

Tampa Palms

Guide To Protected Species of Wildlife



INTRODUCTION:

The Tampa Palms community (the TPOA and CDD) maintains a robust program to protect the waters of the State of Florida and does so under a NPDES Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (NPDES MS4) permit which is administered by the Fla DEP.

The purpose of these protections of the public waters and environments is in part to safeguard the many species of wildlife present in the Tampa Palms area, particularly those which are endangered.

In the following pages the protected wildlife species that live in the Tampa Palms area are described. Currently a total of 20 species are reported to live in or around Tampa Palms, based on distribution information provided by the Florida Natural Areas Inventory. This guide is divided into three sections consisting of birds, mammals, and reptiles/amphibians. Thirteen of these species are more likely to be seen or heard than others in Tampa Palms so the common name for these species has been highlighted in yellow at the top of the page. The remaining seven species may not be seen due to habitat requirements, their timid nature, or they are nocturnal or fossorial (spending the majority of their time underground).

This information is taken from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) which maintains the state list of animals designated as:

- Federal Endangered,
- Federal Threatened,
- Federal Threatened due to similarity of appearance,
- State Threatened, or State Species of Special Concern.

Species listed as Endangered or Threatened at the federal level and also on the state list of imperiled species are now listed as Federal Endangered and Federal Threatened on the state list. Species not on the federal list but at risk of extinction are listed as State Threatened.

Each wildlife species is described on two pages. The first page provides information on the species status, description, a Florida distribution map (distribution shown in yellow), and a picture(s). The second page includes similar species, habitat, and management techniques. The similar species section describes other animals that may look similar to the species in question. This section can be helpful in identifying the different wading birds.

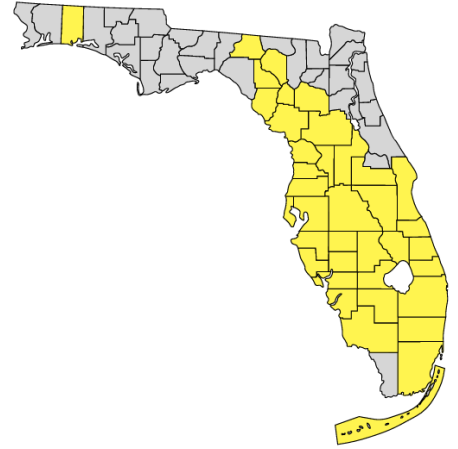
Remember, these species are protected under federal and/or state law and regulations. As such, they should not be handled, harmed, harassed, disturbed, or killed. Violations of the Endangered Species Act, Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, or State Wildlife Code are punishable under law.

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Protected Bird Species In Tampa Palms





FLORIDA BURROWING OWL

Athene cunicularia floridana

Order: Strigiformes
Family: Strigidae
Federal Status: Migratory Bird
FL Status: Species of Special Concern
Legal Protection: U.S. Migratory Bird Treaty Act and state Wildlife Code prohibit take of birds, nests, or eggs.



Description: Small, ground-dwelling owl with long legs, white chin stripe, round head, and stubby tail. Adults are boldly spotted and barred with brown and white. Juveniles are plainer above with less spotting, and buffy below with little or no brown barring. Will often dig their own burrow and, prior to egg laying, will line burrow and entrance with various materials (e.g., grass clumps, palm fronds). After eggs are laid, entrance chamber is further adorned with more decorative and visible objects, such as paper scraps, plastics, tin foil, mirrors, graduation tassels, cigarette butts, and other non-natural materials.

Similar Species: Not likely to be confused with other owl species. Differs from western subspecies in having darker upper parts with less buffy brown and whiter spotting.

Habitat: High, sparsely vegetated, sandy ground. Natural habitats include dry prairie and sandhill. Makes extensive use of ruderal area such as pastures, airports, ball fields, parks, school grounds, university campuses, road right-of-ways, and vacant spaces in residential areas.

Seasonal Occurrence: Predominately non-migratory; maintains home ranges and territories while nesting.

Florida Distribution: Largest populations occur in southwest and southeast Florida. Depending on habitat availability, small, patchily distributed populations occur in the Florida Keys and along the

interior ridges of Florida from Highlands County to Madison County. A single disjunct population occurs at Eglin Air Force Base in Okaloosa County.

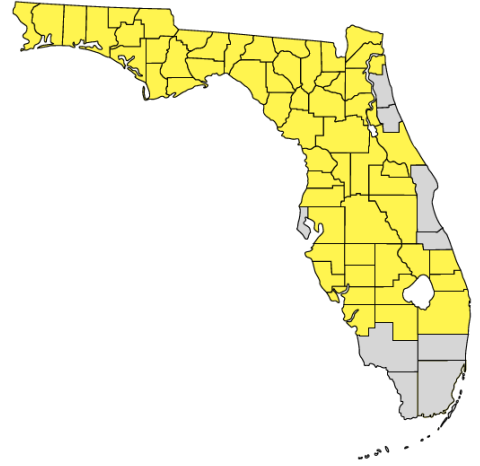
Range-wide Distribution: Resident in Florida and the Bahamas.

Conservation Status: Human activities have increased range in Florida but have exposed owls to additional threats. Largest concentrations of owls now reside in ruderal grasslands and lawns of residential and industrial areas. One of the largest populations is in Cape Coral, a large development in Lee County. Intensive cultivation and development of grasslands pose major threats. Permits for legal “take” of burrows are also a concern. Human harassment (generally by children), predation by domestic animals, and vehicle collisions take a toll on urban birds. Predation by fire ants is also implicated in owl mortality.

Protection and Management: Educate residents in developments and owners of industrial or farm lands where owls occur to help limit harassment. Maintain optimum condition of natural and ruderal sites where owls occur; will likely require fire in natural areas and mowing in ruderal areas. Establish buffer zones and development plans that consider the needs of the owl, which may allow them to persist under otherwise precarious circumstances. Studies in Cape Coral showed owls appeared to prefer sites with between 25 and 75 percent of developable lots occupied.

Nesting Season: February 15 – July 15

Selected References: Bowen 2000, Poole and Gill (eds.) 1993, Robertson and Woolfenden 1992, Rodgers et al. (eds.) 1996, Stevenson and Anderson 1994, Wood 2001.



SOUTHEASTERN AMERICAN KESTREL

Falco sparverius paulus

Order: Falconiformes
Family: Falconidae
Federal Status: Migratory Bird
FL Status: State Threatened
Legal Protection: U.S. Migratory Bird Treaty Act and state Wildlife Code prohibit take of birds, nests, or eggs.



Description: Smallest falcon in U.S. and similar in size to the familiar mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*). Sexes distinctive: male has blue-gray wings, while female is larger and has more uniformly rufous back and wings. Both sexes have a mustached black-and-white facial pattern with strong perpendicular lines extending below eye and near ear, and a black band at base of rufous tail. Falcons in general have long, pointed wings and long tails, similar to doves. The alarm call, given frequently in flight, is *killy, killy, killy*.

Similar Species: The merlin (*Falco columbaris*), another falcon occurring in Florida, is larger and lacks the rufous back and tail. The sharp-shinned hawk (*Accipiter striatus*) has rounded wings and also lacks the rufous tail and back. Both the merlin and sharp-shinned hawk are generally not found in Florida during summer (May – early September).

Habitat: Occurs in open pine habitats, woodland edges, prairies, and pastures throughout much of Florida. Availability of suitable nesting sites is important during the breeding season. Nest sites are cavities in tall dead trees or utility poles generally with an unobstructed view of surroundings. Sandhill habitats seem to be preferred, but may also occur in flatwoods settings. Open patches of grass or bare ground are preferred in flatwoods settings, since thick palmettos prevent detection of prey.

Seasonal Occurrence: Occurs throughout Florida year-round, but seasonal occurrence is complicated by arrival of northern migrants in winter. The subspecies that breeds in Florida is listed, but northern migrants are not listed. Northern migrants generally arrive in September and depart by March, but there are records outside of these dates. All birds found in the breeding season (January – early September) should be assumed to be the listed subspecies.

Florida Distribution: Wintering birds occur throughout Florida (including the Keys), but the breeding subspecies is non-migratory and most common in peninsular Florida, rare in the panhandle. Breeding subspecies appears to no longer occur in former nesting areas in south Florida (Miami-Dade County).

Range-wide Distribution: The species occurs throughout most of North and South America, but the listed subspecies is restricted to the southeastern U.S., occurring from Louisiana east to South Carolina and south through the Florida peninsula.

Conservation Status: Population trends cannot be determined from available survey programs. Natural nesting and foraging habitats have certainly declined, as sandhill and open flatwoods habitats are converted to intensive agricultural lands and residential development. Pasture lands may be used by the breeding species but often lack snags used for nesting sites.

Protection and Management: A key habitat feature necessary for breeding is a suitable cavity tree. Kestrels are secondary cavity nesters that depend upon cavities that are usually excavated in large pines and, less frequently, oaks by species of woodpeckers. Manage for dead tree snags on public lands. Nest-box programs have been used to augment populations in many areas. Protect large blocks of natural habitats with snag trees; open fields and pastures also are needed to provide adequate foraging habitat.

