



Audubon | FLORIDA

Coastal Report

2024 ANNUAL SUMMARY





Marbled Godwit.
Photo: Kara Cook/Audubon Florida



Audubon monitors and stewards beach, island, and rooftop nesting sites for coastal waterbirds in Florida.

Friends and Supporters,

The 2024 summer beach-nesting bird season ended in dramatic fashion, with not one, not two, but three named storms reshaping the Gulf Coast between September and October. Our thoughts are still with the communities that are trying to rebuild after Hurricanes Debby, Helene, and Milton. The Audubon Florida team has fanned out across our shoreline sites to study the impacts of the storms on the birds and will continue to work to remove debris and trash ahead of the 2025 season.

Large storms underscore how important our living shoreline project has become in the Tampa Bay region. Just a few weeks ago we finished our newest shoreline installation initiative, 1,800 additional feet of pH neutral living shoreline that will protect habitat for 18 bird species that depend on small islands to nest, rest, and feed (more on this on page 3).

Overall, 2024 proved to be a mixed year for nesting sea and shorebirds—some successes and some failures. We thank our team and dedicated volunteers for protecting these avian families on our busy beaches. As National Audubon Society seeks to “bend the bird curve” and reverse bird population declines across the hemisphere, every successfully fledged chick is important.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Audrey DeRose-Wilson".

Audrey DeRose-Wilson,
Director of Bird Conservation

Photo: David Korte



Audrey DeRose-Wilson

Cover Photo: Wilson’s Plovers.
Photo: Cindy Barbanera-Wedel/Audubon Photography Awards.
Wilson’s Plovers were one of 42 species identified on the
“Red List” in Audubon Florida’s 2025 State of the Birds Report.
Learn more: stateofthebirds.org/2025

New Segments of Living Shorelines Completed

Audubon Florida has worked with local, state, and federal partners to protect these iconic species and their habitat at the Florida Coastal Islands Sanctuaries since 1934.

What is a living shoreline? A living shoreline uses a system of breakwaters to reduce wave energy, attract oysters, and reduce coastal impacts of erosion. Audubon Florida installs living shorelines in the Tampa Bay region to protect nesting, resting, and feeding habitat for eighteen species of birds.

These structures are colonized by oysters and other organisms, providing wildlife habitat, clean water, and abundant food resources for birds.

The 10,000 feet of living shorelines Audubon has installed has stabilized the shoreline to protect these island nest sites from erosion. Audubon installed more than 1,800 feet of living shoreline in December 2024 along Sand Key, Indian Rocks Beach, Dogleg Key, and Dot Dash Dit.

18 species of birds rely on these spoil islands to raise their families, including Roseate Spoonbills, Wood Storks, Tricolored Herons, and more.

Season Summary by Region

Which regions experienced a good nesting season? Check out the traffic lights for our assessment! Green is relatively good, yellow is mixed, and red indicates a challenging season.



PANHANDLE

In the eastern Panhandle, American Oystercatchers had a successful season, fledging chicks from three remote islands. At Tyndall Air Force Base, monitored in partnership with the FWC, nine Snowy Plover and 27 Wilson's Plover chicks left the beach. Farther west, the Navarre Beach colony saw 120 Least Tern and 50 Black Skimmer chicks successfully fledge. Meanwhile, Panhandle rooftops hosted Least Terns on ten sites—an important contribution to the population that should not be overlooked.



FLORIDA COASTAL ISLANDS SANCTUARIES

Unfortunately, sites monitored by Sanctuaries staff only recorded around 10,300 nesting pairs of wading birds, a significant downturn from previous years. Additionally, Wood Stork colonies across the region were down. Audubon staff continue to investigate possible causes.

Season Summary

Audubon Florida works with partners and volunteers to monitor more than 300 nesting sites across the Gulf and Atlantic coasts. The birds that fledge from Audubon-monitored sites represent critical populations of these vulnerable sea and shorebirds. The data below showcase the number of breeding birds at Audubon-monitored areas in 2024.



BLACK SKIMMERS: 4,898

There are an estimated 7,000 breeding Black Skimmers in Florida.



SNOWY PLOVERS: 124

There are an estimated 400 breeding Snowy Plovers in Florida.



