



Audubon | FLORIDA

Coastal Report

2025 ANNUAL SUMMARY



Photo: Black Skimmer.
Photo: Frank Haluska/Audubon Photography Awards

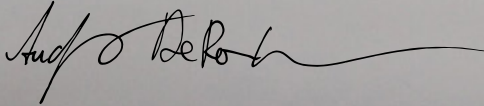
Friends and Supporters,

When protecting the places that sea and shorebirds need, every season brings its own surprises. In the summer of 2025, we experienced a banner year for Wilson's Plovers, birds nesting in brand-new locations, and nesting colonies taking over construction sites to raise their families.

I'm surprised in the best way by the dedication of our Florida community to beach-nesting bird families. This year alone, Wild Birds Unlimited hosted a decoy painting session, Girl Scouts "adopted" a critical beach to monitor the birds, volunteers came together for postings and clean-ups, and so much more.

While birds had to contend with busy beaches, hurricanes spared the Sunshine State, and we didn't lose major nesting sites to storms this year.

Good years are critical for bolstering populations and improving resilience for all our feathered friends, which have already begun nesting for the 2026 season.



Audrey DeRose-Wilson,
Director of Bird Conservation
Audubon Florida



Photo: David Korte

Audrey DeRose-Wilson



Snowy Plover. Photo: Abby McKay/Audubon Florida

Celebrating a Great Year for Wilson's Plovers

When multiple hurricanes and storms in 2024 rearranged habitats across the Gulf Coast, the resulting expanses of bare sand created ideal conditions for beach-nesting birds, especially Wilson's Plovers. Combined with a lack of major storms in 2025, our team saw encouraging results for many coastal bird species all around the Sunshine State, thanks in large part to the dedication of our incredible shorebird steward staff and volunteers.

In the Florida Panhandle, nesting at Tyndall Air Force Base resulted in an incredible year for Wilson's Plovers, which produced 39 fledglings — a record! In fact, staff observed an increase in Wilson's Plover nesting activity across the Panhandle and beyond, with reports by Audubon staff and our Florida Shorebird Alliance partners of newly established pairs in areas where they had not previously been recorded.

New Protections for Wilson's Plovers: In December 2025, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission voted favorably on a petition submitted by Audubon, agreeing that Wilson's Plovers warrant imperiled species protections in Florida! Now considered a "Candidate Species" while the agency develops a management plan, Wilson's Plovers and their habitat will enjoy the protections of state-Threatened species for the first time in 2026!



Photo: Brian Cammarano/Audubon Florida

According to Senior Coordinator of Shorebird Stewardship Brian Cammarano, up to five pairs of Wilson's Plover held territories and successfully nested throughout the one-mile stretch of suitable habitat within the University of West Florida Research Property on Pensacola Beach.

"We observed all five pairs with brooding chicks at some point throughout the season and were able to confirm at least two successfully fledged chicks," says Cammarano.

We hope this is an early indicator of an upward trend in Wilson's Plover productivity as we continue to closely monitor this imperiled beach-nesting species.



Photo: Kara Durda/Audubon Florida



Photo: Kara Durda/Audubon Florida

A Banner Year for Nesting Birds on Florida's Beaches

While Florida communities continue to recover from hurricanes, coastal habitat conditions have improved for sea and shorebirds. Why? The storm surge and winds tore out vegetation, leaving large expanses of bare sand, perfect for nesting. A lack of hurricanes this year meant birds nesting in the newly exposed areas could successfully fledge without contending with excessive waves, wind, or water, showcasing how resilient they can be without human disturbance and development.

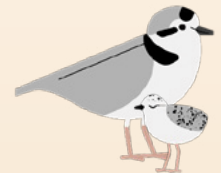


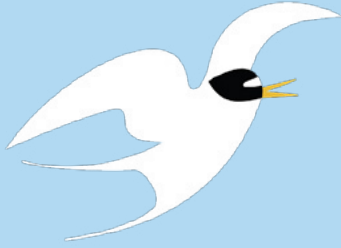
At one point in the season, nearly 2,000 **Royal Tern** chicks flooded the beach at Huguenot Memorial Park. And for the first time ever, we recorded Royal Terns nesting in Collier County.

Featured Sites

1. Navarre Beach
2. Tyndall Air Force Base
3. Cape San Blas
4. St. George Island Cswy/Lanark Reef
5. Florida Coastal Islands Sanctuaries
6. Fort De Soto Park
7. St. Pete Beach
8. Amelia Island
9. Huguenot Memorial Park
10. Tolomato River
11. Anastasia State Park
12. Fort Matanzas
13. Summer Haven
14. Cayo Costa
15. Fort Myers Beach
16. Bonita Beach
17. Keewaydin Island
18. Morgan Island
19. Second Chance CWA
20. Dickmans Island

Three **Snowy Plover** chicks fledged from Cape San Blas — the first since 2017 — and 16 fledged from Tyndall Air Force Base.



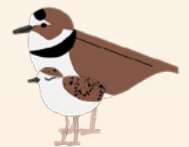


Least Terns had a successful season with 150 nests at Amelia Island State Park, and after several years of low activity, Fort Matanzas saw promising success despite some losses to predation. At Summer Haven, new sand deposits created ideal nesting conditions and supported large Least Tern colonies with moderate success. A huge win for this species came from a construction site in Navarre Beach, where 500 chicks fledged, accounting for the majority of the roughly 630 Least Tern chicks at Audubon-managed sites in the Western Panhandle region. Another 17 chicks in this region fledged from rooftops. In Southwest Florida, more good news: 480 chicks fledged across all sites there. Sanibel Island saw its first successful Least Tern colony since the 1990s and Bonita Beach had its first in a decade.

Black Skimmers had their best season in decades at Anastasia State Park, with more than 30 fledged chicks. At a construction site in Navarre Beach, 45 chicks fledged. Across Pinellas and Sarasota counties, Black Skimmers fledged more than 670 chicks. We recorded some skimmers laying eggs on St. Pete Beach as early as April 26 — the earliest ever for skimmers in Pinellas County! In Southwest Florida, a combined total of 400 skimmers fledged from the many sites we monitor.



American Oystercatchers nested in healthy numbers along the Tolomato River. Audubon staff were delighted to see seven chicks fledge at the St. George Island Causeway and the first oystercatcher chick at Lanark Reef since 2021. Across the sites within the Florida Coastal Islands Sanctuaries, 11 chicks fledged. For the first time on record, oystercatchers also nested in Collier County!



At Audubon-stewarded sites, **Wilson's Plovers** had a great year. In the Panhandle, a record 39 chicks fledged from Tyndall Air Force Base and two more from a property owned by the University of West Florida (see page 3). They also had a productive nesting season along the Tolomato River, though some sites were affected by overwash from rising sea levels. Thanks to predation management and partnership with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the colony at Fort De Soto Park had a record year, producing 14 fledges. This imperiled species also saw success in Southwest Florida, with fledges from Second Chance Critical Wildlife Area, Keewaydin Island, Morgan Island, Dickmans Island, Bonita Beach, Fort Myers Beach, and Cayo Costa.



Girl Scouts were inspired to protect this vulnerable beach habitat for coastal species. Photo: Karen Garcia

The secret to nesting success at Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park? Girl Scout Cadettes! Photo: Karen Garcia



Girl Scouts Band Together to Protect Sea and Shorebirds

Along Florida’s Gulf Coast, where people and wildlife compete for the same narrow ribbon of sand, conservation success begins with collaboration. At Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park, four determined middle school Girl Scouts started a new conservation chapter for the region’s vulnerable sea and shorebirds.

The “Coastal Education Team,” made up of Girl Scout Cadettes from Troops 328 and 446 of the Girl Scouts of Gulf Coast Florida Council, is working toward their Silver Award. This is the highest honor a Cadette can earn. For their “Take Action” project, the girls set their sights on Florida’s coast, asking a simple but powerful question: How can we help?

They found their answer in the Least Tern, a small, charismatic shorebird whose nesting success has declined across much of its range due to habitat loss and human disturbance. Rather than being assigned a project, the girls chose to protect this species after connecting with staff at Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park to learn where help was most needed.

“My group chose this specific project because Delnor-Wiggins reached out to us and told us about their Least Terns,” said Katherine J. “We thought that it was a very unique and fun project to do. I personally hope to learn leadership skills and more information about the types of birds and how to teach others about sharing the shore.”

For Develynn S., the project opened the door to a new understanding of coastal wildlife: “When I was informed about it, I was very intrigued. I never knew that shorebirds were so important, and I immediately wanted to be involved,” she said. “Shorebirds are key species in our ecosystem, so we should make sure we do our best to keep them safe.”

The opportunity came at a critical moment for the park. After a series of hurricanes in late 2024, and while still recovering from 2022’s Hurricane Ian, park staff made the forward-thinking decision to protect newly formed beach habitat. They posted the recently reshaped area with signs and fencing to give shorebirds space to forage during winter with the hope that nesting birds would return this summer. According to park staff, Delnor-Wiggins has not hosted nesting shorebirds since the 1980s. The new habitat offers a rare opportunity.

The challenges facing shorebirds were one reason Iris S. felt drawn to the project. “I chose this project because shorebirds keep leaving nesting sites because of boaters approaching sandbars and because of habitat loss,” she said. “I hope to learn more about shorebirds, especially Least Terns, from this experience.”



Photo: Karen Garcia



Left to right: Audubon Florida's Megan Hatten, Iris S., Katherine J., Develynn S., Abi N., Paige Muller. Photo: Karen Garcia

The Coastal Education Team, made up of Girl Scout Cadettes from Troops 328 and 446 of the Girl Scouts of Gulf Coast Florida Council, is working toward their Silver Award, the highest honor a Cadette can earn. Photo: Karen Garcia



To encourage Least Terns to reclaim the site, the Coastal Education Team designed a decoy project modeled on proven conservation techniques. With support from park staff and guidance from Audubon Florida, the girls learned how decoys can attract nesting terns by signaling that an area is safe and already occupied.

Community partners quickly stepped in to make the idea a reality. Rick Schalk of the Thomas Riley Artisans' Guild donated his time, materials, and woodworking skills to create the decoys. Kathy, Carey, and Amy Slavin of Family Hobby Center supplied paints and materials. The girls painted each decoy by hand, transforming raw wood into lifelike models designed to draw real birds back to the beach.

On February 13, the project came together on the sand. Joined by their adult Girl Scout project adviser, Delnor-Wiggins staff, and Audubon Florida staff, the girls carefully placed the decoys within the posted area while learning how beachgoers can help protect nesting birds simply by respecting posted areas, leashing pets, and giving birds space.

Those small actions are central to the message the team hopes to share. "We can do things that may seem simple to us but are huge for shorebirds," said Develynn S. "The next time you're at the beach during nesting season, making sure you stay away from nesting areas can make a big difference."

Education is at the heart of the Coastal Education Team's Silver Award project. With resources and advice from Delnor-Wiggins State Park and Audubon Florida, the girls are now preparing to share what they've learned with their community and teach others how small actions can protect coastal wildlife.

Abi N. says the experience has shown the team how important those efforts can be. "In this project we have learned about how shorebirds are important to the coastline and why we should help increase their numbers," she said. "Everyone can contribute to sharing the shore by giving the birds personal space and not entering their homes."

In a place shaped by storms and recovery, the project offers something lasting: proof that conservation works best when communities come together. From Girl Scouts and park staff to conservationists and local businesses, this "Share the Shore" effort shows that stewardship isn't just about protecting birds, it's about empowering the next generation to lead the way.



An Unexpected Meeting Made Possible by Bird Banding

Banding is a critically important tool scientists use in bird conservation. Through the U.S. Geological Survey Bird Banding Laboratory program, biologists gain valuable insights into birds' natural histories, including population size, age structure, migration routes, and movement patterns. One of the most well-known efforts focuses on Piping Plover conservation, with scientists monitoring the birds through three separate banding programs based on their location.

Regardless of their breeding location, all Piping plovers in the country migrate south and spend the winter along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts from the Carolinas through Texas and the Bahamas and Caribbean. Each winter, Piping plovers from all three populations congregate along their preferred beaches.

Audubon biologists stewarding beaches in the eastern Florida Panhandle see the Great Lakes Piping plovers with their orange bands fairly often, but it is very rare to see a banded bird from one of the other populations.

While surveying Flag Island Critical Wildlife Area in early January, Apalachicola Shorebird Biologist Zach Matchinski saw a Piping Plover with a yellow flag, indicating it was a member of the Great Plains population. He immediately got out his camera and took photos to document its presence here in Florida and to help him read the code on its flag more easily: 62Z.

Upon reporting the band to the bird banding lab, Matchinski was excited to learn that 62Z hatched on Lake Sakakawea, an area where he worked to monitor Piping plovers during the summer of 2022.

"We have both traveled thousands of miles since first leaving North Dakota, and I definitely enjoyed meeting that Piping Plover on that island in January," says Matchinski.

Knowing where the Piping plovers on our beaches began their journey can greatly improve our conservation efforts for this species, not just at their breeding and wintering locations, but also at the points in between.



Photo: Zach Matchinski/
Audubon Florida

WE OWE OUR THANKS TO THIS INCREDIBLE TEAM!

COASTAL PROGRAM



BREEDING AND
NON-BREEDING
SEASON VOLUNTEERS

ROOFTOPS
SURVEYED



ROOFS WITH
ACTIVE NESTING
AND MOST WITH
PROTECTIONS

(chick fencing, chick checkers, etc)

BEACH, ISLAND, AND
ROOFTOP SITES
STEWARDED BY
AUDUBON FLORIDA



6,005
HOURS



INVESTED IN BIRD STEWARDSHIP
AND PUBLIC OUTREACH TO
PROTECT VULNERABLE COLONIES

FLORIDA COASTAL ISLANDS SANCTUARIES



VOLUNTEERS

134
HOURS



63 VOLUNTEERS DONATED A
TOTAL OF 134 SERVICE HOURS
FOR THESE IMPORTANT PROJECTS



With flexible protected areas and volunteers committed to educating beachgoers, more birds, like Royal Terns, fledged from Huguenot Memorial Park in Northeast Florida. Photo: Walker Golder/Audubon Photography Awards

Huguenot Memorial Park Adapts to Protect Nesting Birds

Huguenot Memorial Park is a critical Northeast Florida nesting site for coastal birds, including Royal Terns and Laughing Gulls. Thousands of birds nest here each year, typically at the north end of the park. Popular for beachgoers as well, park managers usually close some of the beach to vehicles during nesting season to allow chicks safe access to the water.

2024: A PROBLEM EMERGES

In 2024, nesting shifted significantly south of the traditional closed area, which meant they moved into areas where vehicles drive and park as they moved from the dunes to the water. Tragically, more than 40 birds perished as a result of vehicle strikes. Additionally, the situation highlighted limits of relying on historic nesting patterns to guide protections.

2025: A TURNAROUND

“The park staff and city employees deserve huge kudos as they worked on different strategies to help the bird families,” explains Northeast Florida Policy Associate Chris Farrell. They worked with Audubon and employed adjusted management strategies to protect the birds where they decided to nest. Another huge shout out to our Audubon volunteer stewards — you played an important role in both safeguarding the birds and talking to beach users about how to share the shore.

The protected area was expanded to include new nesting locations, reaching roughly 450 feet beyond the traditional closure. Plus, a seasonal protective “box” was added along the dunes to extend protections to the south using a “moving box” approach — especially on weekends — so protection could shift as birds and chicks moved. Law enforcement partners actively intervened when needed, stopping traffic to allow chicks safe passage to the shoreline. Additional posted areas were created when flightless chicks moved outside designated zones.

The result? Better protection for the birds. Monitors and stewards recorded only 17 bird fatalities in 2025 from vehicle strikes.

LOOKING AHEAD

The goal, of course, is to reduce these fatalities to zero. “The 2025 approach will be repeated and refined moving forward,” explains Farrell. “We look forward to continued cooperation between Audubon, the City of Jacksonville, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and the Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office — all of which meet as part of the park’s Shorebird Management Team.”



Least Tern. Photo: Sarah Devlin/Audubon Photography Awards



Left: Great Egret chicks.
Right: Roseate Spoonbill.
Photos: Jeff Liechty/
Audubon Florida

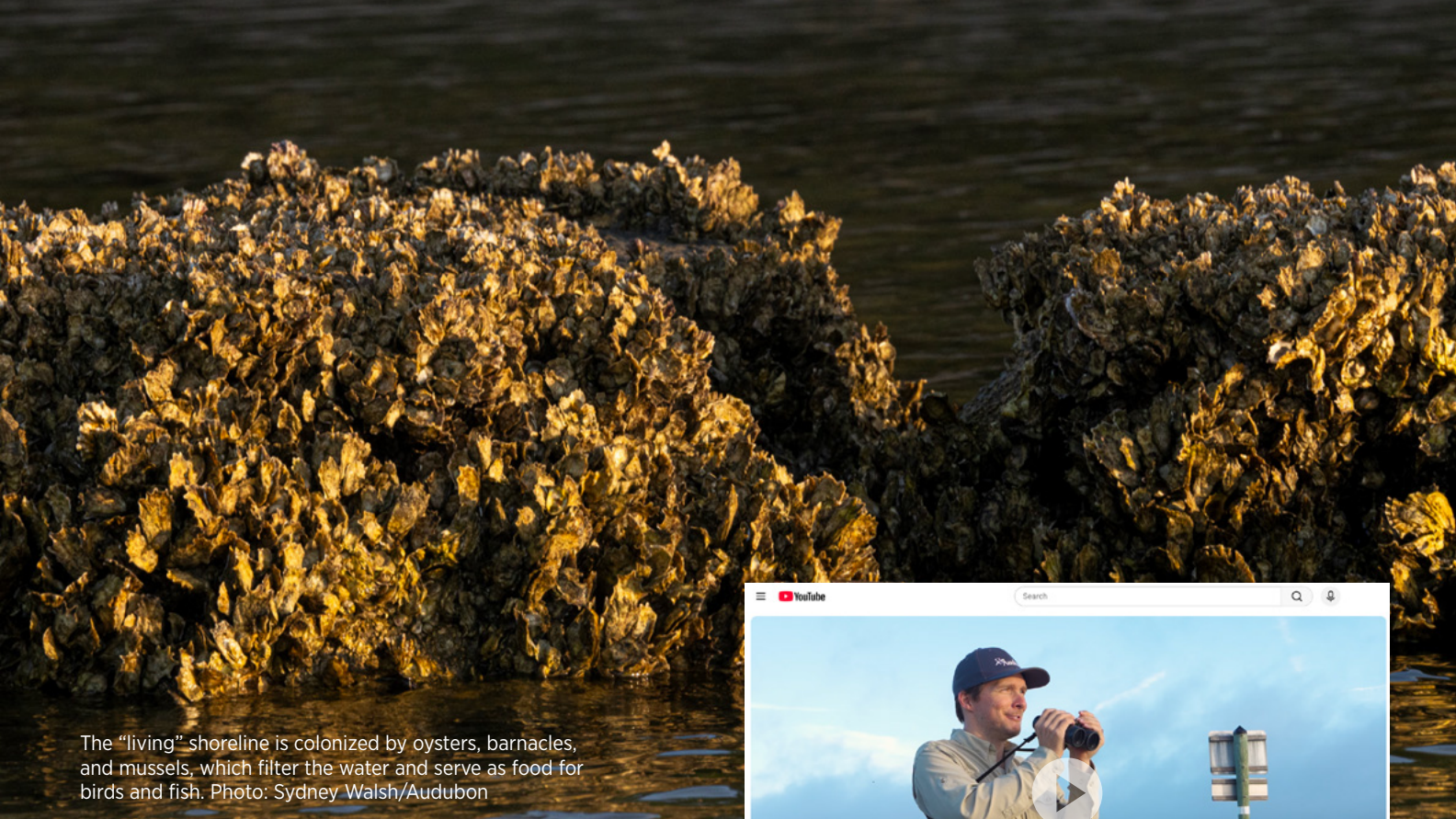
Thank you to Bishop-Parker Foundation for supporting Florida Coastal Islands Sanctuaries' work protecting colonial waterbird islands in Manatee County!

2025 proved to be a successful nesting season at nine islands in Manatee County, where 15 species raised their young, including Great Egrets, Roseate Spoonbills, Wood Storks, and Reddish Egrets. In the non-breeding season, volunteers and staff cleaned more than 1,200 feet of fishing line from colonies. Following the 2024 hurricane season, island management staff installed new signs and removed debris from several islands.

Through strong partnerships and the dedication of volunteers, this work protects birds across Manatee County.

Bishop-Parker Foundation Mission

Inspired by the philanthropic legacy of our founders, Bishop-Parker Foundation partners with nonprofit and public organizations to strengthen Manatee County for current and future generations.



The “living” shoreline is colonized by oysters, barnacles, and mussels, which filter the water and serve as food for birds and fish. Photo: Sydney Walsh/Audubon

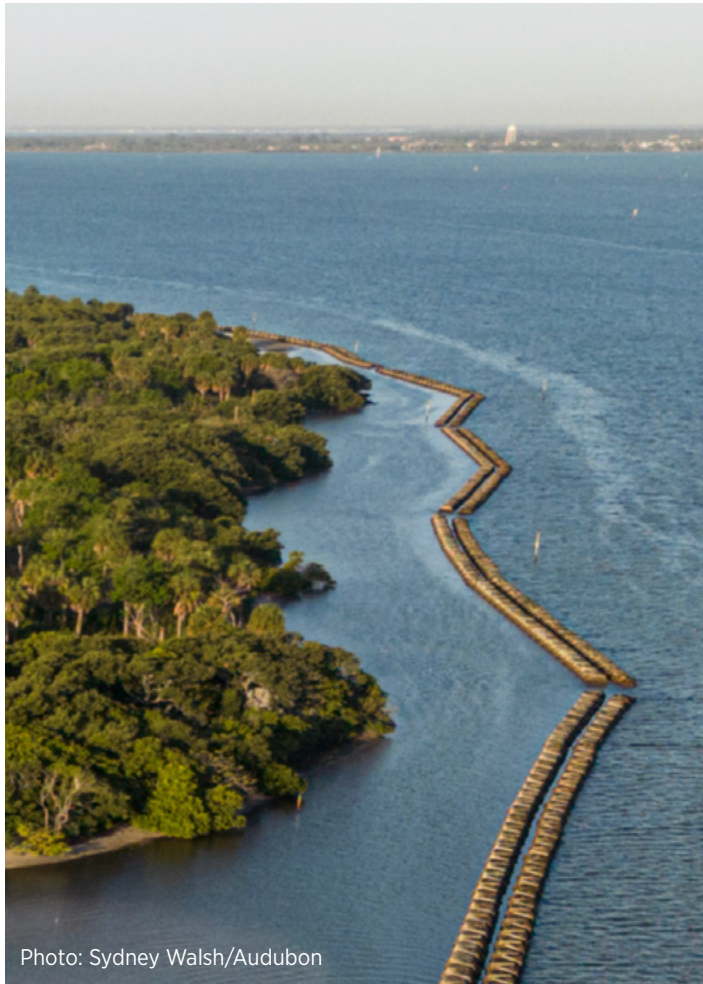


Photo: Sydney Walsh/Audubon

New Video Highlights Florida Coastal Islands Sanctuaries Living Shorelines

Audubon Florida has built more than a mile of living shoreline in the Tampa region. The structures prevent wave energy from boat wakes and storm surge from eroding islands critical for bird nesting, feeding, and resting. In this video, Florida Coastal Islands Sanctuaries Manager Jeff Liechty illustrates how living shorelines are helping new mangroves grow on the Alafia Bank Sanctuary, leased from and managed in collaboration with The Mosaic Company and Port Tampa Bay.

Watch the video!

<https://bit.ly/4so3oEV>





THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS.

The Batchelor Foundation | Mosaic Company Foundation | Bishop-Parker Foundation
Community Foundation of Tampa Bay | National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

Thank you for supporting our coastal work!



DONATE

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

LEARN AND VOLUNTEER

Explore coastal conservation, our efforts, and volunteer to steward coastal birds in your area: audubon.org/florida/coastal

American Oystercatchers.
Photo: Melissa Rowell/Audubon Photography Awards