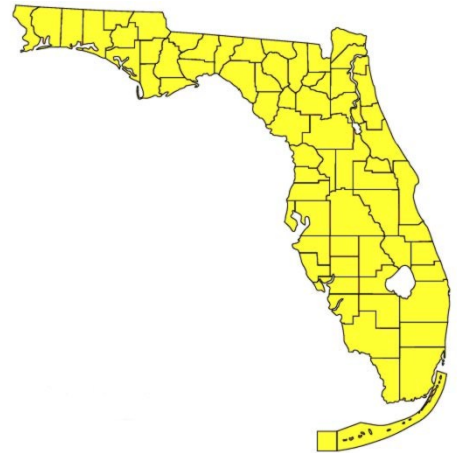
Nesting Season: January – early August with most of the nesting occurring from mid-March through early June.

Selected References: Loftin 1992, Robertson and Woolfenden 1992, Rodgers et al. (eds.) 1996, Stevenson and Anderson 1994, Stys 1993, Wood et al. 1988, Wood 2001.

BALD EAGLE

Haliaeetus leucocephalus

Order: Falconiformes
Family: Accipitridae
Federal Status: Migratory Bird
FL Status: Migratory Bird
Legal Protection: The Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act and state Wildlife Code generally prohibit the disturbance, harassment, harm or take of eagles, their nest, or eggs.



Description: Adult has white head, white tail, and large, bright yellow bill; other plumage is dark. Immature eagles are dark with variable amounts of light splotching on body, wings, and tail; head and bill are dark. Wings are broad and wide and held horizontally in flight, presenting a flat profile when soaring and gliding. Bald eagles fly with slow, powerful wing-beats.

Similar Species: The eagle's size and lack of white in wings should help differentiate it from the crested caracara (*Caracara cheriway*; see species account) when seen at a distance in flight. The caracara also

has a white head. Flattened aspect of the eagle's wings is unlike the teetering, V-shaped flight of the turkey vulture (*Cathartes aura*).

Habitat: Most commonly includes areas close to coastal areas, bays, rivers, lakes, or other inland bodies of water that provide concentrations of food sources, including fish, waterfowl, and wading birds. Usually nests in tall trees (primarily live pines) that provide clear views of surrounding area. Eagles nest in crowns of mangroves and even on the ground in Florida Bay, where there are few predators and few tall trees for nesting.

Seasonal Occurrence: Adults are non-migratory, remaining as year-around residents, but juveniles and sub-adult birds may migrate north in summer and may range as far as Canada but return to natal areas in Florida to breed and nest as adults. Also, some birds from northern populations migrate to northern Florida in winter.

Florida Distribution: Florida supports the largest breeding population of any state outside of Alaska. The eagle breeds throughout most of peninsular Florida and the Keys, mainly along the coast in eastern panhandle, and is rare in western panhandle. Greatest concentrations of nesting eagles occur around Lake Kissimmee in Polk and Osceola counties; around Lake George in Putnam, Volusia, and Lake counties; lakes Jessup, Monroe, and Harney in Seminole and Volusia counties; along Gulf coast north of Tampa and southwest Florida; and in Florida Bay.

Conservation Status: Historic population in Florida occurred throughout the state and likely numbered over 1,000 breeding pairs. Population declined sharply after late 1940s, reaching a low of 88 documented active nests in 1973, and by 1978 was considered rare as a breeder. Use of the pesticide DDT and related compounds are chief causes of their decline. Numbers have steadily increased, especially since 1989. The recovery goal of 1,000 breeding pairs in Florida was met by the late 1990s and the nesting population currently is estimated near 1,400 pairs. Protection of nesting sites remains a management priority.

Protection and Management: The bald eagle is protected by the USFWS under provisions of the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (BGEPA) and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (effective August 9, 2007). Recovery goals have been achieved for this species; therefore, the bald eagle is no longer listed or protected as a "threatened" species under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended. The USFWS has implemented National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines (May 2007) to assist private landowners and others plan land-use activities in proximity to active bald eagle nests by measures that will minimize the likelihood of causing "disturbance" to nesting bald eagles, as defined under the BGEPA. The FWC also removed the bald eagle from classification and protection as a "threatened" species under Florida Rule and implemented a Florida Bald Eagle Management Plan (Florida Plan) (effective May 9, 2008). The Florida Plan includes Florida Bald Eagle Management Guidelines and permit provisions.

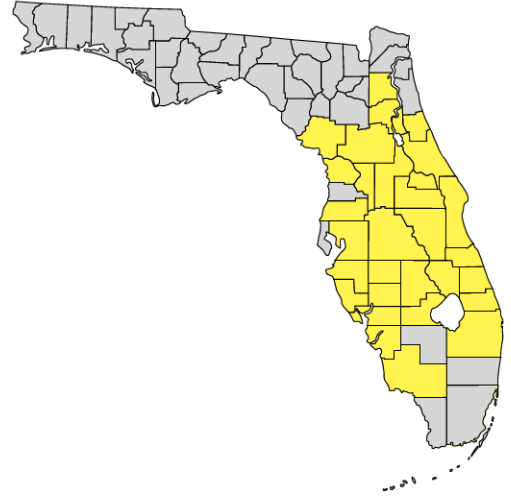
Nesting Season: October 1 – May 15.

Selected References: FFWCC 2001, Kale (ed.) 1978, Poole and Gill (eds.) 2000, Robertson and Woolfenden 1992, Rodgers et. al. (eds.) 1996, Stevenson and Anderson 1994, Wood 2001.

FLORIDA SCRUB-JAY

Aphelocoma coerulescens

Order: Passeriformes
Family: Corvidae
Federal Status: Threatened
FL Status: Federal Threatened
Legal Protection: U.S. Endangered Species Act and state Wildlife Code prohibit take of birds, nests, or eggs.



Description: Similar in size and shape to the familiar blue jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*). Crestless head, nape, wings, and tail are pale blue, and the back and belly are pale gray. Juveniles have fluffy brown heads.

Similar Species: The scrub-jay lacks the crest and white spotting on wings and tail that are characteristic of the blue jay.

Habitat: Inhabits fire-dominated, low-growing, oak scrub habitat found on well-drained sandy soils. May persist in areas with sparser oaks or scrub areas that are overgrown, but at much lower densities and with reduced survivorship.

Seasonal Occurrence: Non-migratory and remains on established territories as family groups.

Florida Distribution: Restricted to peninsular Florida, with largest populations occurring in Brevard, Highlands, Polk, and Marion counties.

Range-wide Distribution: Same as Florida distribution.

Conservation Status: Recognized in 1995 as a distinct species from the scrub-jays in the western U.S., making it the only bird species whose entire range is restricted to Florida. Continuing loss, fragmentation, and degradation of scrub habitat has resulted in a decline of greater than 90 percent of the original pre-settlement population of Florida scrub-jays. Precipitous decline since the 1980s. A 1992 range-wide study estimated an overall population of approximately 10,000 birds. Largest populations occur on federal lands (Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge and Ocala National Forest), but are declining. Land management practices on these lands are of concern, as is the reduced use of prescribed fire to maintain optimum habitat conditions. Smaller populations are found scattered along Lake Wales Ridge in Polk and Highlands counties, with a major protected population at Archbold Biological Station. Cars and cats take a toll on the scrub-jay population in developed areas. Scrub-jays are susceptible to population crashes because of catastrophic fires or disease, so protection of secure populations is essential.

Protection and Management: Acquire suitable xeric habitat in strategic locations among existing scrub-jay preserves to help mitigate the extensive fragmentation of this habitat. Continued existence of this species will depend on preservation and long-term management of suitable scrub habitat. Prescribed fire every 8–15 years that burns in patchy mosaics, where few territories are burned completely, is optimal. Mechanical treatments, at least initially, may be required where fire cannot be used, although the long-term effects of this management practice are unknown.

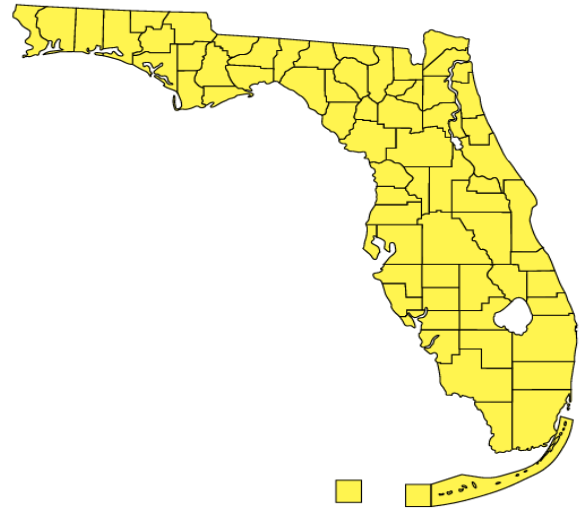
Nesting Season: March – June

Selected References: Fitzpatrick et al. 1991, Poole and Gill (eds.) 1996, Robertson and Woolfenden 1992, Rodgers et al. (eds.) 1996, Stevenson and Anderson 1994, Thaxton and Hingtgen 1996, Wood 2001.