LEAST TERNS: 2,658

There are an estimated 13,000 breeding Least Terns in Florida.



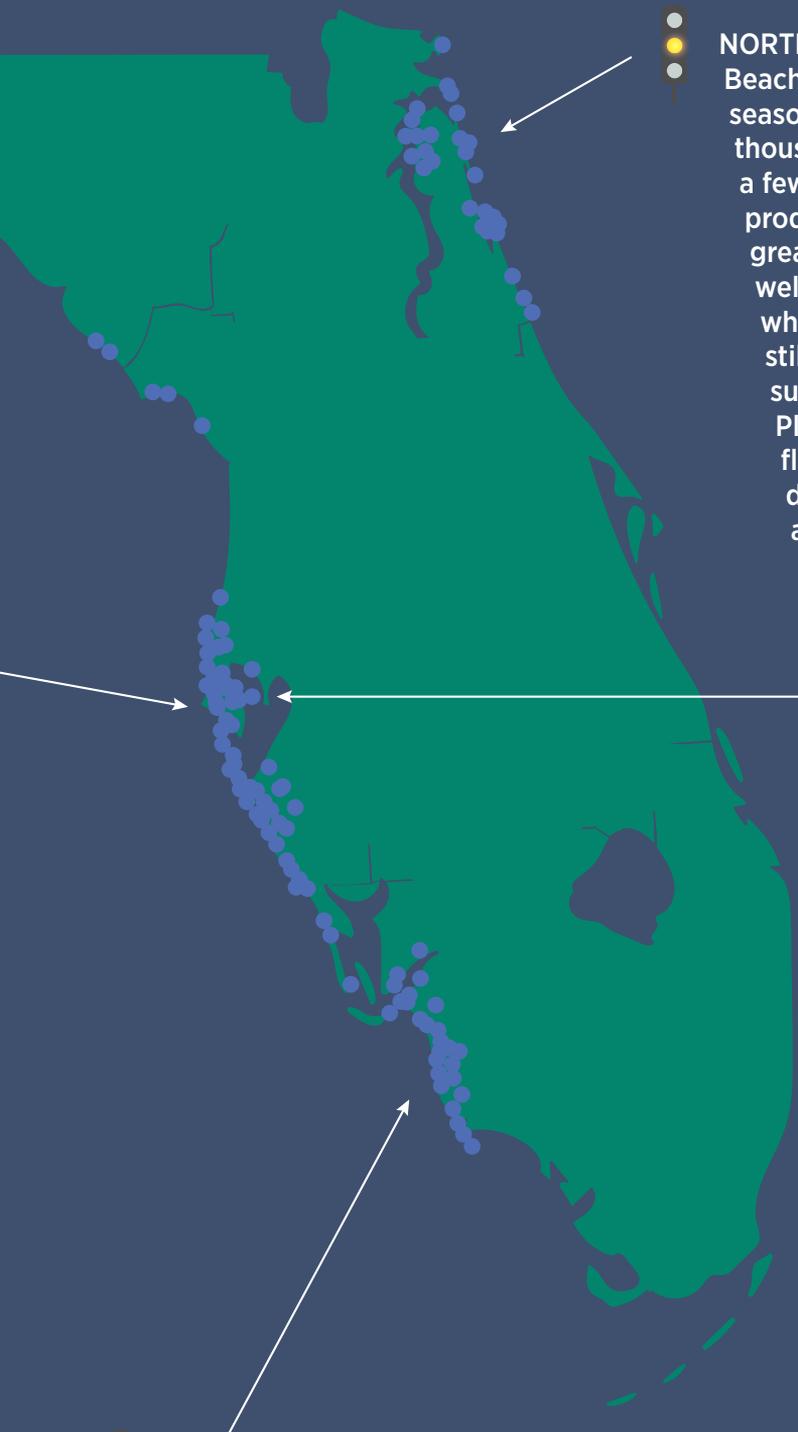
AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHERS: 110

There are an estimated 500 breeding American Oystercatchers in Florida.



WILSON'S PLOVERS: 206

There are an estimated 900 breeding Wilson's Plovers in Florida.



NORTHEAST FLORIDA

Beach-nesting birds at Huguenot Memorial Park had a good season, producing more than 1,000 new Royal Terns, thousands of Laughing Gulls, 100-plus Brown Pelicans, and a few dozen Sandwich Terns. Amelia Island was more productive than usual, thanks to some additional sand and great stewarding, with three dozen Least Terns fledging as well as some Wilson's Plovers. At Anastasia State Park, where the beach was somewhat diminished, Least Terns still fledged more than 100 chicks, plus staff recorded 12 successful nests by Black Skimmers and Wilson's Plovers. Fort Matanzas had their largest colony in years, fledging around 50 Least Terns. Summer Haven, a dynamic site that is filling in again with new sand, had at least 40 Least Terns fledge.

TAMPA BAY

The Least Tern colony on South Lido Key produced 140 fledged chicks. Additionally, Fort De Soto Park continues to be a productive nesting site: Staff recorded multiple Wilson's Plover fledges, one Snowy Plover fledge, and three American Oystercatcher fledges from nests at the park. Staff are also seeing a rise in nesting attempts by Snowy Plovers, which speaks to the successful habitat management at the park. Black Skimmer colonies (four in Pinellas and Sarasota counties) produced a total of 665 fledged chicks

It was another busy rooftop season in the Tampa Bay region, with 22 active rooftops in Pinellas, Pasco, Hillsborough, and Sarasota counties. Staff recorded seven American Oystercatcher pairs with seven fledged chicks, three Black Skimmer colonies, 12 Least Tern colonies, and five Killdeer pairs.

SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

Even though Hurricane Debby caused significant losses of nests and chicks at Second Chance Critical Wildlife Area, 600 Black Skimmers fledged 150 chicks. Least Terns fledged 100 chicks from 168 nests—60 more than last year—before the colony overwashed during Debby. At nearby Caxambas Pass Critical Wildlife Area, a successful Black Skimmer colony produced 56 fledged chicks for the first time in nearly seven years. Carlos Pointe Beach supported a colony with 1,333 adult Black Skimmers and 418 adult Least Terns, resulting in 231 Black Skimmer and 200 Least Tern fledglings despite losses caused by storm surge from Tropical Storm Debby. Snowy Plovers only fledged six chicks across the region. Wilson's Plovers continued to do well, with 11 chicks fledged on Fort Myers Beach and 19 fledged from various Collier County sites.



Thank you to the Dog Island volunteers who helped with our postings over two work days. Photo: Col Lauzau/Audubon Florida.

Partnership on Dog Island Becomes Bright Spots for Birds

Nestled between the Saint George Sound and the Gulf of Mexico, Dog Island is a haven for both birds and people. Audubon has recently strengthened partnerships with residents on the island, as the beaches act as a critical nursery for nesting sea and shorebirds, especially Snowy Plovers.

NEWSLETTER

Audubon staff contributed articles about protecting birds in the Dog Island Conservation District newsletter. Topics have included the start of nesting season, Red Knots, and migration.

VOLUNTEER EVENT

At the start of nesting season, Audubon staff “post” protected areas to keep nesting birds safe. What does that mean? Signs are installed in the sand and joined together by brightly colored string—with 100 signs in this location, it’s a lot of work!



In 2025, 14 volunteers from Dog Island met Alie MacVicar, shorebird biologist, and Collette Lauzau, Panhandle shorebird program manager, on the sand to help.

“With so much help we were able to divide and conquer with some people distributing signs across the east side of the island, while others dug holes and installed the signs, and the last group focused on string and flagging. Everyone was very enthusiastic and excited about the work we were doing.”

— Alie MacVicar, Shorebird Biologist

THANK YOU

Thanks to engaged residents and helpful volunteers, Audubon hopes to see a successful nesting season for a range of species on the island. An extra thank you to William (Bill) Stone, Chair of the Dog Island Conservation District and Dog Island resident, for being such an amazing proponent of conservation efforts and our volunteer events.



Volunteer Highlights



**PENNY MURNANE
LIBRARY TECHNICIAN,
MARY ESTHER LIBRARY**

Penny Murnane is a beach steward and birdy backpack leader, making backpacks for kids with binoculars available for Panhandle library patrons.

HOW DID YOU BRING BIRDING BACKPACKS FOR CHECKOUT TO YOUR LOCAL PUBLIC LIBRARIES?

I came up with the idea for the birding backpacks after I looked at different libraries throughout Florida and noticed that some libraries offer birding backpacks, particularly in the southern part of Florida such as in Citrus County. I also noticed that libraries in other states such as Maryland and New Jersey offer birding backpacks. So, I looked carefully at what was included: an adult pair of binoculars, a youth pair of binoculars, and some guidebooks. The ones in South Florida had guidebooks to birds in their area. My library director, Sheila Ortyl, was very supportive of this idea. She also likes birds and believed that it was an item that could go into a "Library of Things" that more and more libraries are offering nationwide. She was so supportive that she said to just go ahead and buy the items that I thought would be good for the backpack. The binoculars, the books, and the backpack were all purchased after I had researched and consulted with Margaret Benner and Gail Glasgow of Choctawhatchee Audubon Society. They both agreed that the binoculars needed to be very durable and have a good warranty in case they were damaged.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE THE BIRDING BACKPACKS WILL BRING TO THE COMMUNITY?

I hope that by making the birding backpack available to the community it will encourage more people to be aware of the beautiful avian creatures we have all around us. A family returned the backpack recently and they were excited to tell me that they went birdwatching on the Eglin Reservation and near Timber Lake Road saw what they thought was a cormorant but the app said it was an Anhinga. She also told me they saw Cedar Waxwings, Blue Jays, cardinals, and Tufted Titmice. I am hoping the backpack will help people get outside and enjoy nature more!



JAMEY BINNEVELD

Jamey Binneveld is a dedicated bird steward, taking shifts throughout the summer and on busy holiday weekends. She also uses her exceptional photography skills to educate and inspire locals and visitors. In 2024 she

captured photos of a motorized paraglider that flew too low over the colony. Because of her photos, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission tracked down the owner of the tour group to help prevent that from happening again.

WHEN AND WHY DID YOU START VOLUNTEERING WITH AUDUBON?

I began volunteering as an Audubon bird steward in 2023. I started learning about and seeing for myself all the challenges that our nesting birds are faced with. I wanted to do everything that I could to help them, and to educate others about Florida's very special nesting colonies.

IS THERE ANY SPECIAL TIME OR EVENT THAT OCCURRED WHILE VOLUNTEERING THAT IS IMPORTANT TO YOU?

I really enjoyed being a part of launching a new stewarding site at Cayo Costa this past summer. I was able to help educate boaters, minimize disturbances to nests, chicks, and adult birds on the island, and also to observe and help collect data.

IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WANT PEOPLE TO KNOW ABOUT BEING A BIRD STEWARD THAT THEY MIGHT NOT KNOW UNTIL THEY DO IT?

I want people to know that being a bird steward is fun and easy! You get to be outdoors and on the beach with other people that are also bird lovers. The training was also fun, which included an online training class. It is also easy to pick what shifts you want from the schedule that is emailed out to us. Most of all, after every shift you get to go home with a good feeling knowing that you helped make a difference today.

WE OWE OUR THANKS TO THIS INCREDIBLE TEAM!

COASTAL PROGRAM



454

BREEDING AND NON-BREEDING
SEASON VOLUNTEERS



101

ROOFTOPS
SURVEYED



30

ROOFS WITH
ACTIVE NESTING
AND MOST WITH
PROTECTIONS

(chick fencing, chick checkers, etc)



300+

BEACH, ISLAND, AND ROOFTOP SITES
STEWARDED BY AUDUBON FLORIDA

5,340
HOURS



INVESTED IN BIRD STEWARDSHIP
AND PUBLIC OUTREACH TO
PROTECT VULNERABLE COLONIES

FLORIDA COASTAL ISLAND SANCTUARIES



21

VOLUNTEERS

95
HOURS



21 VOLUNTEERS DONATED A TOTAL OF 95 SERVICE HOURS
FOR THESE IMPORTANT PROJECTS



THANK YOU
TO OUR
SUPPORTERS.

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

Thank you for supporting our coastal work!

VOLUNTEER

Steward coastal birds in your area:
fl.conservation@audubon.org

DONATE

Audubon's efforts depend on you. Learn more
about giving by contacting Anny Shepard at
anny.shepard@audubon.org

LEARN

Explore coastal conservation and our efforts:
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