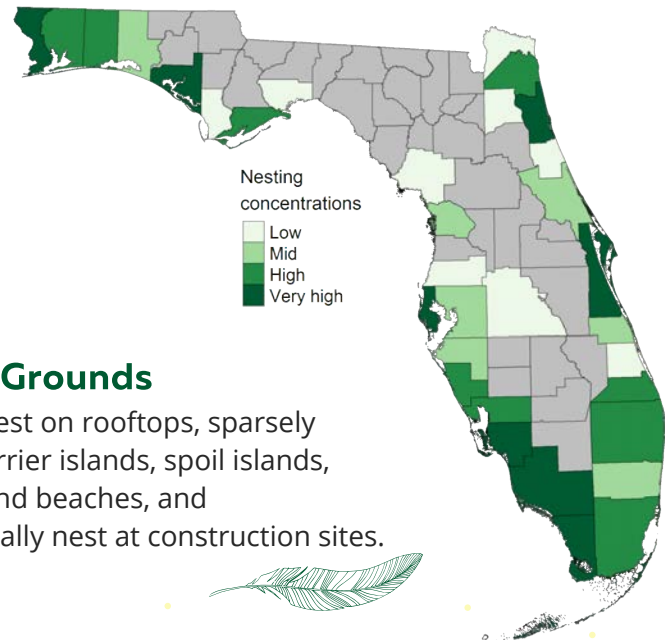
### Help From My Friends

Least terns are attracted to locations where other terns are nesting. They prefer sites that have a mix of single and paired birds over sites with just singles or just pairs.

### Food Matters

Growth of least tern chicks varies between years and colonies but depends on environmental conditions - especially food availability.

### WHERE THEY BREED



### Rooftop Revelation

Since 2000, Least terns in Florida have consistently lost an average of three suitable nesting rooftops per year. However, the rate of loss has slowed, from four losses per year from 2000 - 2010 to one loss per year from 2011 - 2019.



### Breeding Grounds

Least terns nest on rooftops, sparsely vegetated barrier islands, spoil islands, shell rakes, and beaches, and opportunistically nest at construction sites.



Fifty-five percent of the Florida population nested on rooftops in 2019.



### SURVEY TIPS

#### Good Timing

From mid-May to late June, least tern adults spend more than 90% of their day incubating eggs! Maximize your chance of counting peak nest numbers by surveying between 6am - 2pm.

#### Be Choosy

Weekly counts of fledglings from mid-June to the first week of August greatly improves productivity estimates for least terns.



Photo:  
Jack Rogers

August 2021  
[www.flshorebirdalliance.org](http://www.flshorebirdalliance.org)



# SNOWY PLOVER

*Charadrius nivosus*



359

Breeding adults  
in 2019

## Conservation Status in Florida: Threatened

### Genetically Unique

A recent study described the Florida Snowy Plover as genetically unique and recommended that the species be considered part of a new conservation unit that includes the eastern Gulf.



85-87% of this population  
is found in Florida!

### Conservation Strategies

Access to high quality brood-rearing habitat is critical for chick survival. When access is limited, chick growth is slower, chicks take longer to fledge, and chick survival decreases.

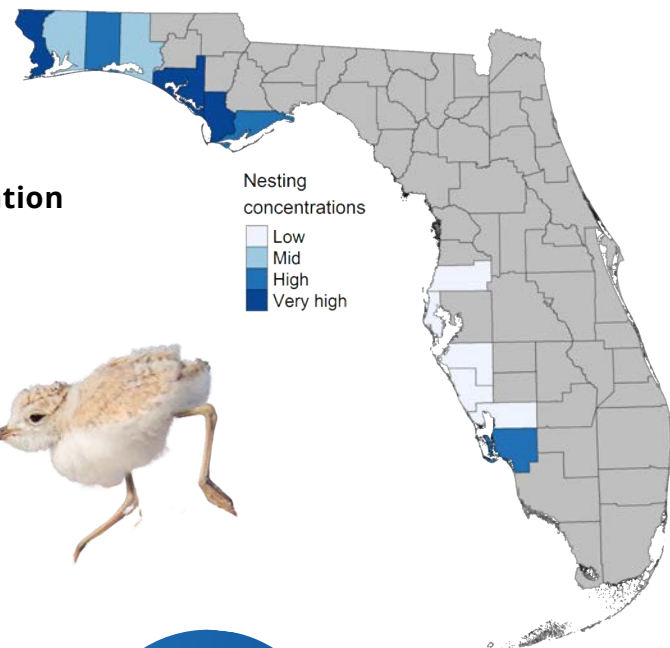
### Breeding Strategy

Within a nesting season, females often have multiple nests with different males. As soon as a nest hatches, some females leave their mate to initiate a new nest with a different male, leaving the chicks to be cared for solely by the male.

### Florida Residents

Based on resights of banded birds in the Florida panhandle, ~75% stay at or near their breeding sites year-round. The remaining ~25% migrate for the winter to the SW Florida coast or to neighboring gulf states.

### WHERE THEY BREED



Nesting concentrations  
Low  
Mid  
High  
Very high

### Breeding Grounds

In Florida, snowy plovers are found on the Gulf coast and nest on sparsely vegetated barrier islands, sandy beaches, and occasionally on spoil islands.

### SURVEY TIPS

#### Vocalization

Snowy plovers make a variety of calls while breeding. Learning their calls can help determine breeding behavior (territorial, nesting, or brood-rearing).

#### Survey Timing

Conduct early breeding surveys during the month of March. Not only are snowy plover adults more visible during pre-nesting periods, but observations can be used to identify breeding territories.



Photos:  
Britt Brown, Jean Hall, Emily Hunter

August 2021  
[www.flshorebirdalliance.org](http://www.flshorebirdalliance.org)



# WILSON'S PLOVER

*Charadrius wilsonia*

912

Breeding  
adults in 2019

## Conservation Status in Florida: Species of Greatest Conservation Need

### Regional Importance

Northeast Florida is an important stronghold for breeding Wilson's plovers, holding 34% of the statewide population.

### Living on the Edge

Wilson's plovers often nest on the margins of coastal wetlands, and small changes in water levels may flood nests.

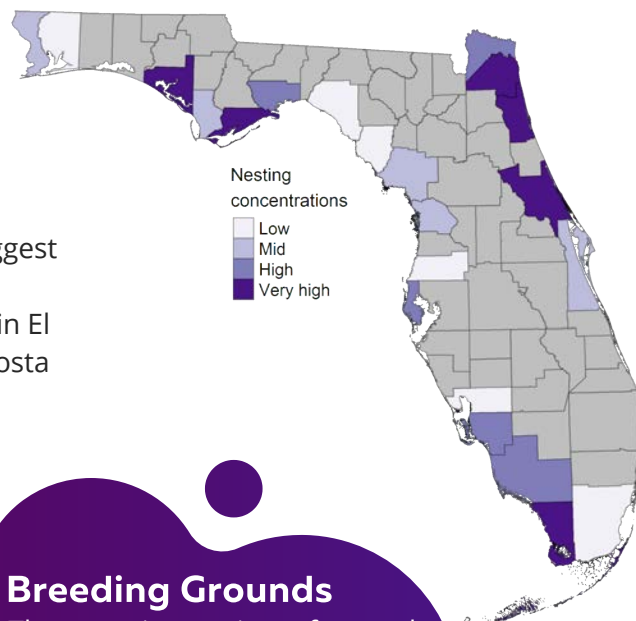
### Chasing Food

Wilson's plover chicks find food for themselves while the parents watch for danger. They travel from their nest to their preferred foraging locations, such as the muddy margins of coastal lagoons, where they hunt for crustaceans like fiddler and ghost crabs.

### International Travelers

Resights of individuals banded by partners across the Gulf coast suggest they frequently winter in Central America. They were documented in El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama!

### WHERE THEY BREED



### Breeding Grounds

They nest in a variety of coastal habitats along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, including salt flats, sandy beaches, shell rakes, lagoons, and marsh edges.

### SURVEY TIPS

#### Sight and Sound

Actively listen and stop periodically to scan ahead to look for birds. Although plovers may blend in, they might call and alert you of their presence.

#### Hidden Chicks

Chicks will often hide in vegetation until flight-capable. Pay close attention to adult behavior to determine if chicks are present. If adults are excessively calling and flying or feigning an injury, they likely have hidden chicks!



Photos:  
Mia McPherson, Britt Brown, Raya Pruner

August 2021  
[www.flshorebirdalliance.org](http://www.flshorebirdalliance.org)