LITTLE BLUE HERON

Egretta caerulea

Order: Ciconiiformes
Family: Ardeidae
Federal Status: Migratory Bird
FL Status: Species of Special Concern
Legal Protection: U.S. Migratory Bird Treaty Act and state Wildlife Code prohibit take of birds, nests, or eggs.



Description: Medium-sized heron, with purplish to maroon-brown head and neck; small white patch on throat and upper neck; and slate-blue body. Bill is black towards tip, especially during breeding season, with other exposed areas on the head appearing dark gray to cobalt blue. Legs are grayish to green, becoming black in breeding season. Immature birds are mostly white with pale slategray tips on primary

wing feathers. Legs of young birds are yellowish-green. Immature birds move into adult plumage during first spring and may be boldly white/blue, looking like tie-dyed shirts. Immature birds retain yellowish legs during second year.

Similar Species: Plumage and eye of reddish egret (*Egretta rufescens*; see species account) are lighter in color, and base of bill is pinkish. Reddish egret has distinctive foraging behavior. Snowy egret (*E. thula*; see species account) and cattle egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) may look like juvenile little blue herons, but the little blue heron has dark primary tips. Bill of snowy egret (*E. thula*) is solid black; snowy egret may have yellowish stripe up the back of the leg.

Habitat: Feeds in shallow freshwater, brackish, and saltwater habitats. Largest nesting colonies occur in coastal areas, but prefers foraging in freshwater lakes, marshes, swamps, and streams. Nests in a variety of woody vegetation types, including cypress, willow, maple, black mangrove, and cabbage palm. Usually breeds in mixed-species colonies in flooded vegetation or on islands.

Seasonal Occurrence: Mostly resident throughout year, but numbers in north Florida during winter are lower than numbers during spring, summer, and fall. Is becoming less abundant in Florida Keys.

Florida Distribution: Most recent population estimate is approximately 17,000 birds distributed among 240+ breeding colonies. Colonies are found nearly statewide, except rare in western panhandle and southern Florida Keys.

Range-wide Distribution: Breeds from Kansas, Missouri, and Tennessee to coastal Maine and south to Peru and central Brazil; range extends west to southern California and Sonora; winter range includes these areas and north to coastal Virginia; may wander to Canada after breeding season.

Conservation Status: The little blue heron lacks the showy plumes found on many other herons and egrets; therefore, this species did not suffer as much during the plume-hunting trade a century ago. Primary threats are alteration of natural hydroperiods in wetlands used for foraging and exposure to pesticides and heavy metal contamination. Population trends are downward, and breeding colonies have become smaller and more numerous. Illegal killings may occur since this species regularly forages at tropical fish farms, commercial fish farms, and hatcheries. Long-term studies are needed on the possible adverse effects of cattle egrets, environmental contamination, and other threats.

Protection and Management: Protect breeding and foraging habitats through establishment of preserves and regulation of wetlands. Restore and maintain natural hydroperiods in degraded wetland areas. The FWC and the Department of Environmental Protection have developed setback distances around wading bird colonies of 330 ft. (100 m) to prevent human disturbance.

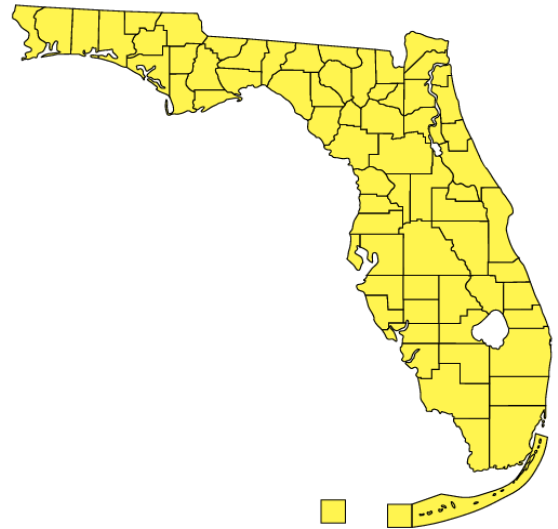
Nesting Season: April – September

Selected References: Poole and Gill (eds.) 1995, Robertson and Woolfenden 1992, Rodgers and Smith 1995, Rodgers et al. (eds.) 1996, Runde et al. 1991, Stevenson and Anderson 1994.

SNOWY EGRET

Egretta thula

Order: Ciconiiformes
Family: Ardeidae
Federal Status: Migratory Bird
FL Status: Species of Special Concern
Legal Protection: U.S. Migratory Bird Treaty Act and state Wildlife Code prohibit take of birds, nests, or eggs.



Description: Medium size, all-white wading bird that has a “slight” appearance in comparison to other wading birds. Bill is black with a bright yellow, fleshy base, and the yellow extends back to the lores and eyes. Legs are black in adults; feet are bright yellow as though wearing gloves. Immature snowy egrets have greenish legs that sometimes have a yellow streak on the back. Breeding-season adults have prominent plumes on shoulders, neck, and head.

Similar Species: Most often confused with juvenile little blue heron (*Egretta caerulea*; see species account), which is white with greenish-gray legs; however, tips of wing feathers are dusky, not pure white as in snowy egret. Little blue heron also has a bi-colored bill, not the solid black bill found on the snowy egret. Great egret (*Ardea alba*) has solid black legs and orangish bill; white morph of the reddish egret (*E. rufescens*; see species account) has two-toned bill and grayish legs; cattle egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) has orangish legs and bill.

Habitat: Nests both inland and in coastal wetlands with nests placed in many types of woody shrubs, especially mangroves and willows. Almost all nesting is over shallow waters or on islands that are separated from shoreline by extensive open water. Feeds in many types of permanently and seasonally flooded wetlands, streams, lakes, and swamps, and in man-made impoundments and ditches. Prefers calm waters. A wide variety of wetland types must be available within 5–7 mi. (8–11 km) to support breeding colonies. Breeding success is tied to water-level fluctuations.

Seasonal Occurrence: Occurs in Florida in all seasons but generally less common in winter, especially in western panhandle and northern counties.

Florida Distribution: Generally found throughout peninsular Florida; becoming less common inland in northern tier of counties (north of Alachua County) and in the western panhandle. Typically more common along coast throughout its range. Breeding documented for 43 Florida counties but more variable in western Florida panhandle and in some northern counties in the interior (north of Alachua County). Also rare or absent in southern Keys.

Range-wide Distribution: Northern limits of summer range extend from northern California to southern Montana, central Kansas, and Tennessee, east to Atlantic coast to coastal Maine; occurs south to southern Chile and central Argentina. Winters in North America from northern California to Arizona, along the northern Gulf coast, and along Atlantic coast to South Carolina.

Conservation Status: Numbers in Florida have been declining since the 1950s, possibly faster than declines of other herons and egrets. This species was found in 1989 to occur in only 22 percent of the colonies where it historically occurred. Persistent patterns of wetland destruction and alteration likely have eliminated large areas of essential habitat. Most impacts appear to affect quality of foraging habitat rather than areas immediately surrounding nesting colonies.

Protection and Management: Prevent rapid changes in water depth in managed wetlands that will likely adversely affect quality of foraging. Restore and maintain natural hydroperiods in degraded wetland areas. Protect breeding and foraging habitats through establishment of preserves and regulation of wetlands. The FWC and the Department of Environmental Protection have developed setback distances around wading bird colonies of 330 ft. (100 m) to prevent human disturbance.

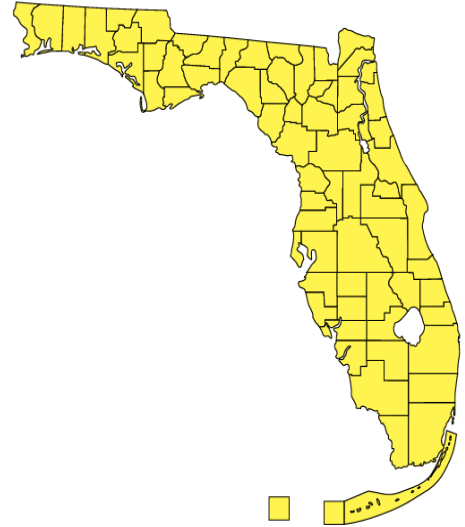
Nesting Season: January – August

Selected References: Poole and Gill (eds.) 2000, Robertson and Woolfenden 1992, Rodgers and Smith 1995, Rodgers et al. (eds.) 1996, Runde et al. 1991, Stevenson and Anderson 1994.

TRICOLORED HERON

Egretta tricolor

Order: Ciconiiformes
Family: Ardeidae
Federal Status: Migratory Bird
FL Status: Species of Special Concern
Legal Protection: U.S. Migratory Bird Treaty Act and state Wildlife Code prohibit take of birds, nests, or eggs.



Description: Medium-sized heron with a slender neck. Body color appears two-toned with dark slate coloration on head, neck, and body that contrasts with white rump, belly, and undertail. A reddish-brown and white streak extends along the front of the neck. During breeding season, adults have white head plumes and rufous to whitish shoulders. Young birds (<1 year) have more reddish-brown on head, neck, and mantle; otherwise similar to adults.

Similar Species: Little blue heron (*Egretta caerulea*; see species account) and reddish egret (*E. rufescens*; see species account) have solid dark colors; great blue heron (*Ardea herodias*) is larger and has white streak down neck but dark belly and underparts. Great blue heron also has a dark swath that extends back from eye and contrasts with lighter-colored top of head.

Habitat: Most nesting colonies occur on mangrove islands or in willow thickets in fresh water, but nesting sites include other woody thickets on islands or over standing water. Prefers coastal environments. Feeds in a variety of permanently and seasonally flooded wetlands, mangrove swamps, tidal creeks, ditches, and edges of ponds and lakes. Seasonal variation in water levels are particularly critical to nesting success, so alteration of wetlands used during breeding season can have negative consequences.

Seasonal Occurrence: Permanent resident, found throughout Florida in all seasons, except rare in winter in western Panhandle. Also, somewhat less common inland in recent years, particularly during winter.

Florida Distribution: Most numerous along coast. Generally becoming less numerous in northern tier of counties (Alachua County northward). Nesting in panhandle and northern interior more variable and restricted leading to few inland reports in panhandle.

Range-wide Distribution: Occurs during breeding season from California to Texas and along northern Gulf coast; along Atlantic coast to Maine; south to central Brazil; leaves northern portion of range in winter.

Conservation Status: Once described as the most abundant heron in the state, but now much less common in interior. Long-term population trends are uncertain but apparently declining. Need information on marked individuals to document the species' movement and wetland utilization patterns in more detail.

Protection and Management: Approximately 25 percent of nesting colonies occur in disturbed water impoundments or dredge-material islands, so management opportunities exist. Create new nesting sites or stabilize established sites through management. Survey and monitor to document population trends.

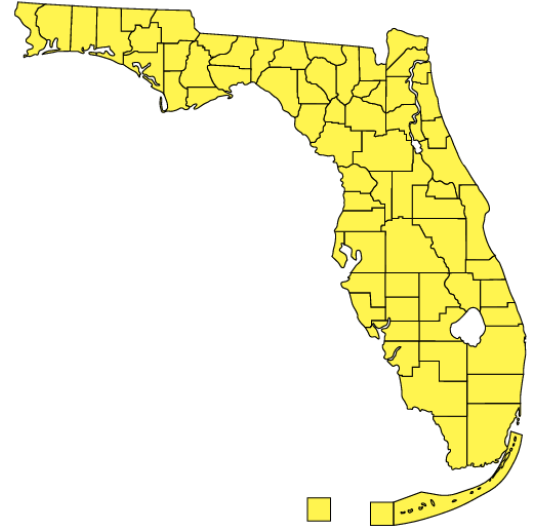
Nesting Season: February – August

Selected References: Poole and Gill (eds.) 1997, Robertson and Woolfenden 1992, Rodgers et al. (eds.) 1996, Runde et al. 1991, Stevenson and Anderson 1994.

WHITE IBIS

Eudocimus albus

Order: Ciconiiformes
Family: Threskiornithidae
Federal Status: Migratory Bird
FL Status: Species of Special Concern
Legal Protection: U.S. Migratory Bird Treaty Act and state Wildlife Code prohibit take of birds, nests, or eggs.



Description: Medium-sized wading bird with long, downward-curving bill. Adults are white except for black tips on wings and pink to reddish coloration on exposed flesh around face, bill, and legs. Young birds are dark brown on wings, neck, head, and tail, but noticeable white patches occur on back and belly. Juvenile white ibises begin to acquire adult coloration near the end of first year but retain some brown feathers on head and neck until third year.

Similar Species: Glossy ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) also has a downward curving bill but is uniformly dark. Adult glossy ibis has purplish coloration and young birds are uniformly brown. An immature glossy ibis could be mistaken for a juvenile white ibis, but glossy ibis lacks the white patch on the back (best seen during flight) and belly is dark, not white. Bills of all egrets and herons are straight, not curved.

Habitat: Found in a wide variety of habitats, including freshwater and brackish marshes, salt flats and salt marsh meadows, many types of forested wetlands, wet prairies, swales, seasonally inundated fields,

and man-made ditches. Adults prefer foraging in freshwater areas when feeding young. Young birds do not grow when fed a salty diet or when access to fresh water is limited. Forage by feeling with their bills and may forage effectively in turbid waters. Nests are placed on a variety trees, shrubs, and vines, and tend to be closer to ground than other colonially nesting wading birds.

Seasonal Occurrence: May be found throughout Florida during all seasons, but numbers in north Florida are smaller and diminish sharply in winter. Numbers also vary depending on local water levels and conditions. Spring and fall movements can be spectacular, with hundreds of individuals observed moving in long, V-shaped lines. Much of the movement pattern seems nomadic; large-scale movements occur in other seasons in response to changing water levels. Dates of spring movements can be mid-February, and fall movements may begin in July and peak in September and October. In non-breeding season, Florida probably supports much of the population that breeds to north into Georgia and North and South Carolina.

Florida Distribution: Found throughout Florida, but breeding season distributions more closely restricted to breeding colonies. Breeding sites are rare in panhandle and may be less common in the Keys. Seem to be nomadic when selecting annual nesting sites, so numbers can vary considerably from year to year.

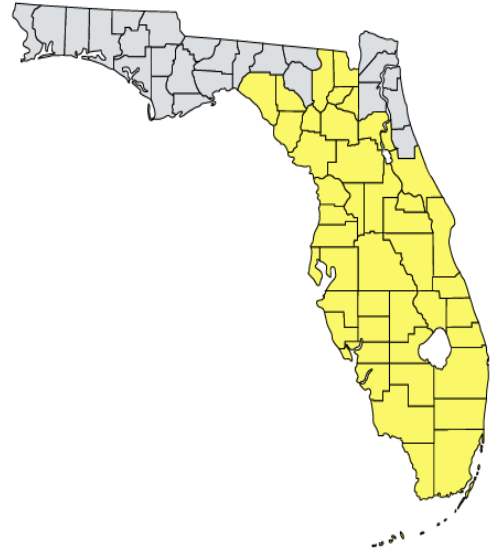
Range-wide Distribution: Breeds from California south through Central America along Pacific coast; from northern South America through Caribbean and Antilles and north Gulf coast (with inland nesting in northern South America and southeastern U.S.); northward along Atlantic coast to Virginia.

Conservation Status: Population declines in Florida appear to have been pronounced over the past decades (around 50 percent from 1970 to 1990). However, declines in Florida have been offset to some degree by increasing numbers in other nearby states. Range-wide declines in Florida and neighboring states are believed to be occurring, but these can be difficult to document in the absence of thorough surveys.

Protection and Management: Protect colonial nesting sites from human disturbance. The FWC and Department of Environmental Protection have developed setback distances around wading bird colonies of 330 ft. (100 m) to prevent such disturbance. These guidelines may serve to protect individual colonies, but primary long-term threat is degradation of wetlands through destruction, alteration, pollution, salinization, and other forms of disturbance. Large-scale restoration efforts in the Everglades, Lake Okeechobee, Kissimmee River, and elsewhere should prove beneficial.

Nesting Season: March – August

Selected References: Poole and Gill (eds.) 1992, Robertson and Woolfenden 1992, Rodgers and Smith 1995, Rodgers et al. (eds.) 1996, Runde et al. 1991, Stevenson and Anderson 1994.



FLORIDA SANDHILL CRANE

Grus canadensis pratensis

Order: Gruiformes
Family: Gruidae
Federal Status: Migratory Bird
FL Status: State Threatened
Legal Protection: U.S. Migratory Bird Treaty Act and state Wildlife Code prohibit take of birds, nests, or eggs.



Description: A tall, long-necked, long-legged bird with a clump of feathers that droops over the rump. Adult is gray overall, with a whitish chin, cheek, and upper throat, and dull red skin on the crown and lores (lacking in immatures); feathers may have brownish red staining resulting from preening with muddy bill. Immature Florida sandhill crane has pale to tawny feathers on head and neck and a gray body with brownish-red mottling. Flies with neck extended. Their distinctive bugling or trumpeting call can be heard from far away.

Similar Species: Indistinguishable from greater sandhill crane (*Grus canadensis tabida*), which winters in Florida. Greater sandhill crane generally arrives in Florida in October and leaves in March, so the date observed or definite evidence of reproduction may be used to differentiate the two. Great blue heron (*Ardea herodias*) is sometimes mistakenly identified as a crane. This heron lacks the bald, red crown of

the sandhill and flies with its neck tucked in, typical of herons and egrets. Whooping crane (*G. americana*) is white.

Habitat: Prairies, freshwater marshes, and pasture lands. Avoids forests and deep marshes but uses transition zones and edges between these and prairies or pasture lands. Will frequent agricultural areas like feed lots and crop fields, and also golf courses and other open lawns, especially in winter and early spring. Nest is a mound of herbaceous plant material in shallow water or on the ground in marshy areas. Favors wetlands dominated by pickerelweed (*Pontederia cordata*) and maidencane (*Panicum hemitomon*).

Seasonal Occurrence: Non-migratory. Very sedentary, although may forage widely. Large influx of northern migratory subspecies in winter (October – March).

Florida Distribution: Most of peninsular Florida is within appropriate habitat, though not as common south of Lake Okeechobee. Rarely reported west of Taylor County.

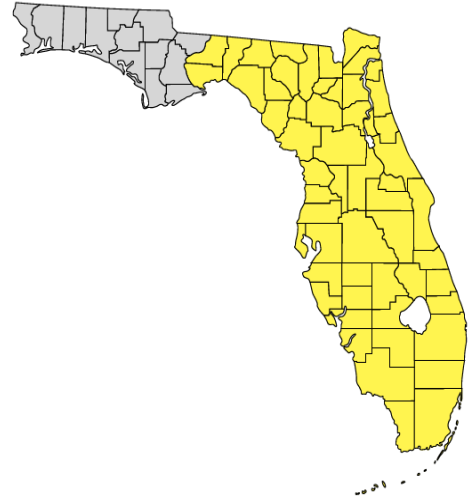
Range-wide Distribution: Florida and extreme southeastern Georgia (Okefenokee Swamp).

Conservation Status: Population estimate in 1975 of approximately 4,000 birds (25 percent are nonbreeding subadults) is still considered accurate. Habitat availability will become more and more of concern as Florida continues to lose open rangeland and native prairie to development and more intensive agricultural uses (e.g., citrus, row crops). Nesting success in human-altered areas is well below that of native areas. Shallow wetlands used by cranes are easily affected by drainage of adjacent uplands even if they are not directly disturbed. Florida sandhill cranes are found on federal and state lands and on local government lands (e.g., wellfields).

Protection and Management: Public lands do not protect large populations of cranes due to large home range requirements. Acquire land, through fee-simple acquisition and conservation easements on suitable ranchlands, in areas that bolster existing protected populations. Periodic fire is important to retard invasion of woody vegetation in crane habitat. Filling drainage ditches to restore natural hydrological conditions is important in some areas.

Nesting Season: Late December – June

Selected References: Poole and Gill (eds.) 1992, Robertson and Woolfenden 1992, Rodgers et al. (eds.) 1996, Stevenson and Anderson 1994, Toland 1999a, Wood 2001.



WOOD STORK

Mycteria americana

Order: Ciconiiformes
Family: Ciconiidae
Federal Status: Endangered
FL Status: Federal Endangered
Legal Protection: U.S. Endangered Species Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act and state Wildlife Code prohibit take of birds, nests, or eggs.



Description: Very large, white wader with black in wings and a short black tail. Soars with neck and legs extended, displaying its long, broad wings; black flight feathers contrast with white along length of wings. Legs are dark; feet are beige. Adults have bare, scaly, dark-gray heads and necks, and long, heavy, decurved bills. Head and neck of immature storks have grayish-brown feathering and their bills are yellowish.

Similar Species: American white pelicans (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) have a similar wing pattern and also soar but have short legs, white tail, and do not fly with necks extended. White ibis (*Eudocimus albus*; see species account) is much smaller and only has black on wing tips. Great egret (*Ardea alba*) lacks black on wings.

Habitat: Nests colonially in a variety of inundated forested wetlands, including cypress strands and domes, mixed hardwood swamps, sloughs, and mangroves. Increasingly nesting in artificial habitats (e.g., impoundments and dredged areas with native or exotic vegetation) in north and central Florida. Forages mainly in shallow water in freshwater marshes, swamps, lagoons, ponds, tidal creeks, flooded pastures, and ditches, where they are attracted to falling water levels that concentrate food sources (mainly fish).

Seasonal Occurrence: Post-breeding dispersal carries large numbers from more southern locales to more northern parts of range; in winter, northern birds move south. Annual and long-term use of nesting sites is very dependent on feeding conditions, which may be affected dramatically by altered hydrologic patterns. Colonies may form late November – early March in south Florida and February – March in central and northern Florida.

Florida Distribution: Locally rare to abundant in the peninsula and Big Bend, but generally rare or lacking in panhandle and the Florida Keys. Uncommon to rare in winter in north.

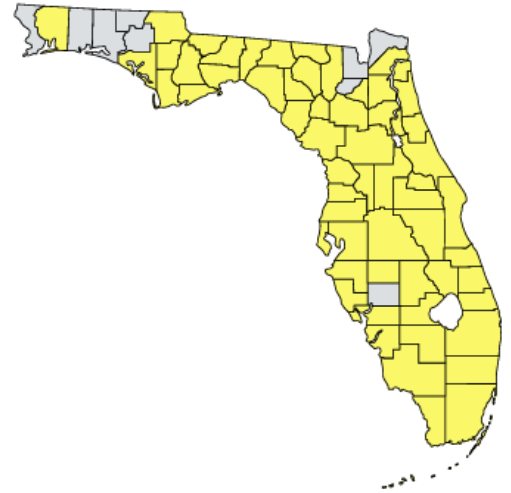
Range-wide Distribution: Breeds locally in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida (formerly west to Texas), in lowlands from Mexico and northern Central America to South America (to western Ecuador, eastern Peru, Bolivia, northern Argentina), and rarely in Cuba and the Dominican Republic. Winters are spent throughout breeding range except in South Carolina and Georgia.

Conservation Status: Many known breeding sites occur within public and private conservation lands. Dramatic decline in the large colonies (>500 individuals) formerly occurring in south Florida, and trend toward fewer birds distributed among smaller, more numerous colonies in central and northern Florida. Very sensitive to manipulation of water regimes and loss of wetland habitat, which affect both nesting sites and feeding areas.

Protection and Management: Survey colony sites and important feeding areas regularly. Essential to protect wetland areas. Closely monitor water quality, and manage hydrologic patterns that consider the needs of the wood stork.

Nesting Season: Throughout the year

Selected References: Poole and Gill (eds.) 1999, Robertson and Woolfenden 1992, Rodgers et al. (eds.) 1996, Runde et al. 1991, Stevenson and Anderson 1994, Wood 2001.



LIMPKIN

Aramus guarauna

Order: Gruiformes
Family: Aramidae
Federal Status: Migratory Bird
FL Status: Species of Special Concern
Legal Protection: U.S. Migratory Bird Treaty Act and state Wildlife Code prohibit take of birds, nests, or eggs.



Description: Large, long-billed, long-legged wader of swamps and marshes. Color is a deep brown with white spotting and streaking. Bill is heavy and slightly decurved, allowing easy access to its preferred food, the apple snail (*Pomacea paludosa*). Call is an unmistakable loud wail that has a slight bugling or trumpeting characteristic similar to that of the distantly related sandhill crane.

Similar Species: Long neck and bill of the limpkin help distinguish it from the slightly smaller, but similarly colored, immature night-herons (*Nycticorax* spp.). The immature white ibis (*Eudocimus albus*; see species account) has a long, decurved bill and long legs but is not brown all over with white flecking. Another species that looks similar is the glossy ibis that is of similar size and brown but with a glossy appearance and no spots.

Habitat: Inhabits mangroves, freshwater marshes, swamps, springs and spring runs, and pond and river margins. Also lake margins in peninsular Florida and swales, strand swamps, sloughs, and impoundments in south Florida. May also forage in ruderal areas such as sugarcane fields and banks of irrigation canals. Wide range of nesting sites, including mounds of aquatic vegetation and marsh grasses, among cypress knees, and high in trees.

Seasonal Occurrence: Males generally appear to reside where they breed, although there is some evidence of movement, possibly related to food availability. A partial migration was documented with color-banded birds from Wakulla Springs (Wakulla County) and Alexander Springs (Lake County); most females left their breeding territories, for parts unknown, in mid-summer and returned in mid-winter. Observations of large concentrations of limpkins are usually attributed to regional drought conditions. Nesting generally occurs late February – May in north Florida and late January – March in central Florida, and possibly earlier in south Florida.

Florida Distribution: Scattered sites in the panhandle and northern Florida, but generally widespread in central and southern Florida.

Range-wide Distribution: Resident in southeastern Georgia, Florida, Greater Antilles (rare or extirpated in Puerto Rico), and from southern Mexico to central Argentina.

Conservation Status: Occur on numerous lands owned by federal, state, and private entities; although this is no insurance against threats. A large and presumably stable population at Wakulla Springs State Park (Wakulla County) has experienced recent declines, possibly because of deteriorating water quality. Pollution, hydrological disruptions, and an increase in invasive plants threaten the health of the apple snail population and hence the limpkin.

Protection and Management: Maintain natural hydrological regimes and protect suitable habitat from pollution, development activities, and proliferation of exotic plants. Institute regular surveys and monitoring programs for both limpkins and apple snails, particularly in light of continued degradation and loss of Florida's wetlands.

Nesting Season: Late February – June

Selected References: Robertson and Woolfenden 1992, Rodgers et al. (eds.) 1996, Stevenson and Anderson 1994.

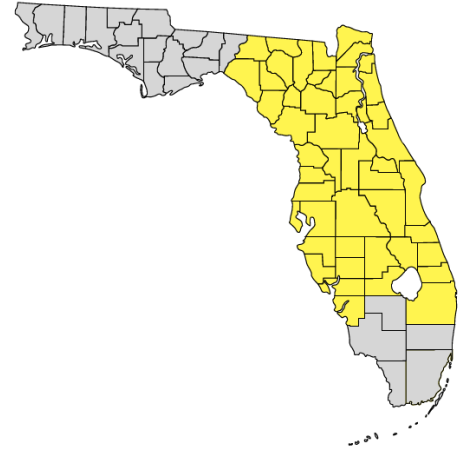
Protected Mammal Species In Tampa Palms



SHERMAN'S FOX SQUIRREL

Sciurus niger shermani

Order: Rodentia
Family: Sciuridae
Federal Status: Not Listed
FL Status: Species of Special Concern
Legal Protection: State Wildlife Code prohibits take, possession, sale, or purchase of individuals except by permit.



Description: A large (23 - 28 in. = 600 – 700 mm) tree squirrel with highly variable dorsal fur color ranging from nearly all black (uncommon) to silver, with variations of black over silver and silver over black. Underside is tan. Head is generally black; ears and muzzle are often white. Tail is long, nearly the length of the head and torso. Nests are usually in oak trees and are constructed of oak leaves and Spanish moss.

Similar Species: Gray squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) is smaller (less than 19 in. = 500 mm).

Habitat: Sandhills (high pine), pine flatwoods, and pastures and other open, ruderal habitats with scattered pines and oaks. Depends on a variety of oak trees for seasonal food and nest material. Longleaf pine cones and seeds are important foods.

Seasonal Occurrence: Active year-round.

Florida Distribution: Subspecies range was originally defined as running from the Aucilla River east to Nassau County, south to the Caloosahatchee River in southwestern Florida, and to Miami-Dade County along the east coast. Some researchers extend the range westward to the Apalachicola River. Southern fox squirrel (*S. n. niger*) occurs throughout most of the panhandle; mangrove fox squirrel (*S. n. avicennia*) occurs southwest of Lake Okeechobee.

Range-wide Distribution: Peninsular Florida (excluding southwestern portion) north to central Georgia.

Conservation Status: Although present in several conservation areas, Sherman's fox squirrel has been eliminated from much of its former habitat as a result of conversion to pine plantation, row crops, or development.

Protection and Management: Preserve longleaf pine/wiregrass communities, particularly sandhills. Burn habitat every two to five years (April – July if possible) to control shrubby vegetation and maintain park-like conditions.

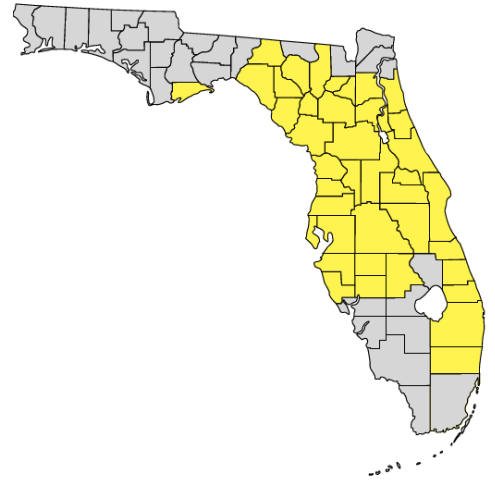
Nesting Season: Mating late winter and mid-summer.

Selected References: Brown 1997, Hall 1981, Humphrey (ed.) 1992, Whitaker 1996, and Wood (2001).

FLORIDA MOUSE

Podomys floridanus

Order: Rodentia
Family: Cricetidae
Federal Status: Not Listed
FL Status: Species of Special Concern
Legal Protection: State Wildlife Code prohibits take, possession, sale, or purchase of individuals except by permit.



Description: A large mouse (7.3 - 8 in. = 179 - 203 mm), brownish to tawny above and whitish below. Flanks are often chestnut or orangish. Hind feet are large (0.86 - 1.1 in. = 23 - 28 mm), generally with five pads (plantar tubercles). Tail (3.12 - 3.8 in. = 80 - 95 mm) is indistinctly bicolored: gray-brown above, whitish below. Often has a faint skunk-like odor.

Similar Species: Distinguished from all other mice within its range by the presence of five plantar tubercles on the hind feet versus six or seven in *Peromyscus* spp. Oldfield mouse (*Peromyscus polionotus*) is generally smaller (4.7 - 6.0 in. = 122 - 153 mm) with a proportionally shorter tail (1.6 - 2.4 in. = 40 - 60 mm) that is sharply bi-colored. Cotton mouse (*Peromyscus gossypinus*) is slightly

smaller, but overlaps in body measurements to the degree that the number of plantar tubercles is the best distinguishing characteristic.

Habitat: Xeric upland communities with sandy soils, including scrub, sandhill, and ruderal sites where they inhabit burrows of the gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*; see species account). Florida mice will dig their own burrows or use those of old field mice in the absence of gopher tortoises.

Seasonal Occurrence: Active year-round except on especially cold nights.

Florida Distribution: Occurs from north-central Florida, south to Highlands and Sarasota counties, and along the Atlantic coast from St. Johns County south to Miami-Dade County.

Range-wide Distribution: Same as Florida distribution.

Conservation Status: Protected on several conservation lands throughout central Florida. Largest populations may occur within Ocala National Forest and the scrubs along Lake Wales Ridge.

Protection and Management: Preserve areas supporting sandhill and scrub. Use prescribed fire to maintain openings in scrub and encourage the growth of grasses and forbs important for food and cover. Protect populations of gopher tortoises.

Nesting Season: Breeding can occur from June – March, but usually in fall and early winter.

Selected References: Brown 1997, Humphrey (ed.) 1992, Layne 1990, Lazell 1989, Whitaker 1996.

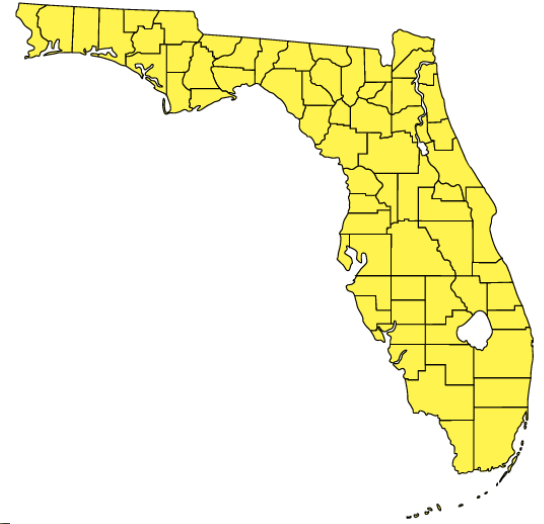
Protected Reptile and Amphibian Species In Tampa Palms



GOPHER TORTOISE

Gopherus polyphemus

Order: Testudines
Family: Testudinidae
Federal Status: Not Listed in Florida
FL Status: State Threatened
Legal Protection: Florida State Wildlife Code prohibits take, possession, sale, transport, molestation, harassment, or purchase of tortoises or their parts except by permit.



Description: A medium-sized turtle (to 10 in. = 254 mm) fully adapted for life on land. Upper shell is brown and relatively flat above; lower shell is yellowish, without hinge, and projecting forward, especially in male; skin brown to dark gray. Forelimbs greatly expanded for digging; hind limbs reduced, stumpy, lacking any form of webbing between toes. Lower shell of male somewhat concave. Young: scales of carapace often with yellow centers, skin yellowish to tan; approximately 2 in. (51 mm) shell length at hatching.

Similar Species: The only other native land turtle in Florida, the box turtle (*Terrapene carolina*), is distinguished by its smaller size (to 8 in. = 203 mm), less stout feet, moveable hinge on lower shell, and often but not always by black and yellow upper shell. Tortoise burrows, which are useful in determining species' presence, typically have lower, flatter profile than more rounded burrows of armadillos; this reflects differences in cross-sectional shapes of the two animals.

Habitat: Typically found in dry upland habitats, including sandhills, scrub, xeric oak hammock, and dry pine flatwoods; also commonly uses disturbed habitats such as pastures, old fields, and road shoulders. Tortoises excavate deep burrows for refuge from predators, weather, and fire; more than 300 other species of animals have been recorded sharing these burrows.

Seasonal Occurrence: Above-ground activity is greatly reduced during cold weather, with tortoises in northern Florida remaining below ground for months. Nonetheless, burrows are relatively conspicuous year-round.

Florida Distribution: State-wide except absent from the Everglades and Keys.

Range-wide Distribution: Lower Southeastern Coastal Plain, extending from southern South Carolina southward through lower Georgia and Florida, and westward through southern Alabama, Mississippi, and extreme southeastern Louisiana.

Conservation Status: Despite its widespread occurrence throughout Florida, there is considerable concern about the declining abundance of this species. Much of its native habitat has been lost to agriculture, citriculture, forestry, mining, and urban and residential development. Although protected populations occur on many state, federal, and private conservation lands, recent development of a severe respiratory disease threatens even those.

Protection and Management: The FWC approved reclassification of the gopher tortoise from “Species of Special Concern” to “Threatened” status at their regular meeting in September 2007. That reclassification was effective November 7, 2007. The FWC also approved implementation of a *Gopher Tortoise Management Plan* (Management Plan) at that meeting, pending development of *Gopher Tortoise Permit Guidelines* (Permit Guidelines). Those Permit Guidelines were approved and fully implemented effective April 2009. The new permits that are described in the Permit Guidelines and replace the former “special” and “standard” gopher tortoise permits are now available online. All survey, capture, and relocation activities associated with permits must be conducted by an “Authorized Gopher Tortoise Agent”. Land use planning that anticipates need to accommodate the conservation needs of gopher tortoises should be designed consistent with the Permit Guidelines.

The FWC generally recommends the following options for avoiding, minimizing, and/or compensating the potential for take of gopher tortoises or their burrows to occur on lands that are proposed for development:

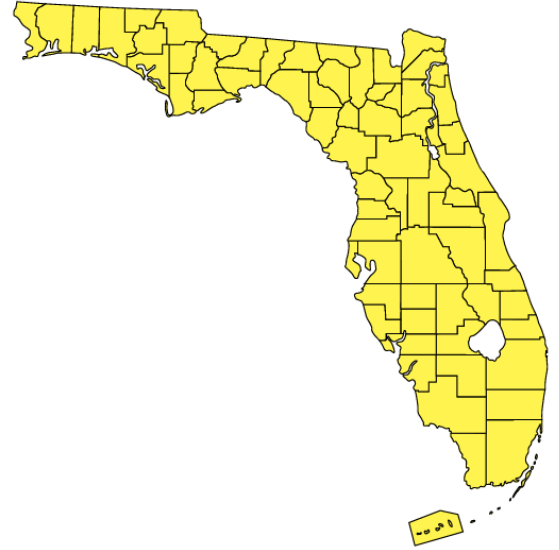
- 1) Avoid developing in the area occupied by gopher tortoises;
- 2) Develop so as to avoid gopher tortoise burrows by avoiding concentrations of burrows altogether and/or staying at least 25 feet from entrances of individual burrows; or
- 3) Relocate gopher tortoises that would otherwise be “taken” to an approved recipient site that is either on or off the development site (a 10 or Fewer Burrows Permit or Conservation Permit will be required).

Nesting Season: April – July

EASTERN INDIGO SNAKE

Drymarchon corais couperi

Order: Squamata
Family: Colubridae
Federal Status: Threatened
FL Status: Federal Threatened
Legal Protection: U.S. Endangered Species Act and State Wildlife Code prohibit take, possession, sale, transport, molestation, harassment, or purchase of individuals except by permit.



Description: A very large, stout-bodied, shiny, black snake reaching lengths as great as 8 ft. (244 cm). Black ventrally, but chin, throat, and sides of head may be reddish or (rarely) white. Scales typically smooth (no ridges), though adult males have keel on front half of some scales along back; anal scale undivided. Young are similar to adults though often more reddish anteriorly, 17 – 24 in. (430 – 610 mm) at hatching. When encountered, often hisses, flattens neck vertically (from side to side), and vibrates tail, but rarely bites.

Similar Species: Black racer (*Coluber constrictor*), which rarely exceeds 5 ft. (152 cm), is more slender, a duller sooty black usually with a white chin and throat, and has a divided anal scale. The mostly aquatic mud snake (*Farancia abacura*) is glossy black above and can grow to 6 ft. (183 cm), but has a reddish, rarely white, belly, with coloration encroaching on the sides, and a sharp-pointed tail tip.

Habitat: Broad range of habitats, from scrub and sandhill to wet prairies and mangrove swamps. Often winters in gopher tortoise burrows in sandy uplands but forages in more hydric habitats in northern part of range. Requires very large tracts to survive.

Seasonal Occurrence: Active nearly year-round in southern Florida but winters underground farther north. Lays eggs in May and June.

Florida Distribution: Statewide, including Upper and Lower Keys, but rare in panhandle.

Range-wide Distribution: Florida and southern Georgia; formerly extended from southern South Carolina to southeastern Mississippi.

Conservation Status: Rare in most areas, though species has been recorded from many public lands statewide; however, whether most of these support viable populations is uncertain. Major threats are habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation, with associated highway mortality. Other threats include gassing of tortoise burrows for rattlesnakes, collection for pets, and deliberate persecution, all of which are illegal.

Protection and Management: Protect very large tracts (> 5000 acres = 2025 ha) of appropriate natural habitat un-fragmented by roads; use prescribed fire as needed. Maintain gopher tortoise populations and dead stumps to provide natural subterranean refugia. Enforce bans on tortoise burrow gassing and on collection or molestation of snake. Avoid construction of roads through un-fragmented habitat. Educate public to avoid wanton destruction of large snakes.

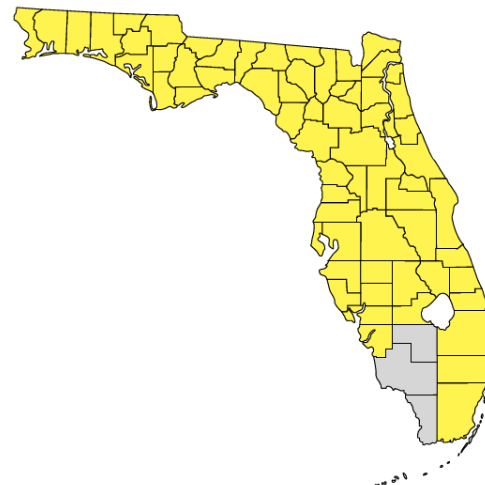
Nesting Season: Breeding November – April, Lay eggs in May and June

Selected References: Ashton and Ashton 1988b, Conant and Collins 1991, Ernst and Barbour 1989, Georgia DNR 1999, Lazell 1989, Moler (ed.) 1992, Mount 1975, Tenant 1997.

FLORIDA PINE SNAKE

Pituophis melanoleucus mugitus

Order: Squamata
Family: Colubridae
Federal Status: Not Listed
FL Status: Species of Special Concern
Legal Protection: State Wildlife Code prohibits take, possession, sale, or purchase of individuals except by permit. State possession limit of one snake per person.



Description: A large, stocky, tan or rusty colored snake with an indistinct pattern of large blotches on a lighter background; blotches more distinct posteriorly; venter white. May be dark brown in far western panhandle, where it integrates with another subspecies. The body is muscular, with keeled scales and undivided anal scale. The head is relatively small, snout somewhat pointed, four prefrontal scales, rostral scale extending upward between internasal scales. Adults 4 – 7 ft. (122 – 213 cm) or longer; young 15 – 24 in. (380 – 610 mm) at hatching. May hiss loudly and vibrate tail when encountered.

Similar Species: Most Florida snakes have only two prefrontal scales, and the rostral scale does not split the two internasals. Blotches of red rat snakes (*Elaphe guttata*) are smaller, more numerous (nearly 40), and more distinct. Eastern coachwhip (*Masticophis flagellum*) is more slender, usually darker anteriorly, lacks blotches, and has smooth scales and divided anal scale.

Habitat: Prefers habitats with relatively open canopies and dry sandy soils, in which it burrows. Especially sandhill and former sandhill, including old fields and pastures, but also sand pine scrub and scrubby flatwoods. Often co-exists with pocket gophers and gopher tortoises.

Seasonal Occurrence: Spends most of their time below ground; occasional surface activity from spring through fall, especially May – October. Eggs are laid June – August; hatch in September and October.

Florida Distribution: Most of panhandle and peninsula south to Lake Okeechobee, extending southward along eastern ridge to Dade County, but absent from Keys. Possibly extirpated from more heavily developed counties such as Pinellas.

Range-wide Distribution: Southern South Carolina, southern Georgia, and most of Florida.

Conservation Status: Occurs on many state and federal lands in Florida. Threats include collection for pets (now restricted); highway mortality; and habitat loss and fragmentation from development, intensive agriculture, and mining.

Protection and Management: Maintain large, unfragmented blocks of xeric natural communities; can tolerate some habitat degradation. Manage habitats with fire to prevent succession to closed canopy forests.

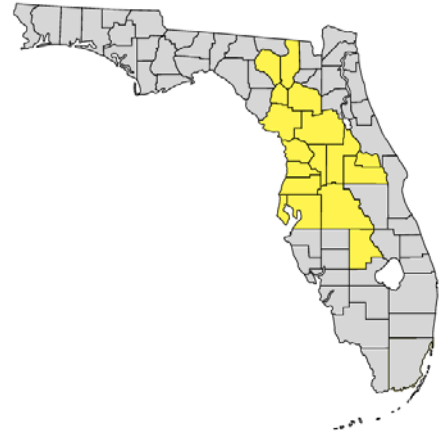
Nesting Season: Lay eggs June – August and hatch in September and October.

Selected References: Ashton and Ashton 1988b, Conant and Collins 1991, Ernst and Barbour 1989, Franz 1986, Moler (ed.) 1992, Mount 1975, Tenant 1997.

SHORT-TAILED SNAKE

Stilosoma extenuatum

Order: Squamata
Family: Colubridae
Federal Status: Not Listed
FL Status: State Threatened
Legal Protection: State Wildlife Code prohibits take, possession, sale, transport, molestation, harassment, or purchase of individuals except by permit.



Description: An extremely slender, spotted snake with a cylindrical body rarely exceeding 20 in. (510 mm) total length; even very large specimens two ft. (61 cm) long are only the diameter of a pencil. Grayish ground color with 50–80 dark brown blotches lacking darker edges and often separated by areas of yellow to red along back, and alternating with a series of smaller blotches on sides; belly with many dark blotches. Tail, as measured posteriorly to the anal scale, comprises only 7–10 percent of total length. The head is small, no wider than body; scales smooth (no keels); anal scale undivided.

Similar Species: All other Florida snakes have tails greater than 10 percent of total length. Young rat snakes (*Elaphe*) and black racers (*Coluber*) are strongly blotched but have heads substantially wider than neck. Anal scale of racer is divided, while most scales on back and upper sides of rat snakes bear a single low keel. Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis getula*) may have large black blotches but is more heavy-bodied and grows much larger. Mole kingsnake (*L. calligaster*) is similar but lacks areas of orange or yellow between blotches, which are dark-edged.

Habitat: Dry upland habitats, principally sandhill, xeric hammock, and sand pine scrub. A secretive burrower, only rarely seen above ground or under cover objects.

Seasonal Occurrence: Most above-ground activity occurs in October and November, with a few sightings in March and April.

Florida Distribution: Northern and central peninsula, from the Suwannee River to Highlands County.

Range-wide Distribution: Restricted to Florida.

Conservation Status: Occurs on some state and federal lands, including Ocala National Forest. Decline directly related to loss and conversion of habitat for citrus, mining, silviculture, and development.

Protection and Management: Maintain upland longleaf pine and sand pine scrub habitats with prescribed fire as needed. Able to tolerate some disturbance, including limited harvest of longleaf pine and low-density development.

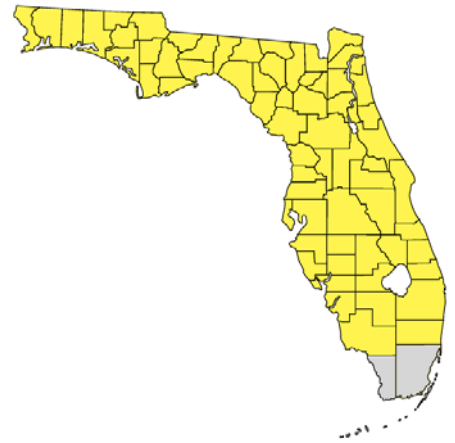
Nesting Season: Unknown

Selected References: Ashton and Ashton 1988b, Conant and Collins 1991, Ernst and Barbour 1989, Moler (ed.) 1992, Tenant 1997.

GOPHER FROG

Rana capito (formerly *R. areolata*)

Order: Anura
Family: Ranidae
Federal Status: Not Listed
FL Status: Species of Special Concern
Legal Protection: State Wildlife Code prohibits take, possession, sale, or purchase of individuals except by permit.



Description: A medium-sized, boldly spotted frog with a chunky appearance: body short and plump, head large with somewhat rounded snout, and relatively short legs. Back with somewhat warty skin and prominent, often bronze-colored longitudinal ridge on each side behind eye. Dorsal pattern of irregularly shaped, dark spots on background that may be cream, gray, or brown. Chin and throat are spotted, belly usually unmarked posteriorly. Adults 2.5 – 4 in. (63 - 102 mm) (excluding legs). Call resembles a deep snore. Tadpole large, to 3.5 in. (89 mm), globose, olive green, with large black spots on sides of tail.

Similar Species: Leopard frog (*Rana sphenocephala*), which may share breeding ponds with gopher frog, has large, dark brown spots on a green to brown background; however, body is more slender, snout very pointed, and throat and chin plain white. Tadpoles of the two species are very similar. Southern toad (*Bufo terrestris*) has dry, very warty skin, no raised ridges along edges of back, a pair of large raised glands behind eyes, and blunt snout. Spadefoot toad (*Scaphiopus holbrookii*) has vertical black pupils in golden eyes, dry skin, and a pair of hourglass-like lines rather than spots on back. All treefrogs have enlarged pads on toes.

Habitat: Dry, sandy uplands, chiefly sandhill and scrub, that include isolated wetlands or large ponds within about 1 mi. (1.7 km). Occasionally in dry pine flatwoods, xeric hammock, and disturbed examples of above. Breeds chiefly in seasonally flooded, temporary ponds, but also in some permanent waters. Nocturnal, normally spending daytime in stumpholes, tunnels, or burrows, especially those of gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*).

Seasonal Occurrence: Migrates to ponds for breeding from October through April, though may also breed during summer in central and southern Florida.

Florida Distribution: Most of state excluding Everglades and Keys; potential but not documented for some counties indicated on map. Two subspecies: dusky gopher frog (*R. c. sevosa*) in western panhandle, Florida gopher frog (*R. c. aesopus*) in peninsula and eastern panhandle.

Range-wide Distribution: Southeastern Gulf and Atlantic Coastal Plains, from North Carolina to eastern Louisiana.

Conservation Status: Many protected conservation lands in Florida support gopher frogs, although attention to managing and protecting breeding habitat and migratory pathways is often insufficient.

Protection and Management: Maintain large tracts of native vegetation in sandy, upland habitats that include wetlands. Allow fires to burn through dry wetland basins, in addition to uplands. Manage uplands for gopher tortoises. See recommendations for striped newt (*Notophthalmus perstriatus*).

Nesting Season: Breeding occurs October – April

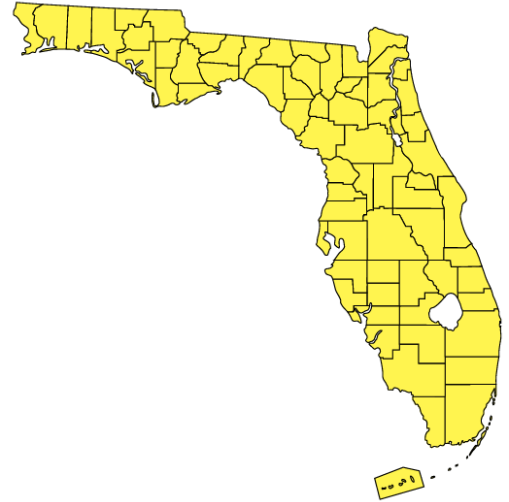
Selected References: Ashton and Ashton 1988a, Bartlett and Bartlett 1999, Conant and Collins 1991, Franz 1986, Franz and Smith 1999, Moler (ed.) 1992, Mount 1975.

AMERICAN ALLIGATOR

Alligator mississippiensis

Order: Crocodylia
Family: Alligatoridae
Federal Status: Threatened by Similarity of Appearance
FL Status: Federal Threatened Similarity of Appearance

Legal Protection: U.S. Endangered Species Act and State Wildlife Code prohibits take, possession, sale, or purchase of individuals except by permit. Harvest of alligators and eggs is regulated by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.



Description: A large, mostly black crocodylian body with a broadly rounded snout. Young alligators have yellow crossbands on back, tail, and sides; throat and belly are white to creamy yellow at all ages. Head is smooth in front of eyes; no prominently visible teeth in lower jaw when mouth is closed. Adults 6–15 ft. (1.8 - 4.6 m); hatchlings about 9 in. (230 mm).

Similar Species: Spectacled caiman (*Caiman crocodilus*), introduced in southern Florida, shares broadly rounded snout but rarely exceeds 6 ft. (1.8 m) and has curved bony crosswise ridge in front of eyes; varies from yellow-green to gray-brown with dark crossbands. American crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*; see species account) is gray to brown and has long, tapered snout with prominently projecting fourth lower tooth when mouth is closed (except in very young).

Habitat: Most permanent bodies of fresh water, including marshes, swamps, lakes, and rivers. Occasionally wanders into brackish and salt water but rarely remains there.

Seasonal Occurrence: Most active from spring through fall, with nesting in late spring and hatching in summer. Inactive during cold weather, though some may bask on sunny winter days.

Florida Distribution: Statewide, though rare in Florida Keys.

Range-wide Distribution: Southeastern Coastal Plain from North Carolina to Texas.

Conservation Status: Has recovered dramatically since 1960s. Populations are present on most federal, state, and private conservation lands where there is permanent fresh water. Several populations are now large enough to support controlled harvest. Threats include destruction and pollution of wetlands, including lakes and rivers. The species remains classified under the Endangered Species Act as Threatened Due the Similarity of Appearance to more endangered crocodylians that are marketed illegally throughout the world.

Protection and Management: Protect wetlands of all types from ditching, filling, and pollution.

Nesting Season: April – May

Selected References: Ashton and Ashton 1991, Bartlett and Bartlett 1999, Conant and Collins 1991, Deitz and Hines 1980, Delany and Abercrombie 1986, Kushlan 1974, Lazell 1989, Mount 1975, Neill 1971.