

# THE SNAIL KITE

NEWSLETTER OF THE  
FLORIDA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

[www.fosbirds.org](http://www.fosbirds.org)



## President’s Message—Changing of the Guard

As time goes by, people who have worked hard in different roles for FOS have to move on. It’s life, and we all know that, as volunteers, *we can only do what we can do* for any organization, even one that we love as much as FOS. And it’s time for a Changing of the Guard, to carry on our work here in Florida.

And so now, the time has come, again, to ask you as members of our organization to help replace the great folks who have been working so hard for our Society, to continue the excellence of their efforts into the future. We have a number of opportunities to participate in the on-going progress of FOS. I am asking everyone to consider how you can undertake a leadership role within our organization.

Please look at the list of opportunities to be part of the structure of FOS. Consider your skills, your level of current obligations, and your love of FOS. You can call the person who has been serving FOS in the role before to learn about the job’s scope of duties. And as a new leader, you have the chance to rethink, reorient, and design a new future for FOS.

It’s not necessary to be an ornithologist to be an FOS Committee Chair, or to undertake other roles. As you know, FOS is devoted to creating an opportunity for our state’s bird scientists, bird-watchers, and bird enthusiasts to connect. Serving in a role needed by our organization will allow that goal to continue.

None of us are irreplaceable, although the folks who come into the new roles will bring different skills and interest levels, new ideas and levels of enthusiasm. This means that progress is possible.

If you have any questions, please call me for clarification. Please consider volunteering for FOS. For help us as we “change the guard” and move ahead into the future. Thanks so much.

Ann Paul, President  
813/624-3149  
[Annpaul26@gmail.com](mailto:Annpaul26@gmail.com)

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### Some of the positions currently in need of new leadership:

- Membership Chair
- Snail Kite Newsletter Editor
- Nominating Committee Member
- Cruickshank Education Committee Member
- Merchandise Committee Member





**Join Us as We Continue to  
Celebrate our 50<sup>th</sup> Year!**



## **Fall 2023 FOS Meeting**

**Friday, November 10 – Sunday, November 12**

**Boyd Hill Nature Preserve in South St. Petersburg**

**Pinellas Pioneer Settlement Meeting Hall**

3010 31<sup>ST</sup> Street South, St. Petersburg, FL 33705

- **Boyd Hill Nature Preserve's Terry Tomalin Campground**, cabins and campsites available, (727)893-7326.

- **Ft. DeSoto County Park** camp sites, **Customer Information Call Center – (727) 582-2100** (Select 2 from the phone menu). The Customer Information Call Center is available Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. Email [parks@pinellascounty.org](mailto:parks@pinellascounty.org) outside of call center hours; allow 24 – 48 hours for reply.

For more information about the FOS Meeting, contact Mary Mack Gray [graymarymack@gmail.com](mailto:graymarymack@gmail.com), David Goodwin [David.goodwin@aol.com](mailto:David.goodwin@aol.com), or Ann Paul [annpaul26@gmail.com](mailto:annpaul26@gmail.com).

### **Friday afternoon, November 10**

**2 p.m. – Board of Director's Meeting, Pinellas Pioneer Settlement Meeting Hall**

Members welcome.

**2 p.m. – Field Trip – Explore Boyd Hill Nature Preserve, \$3/person. Leader: tba**

Six miles of trails and boardwalks provide access to Lake Maggiore shoreline, hardwood hammocks, pine flatwoods, upland scrub, freshwater swamp, and a freshwater marsh. The Environmental Education Center offers exhibits and an aviary with rehabilitated birds of prey. Over 60 species of reptiles and amphibians, including alligators, gopher tortoises, Florida box turtles, and eastern indigo snakes occur here. More than 60 species of butterflies have been found including giant swallowtail, southern oak hairstreak and white peacock. Year-round, Green Heron, Osprey, Common Gallinule, Eastern Screech-Owl, and Downy Woodpecker, Limpkin, Purple Gallinule, and King Rail can be found, plus more than 20 species of wood-warbler during spring and fall migration including Kentucky, Cerulean, Blackburnian, Bay-breasted and Wilson's. Rarities such as Long-tailed Duck, Groove-billed Ani, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Nashville Warbler, and Lark Sparrow have also been recorded. Meet at the Education Center.

### **Friday evening**

**6 p.m. Supper & Flocking – An Introduction to BBA II and Tales of the BBAs.**

Share your stories, slides, and remembrances of your BBA surveys and other work for BBA I and BBA II! That includes you, Wes!

## **Saturday morning, November 11**

**8:00 a.m. – Field Trip to Ft. DeSoto County Park, 3500 Pinellas Bayway South**

**Tierra Verde, \$5/vehicle, Leader: David Goodwin**

One of Florida's premier birding sites, the Park's 1,136 acres are on five interconnected islands/keys. These keys are home to beach plants, mangroves, wetlands, palm hammocks, hardwoods and scores of native plants. Over the past 60 years, bird-watchers and ornithologists have documented more than 328 species.

## **Saturday afternoon, Boyd Hill Nature Preserve's Pinellas Pioneer Settlement Meeting Hall**

**1:30 p.m. – Membership Meeting, Announcements, FOS report from the Board**

**2:00 – 5:00 p.m. – Scientific Session, Student Papers**

### **Student Presentations**

Temperatures within Least Tern nesting colonies on rooftops and beaches

Connor O'Brien, Undergraduate student, Eckerd College (Cruickshank Award recipient 2023)

Effects of Male Black Skimmer Aggression on Nesting Success and Dispersal

Jessica Hughes, Undergraduate student, Eckerd College

Evolution of vocal traits in New World quail

Brittany L. Buchanan, PhD student, University of Florida

Are social birds talking about food? Titmouse food-related vocalizations

Po-An Chen, PhD student, University of Florida

Impact of light and noise pollution on an urban adapted bird in Pakistan

Talha M. Imtiaz, Visiting PhD Scholar, University of Florida

What are they talking about? Novel approaches to decode complex bird vocalizations.

Suyash Sawant, PhD student, University of Florida

### **Scientific Presentations**

Nick Jennings, Assistant Regional Species Conservation Biologist, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Southwest Region – The Effects of Displacement on Urban Burrowing Owls

Adrienne Fitzwilliam, Assistant Research Scientist, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission – “Florida Grasshopper Sparrow Research and Conservation”

Kara Cook, Rooftop Biologist, Audubon Florida – “Banding Rooftop-nesting American Oystercatchers”

Beth Forys, PhD, Professor, Eckerd College – “Survival of Fallen and Returned Rooftop Nesting Least Tern Chicks”

Jeff Liechty, Coastal Biologist, Audubon Florida – “Seabird entanglement at Skyway Fishing Pier and Brown Pelican banding”

**5:30 p.m. Skin Quiz provided by Andy Kratter, Florida State Museum of Natural History**

## **Saturday evening Banquet and Keynote Talk**

**6:00 p.m. – Reception and Banquet**

**7:00 p.m. – Stephen A. Nesbitt, “Secrets of the Sandhills” or “The Life History of the Florida Sandhill Crane”**

After 35 years of working with dozens of known individual Florida Sandhill Cranes, Nesbitt, a retired biologist formerly with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, will discuss what they learned. How can you tell an old crane from a young crane? How can you tell a male from a female? Do crane really pair for life? What is the typical home range for a pair of Florida Sandhill Cranes? What does it take for a pair to successfully raise a chick to the age of independence? How long can a Florida crane live? What does the future for cranes in Florida look like? These are some of the topics to be discussed.

## **Sunday morning, November 12 – Field Trips**

**8:00 a.m. – noon**

**Celery Fields, 6799 Palmer Blvd, Sarasota, Leader: Jeanne Dubi**

The location of the site, the large number of diverse bird species, and its public ownership by Sarasota County make the Celery Fields an ideal location for wildlife watching and passive recreational use. To date, 246 species have been recorded using open marshlands, deep ponds, shallow pools, and canals. The 400+ acre site is also the County’s primary stormwater collection zone. Meet Jeanne Dubi at Sarasota Audubon’s Nature Center at the intersection of Center Road and Raymond Road.

Directions: From I-75, take Exit 210, Fruitville Road. Go east and make a right at Lakewood Ranch Blvd light, then right at traffic circle onto Apex Road. Follow Apex for 1 (one) mile and make a left onto Palmer Blvd. After .3 mile turn left into parking lot which also has restrooms.

**Circle B Bar Reserve, 4399 Winter Lake Rd, Lakeland, Leader: Bob Snow and Cole Frederick**

The Circle B Bar Reserve on the northwest shore of Lake Hancock, is a former cattle ranch that today boasts a wide variety of plants and animals. is an area of protected lands in Polk County, Florida. Comprising 1,267 acres at 4399 Winter Lake Road near Lakeland, it is managed by the Polk County Board of County Commissioners, which co-owns it with the Southwest Florida Water Management District. This incredible reserve is among the best inland birding and wildlife viewing spots in Central Florida boasting a bird checklist of over 220 species. Be on the lookout for alligators, eagles, osprey, red shouldered hawks, wild turkey, barred owls, wood storks, white ibis, sandhill cranes, moorhens, pied-billed grebes, black-necked stilts, red-bellied woodpeckers, bobwhite quails, eastern meadowlarks, savannah sparrows, American kestrels, great blue herons, American white pelicans, sandpipers, spoonbills, great egrets, ducks and other waterfowl and wading birds. You might also see otters, bobcats, grey fox, armadillos, squirrels (gray and fox varieties), frogs, turtles, black racer snakes, five-lined racerunner lizards and other reptiles. Many migratory birds can be found here in the winter months. Meet at the Visitors’ Center.

**Honeymoon Island State Park, #1 Causeway Blvd., Dunedin, \$8/vehicle, Leader: Ann Paul, Dan Larremore, Bill Kaempfer**

One of Florida’s best-loved state parks, Honeymoon Island has more than four miles of beach to explore along with a three-mile trail through one of the last remaining virgin slash pine forests. Eagles, Osprey and Great Horned Owls, songbirds, shorebirds, and waders plus gopher tortoises, raccoons and armadillos. The Rotary Centennial Nature Center overlooks shallow waters of the St. Joseph Sound estuary. Meet at the MacDonald’s, 2618 Bayshore Blvd, Dunedin, and we will car-pool from there.



## Registration Form

# Fall 2023 FOS Meeting

Friday, November 10 – Sunday, November 12

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Registration Fee, \$30/person, \$5 for students      \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Friday, November 10, Supper, \$20/person      \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Saturday, November 11, Banquet, \$20/person      \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Late fee, after November 1, \$15      \$ \_\_\_\_\_

(so we order enough meals, etc.)

TOTAL      \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please mail your registration and check made out to “FOS” to Mary Mack Gray, Vice President, 1909 Sherwood Drive, