



GREEN FLASH

BROUGHT TO YOU BY **WGCU**

Southwest Florida Environmental News for Jan. 2022

Ornithologists: Wading bird nesting in Everglades mixed. That's OK.



Roseate spoonbill. Photo courtesy FWC

Roseate spoonbills that nested early in the Florida Everglades had a successful year raising hatchlings in 2020. However, an early rainy season meant food became scarce so wading birds that nest later did not do as well.

The pink-and-white birds with the distinctive flat bill built twice as many nests last year as they have done during each of the past 10 years.

Audubon Florida published a report for 2020 regarding the health and success of 43,680 wading bird nests from Fort Myers to Lake Okeechobee and south to Florida Bay at the southern tip of mainland South Florida.

Tricolored herons, great egrets, and little blue herons created fewer than 10,000 nests each, down from previous years. Snowy egret nests declined by 27 percent on average. The early rains pummeled nesting wood storks which, before Everglades flood control efforts during the 1980s and 1990s, began nesting in November or December. In 2020, the birds began nesting in mid-January, but there was not enough time for many of the hatchlings to mature before the rains came, which led to widespread nest abandonment.

Restoration is working

What really matters, according to the Audubon Florida report, is how the overall now compares with the overall then.

Even nesting numbers like those for 2020 are considered successful because the effort of groups working to re-establish rookeries in the Everglades are measured in decades-over-decades, and things are better overall in 2020 than in, say, 1988, before restoration efforts began.

“The science tells us that Everglades restoration works for wading birds,” said Kelly Cox, Audubon Florida’s Director of Everglades Policy. “This report shows that if we remain steadfast in our commitment to Everglades restoration, wading birds will have a greater chance of reaching their historic numbers.”



Wood stork. Photo courtesy FWC

Water woes

Too much or too little water remains a key factor affecting the survival of the hatchlings. Audubon Florida said climate change-induced variations in seasonal rainfall patterns, including stronger and more frequent storms, will make things tough on nesting wading birds.

Wading bird nesting around Lake Okeechobee was the lowest in 2020 than it has been since the extreme drought year of 2008. Researchers documented 1,951 nests last year. The 10-year average is 5,319.

For the ninth time in 14 years wood storks failed to nest in the Corkscrew Swamp watershed, likely due to changes in water flow caused by development and a resulting decline in the amount of crayfish and other critters the storks feed their hatchlings. Nearby, however, colonies on Lenore Island in the Caloosahatchee River near Fort Myers, and in inland Collier County, together built a total of 35 nests. The fate of those hatchlings is not known because a spike in COVID-19 caused researchers to cancel the flights used to monitor the nesting colonies from the air.

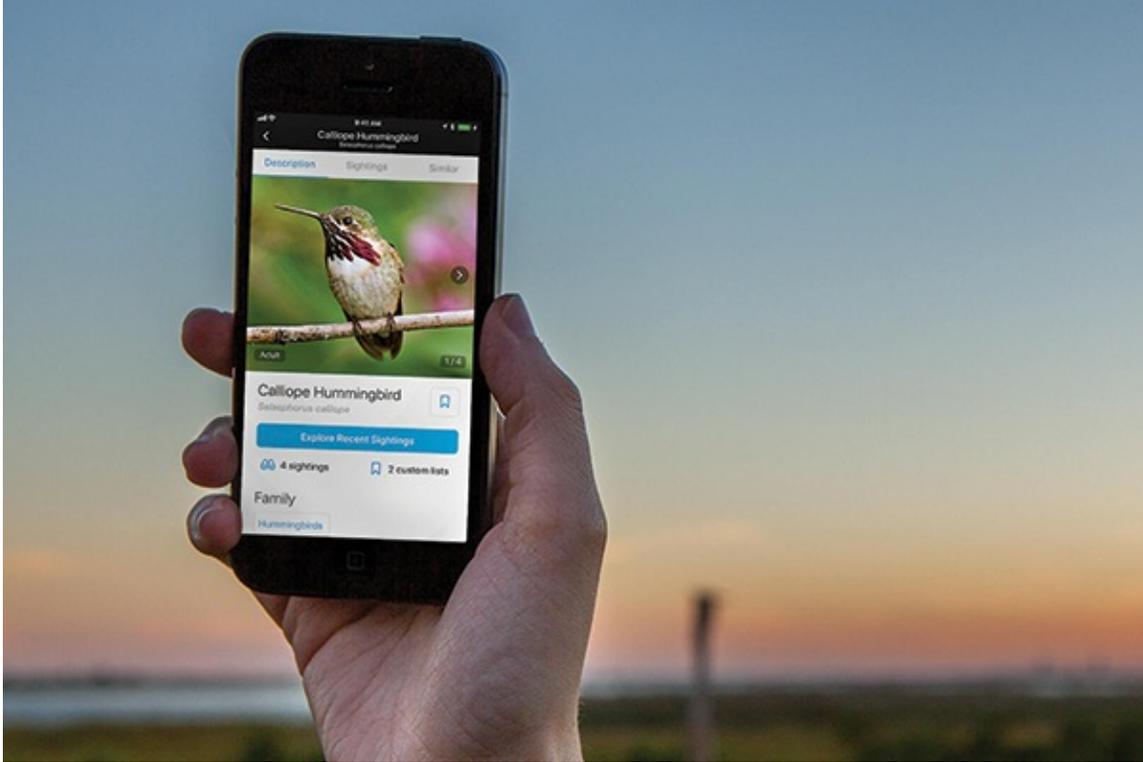


Tricolored Heron. Photo courtesy FWC

Tricolored herons surprise

Audubon Florida reports Florida Bay accounted for 64 percent of the tricolored heron nests in the Everglades even though herons are not thoroughly surveyed. Unlike in the rest of the Everglades, tricolored herons in Florida Bay are not declining, and may be on the increase.

- Tom Bayles



Audubon Bird Guide App. Photo courtesy www.audubon.org

Free bird! ... smart phone app

The **Audubon Bird Guide App** is a free cell phone app field guide to over 800 species of North American birds to help users identify birds, keep track of them, and possibly even help them inspire kids to get outside to find and categorize birds they see.

The Audubon app has been downloaded more than 2 million times. Some of the more popular features include:

Bird ID

- Enter its coloring, size and location and a short list of possible matches will appear.

Bird Info

- The field guide features over 3,000 photos, audio clips of songs and calls, multi-season range maps, and in-depth text by leading North American bird expert Kenn Kaufman.

Bird Tracker

- Keep a record of every bird encountered, whether you see it while hiking, sitting on the lanai, or catching a glimpse of birds out the window. The app keeps the list updated.
-



New year brings no new red tide – for now

The red tide organism, *Karenia brevis*, was not observed in samples collected statewide over the past week, nor were reports of fish kills suspected to be related to red tide received. Respiratory irritation suspected to be related to red tide was not reported in Florida over the past week. For recent and current information at individual beaches, go to visitbeaches.org/

The next complete status report will be issued on Friday, January 14. Check WGCU's daily sampling map, which can be accessed via the online status report on our [Red Tide Current Status page](#). For more information on algal blooms and water quality, visit [Protecting Florida Together](#).

The Red Tide Current Status website also provides links to additional information related to the topic of Florida red tide including satellite imagery, experimental red tide forecasts, shellfish harvesting areas, the FWC Fish Kill Hotline, the Florida Poison Information Center (to report human health effects related to exposure to red tide), and other wildlife related hotlines.

To learn more about various organisms that have been known to cause algal blooms in Florida waters, see the [Red Tide Flickr](#) page.



An alcove at Lovers Key State Park beach

Friends of Lovers Key events

The Friends of Lovers Key have two upcoming events open to everyone.

Water issues discussion

On Thursday, Jan. 13 at the park's Welcome & Discovery Center, the group will host "A History of Water Stewardship in Southwest Florida: A Discussion with Nick Penniman." Penniman, who has been a county coastal manager, will talk about the history of water management in Southwest Florida – where it succeeded and where it went terribly wrong.

Penniman, who was a publisher of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch and chair of the Collier County Growth Management Oversight Committee, is author of "A Toxic Inconvenience: Red Tide and Blue-Green Algae on Florida's Coast" and "On the Knife: A History of Sugar in Florida."

His presentation will include visuals, and audience participation is encouraged as topics include growth management and its impacts on the coastal environment.

Tickets to Penniman's presentation are \$30. Purchase them online [HERE](#).

Lure of Lovers Key film and annual meeting

Friends of Lovers Key is holding its annual meeting the next Thursday, Jan. 20, at the welcome center.

The meeting includes a screening of the documentary "The Lure of Lovers Key," which was produced by Southwest Florida documentary filmmaker Tom James and aired on WFCU PBS. The film tells of the creation of Lovers Key State Park, its gorgeous natural attributes, and the importance of maintaining

its ecological health.

The group will show off the new welcome center, which features a hall with interactive environmental exhibits designed to immerse visitors into the various areas in the park. The new center has a community room for gatherings with a kitchen, bookstore and gift shop celebrating local artists.

A presentation covering the group's goals for 2022 will be held as well as discussion of the upcoming educational and recreational opportunities,

The meeting will be held from 4:30 p.m. to 6 p.m. at Lovers Key State Park, 8700 Estero Blvd., Fort Myers Beach. Those arriving early can visit the Samelson Exhibit Hall and browse the Nature Nook boutique and bookshop.

Registration is required in advance and can be completed [HERE](#).



A runnel. Photo courtesy U.S. Geological Survey

“Enviroterminologism”

• n | **EN-viro-TERM-in-ALA-gism**: a made-up word to introduce interesting **REAL** words thrown about in environmental sciences; n | cool terms about environmental stuff

This issue's focus is coastal ecosystems.

Beach face: n | **BE-ch FAY-se**; The zone of sand between the low-tide mark and the spot where waves reach their highest point up the beach during high tide. Also known as the foreshore, it is home to hundreds of tiny creatures at the base of the coastal ecosystem.

Runnel: n | RUN-el; A depression in the beach near the shoreline in which sea water collects after a high tide. It's that little lake-like thing that is perhaps a foot or two deep with sand between the trapped water and, in our case, the Gulf of Mexico. They differ from lagoons both in smaller size and the lack of an opening to the sea.

Sand bank: n | SAN-d B-ank; A ridge, bar or shoal of sand naturally deposited in the area that rises above the surrounding sea floor. Often located outside or inside of passes on the west coast of Florida, they are both navigation hazards to boaters and sources of sand for beach nourishment.

Littoral drift: n | LIT-or-el Dr-ift; The movement of sand along the shoreline thanks to the forces involved in breaking waves, longshore currents and gravity.

Quartz: n | KW-ortz; A common ingredient in the powdery-white sand common on Florida's Gulf Coast beaches. It comes from the granite peaks of the Appalachian Mountains, where pieces are weathered away by rainfall and eroded by streams then tumble along tributaries and into the Mississippi River and, in time, spill out into the Gulf of Mexico. Teeny crystals of quartz, which are embedded throughout the granite, are separated from the rock as both are washed down the Gulf Coast. A combination of coastal geology, the chemical makeup of quartz, and the crystals' shape creates beaches like Siesta Key in Sarasota County or Fort Myers Beach in Lee County, which are nearly pure quartz -- and that is the secret behind the "squeakiness" experienced when walking on those beaches.



Surviving the Great Depression. Photo courtesy Lake Wales History Museum

Florida Humanities Speaker Series talk by Janie Gould

“When Manatees Were Sea Cows: How Floridians Coped When Times Were Hard” is the topic of a talk by Janie Gould on Jan. 13 at 6 p.m. in Lake Wales. Funding for the program was provided through a grant from Florida Humanities with funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Register and get more information [HERE](#).

Beach updates

WGPU News provides the following:

Weekly red tide **UPDATES**

Blue-green algae **BULLETINS**

And from Mote Marine:

Current local beach **CONDITIONS**

Click below to make a financial contribution now.

SUPPORT WGPU NOW

Environmental reporting for WGPU is sponsored in part by the [VoLo Foundation](#).

Did someone share this email with you? [SIGN UP](#) up to receive more from WGPU.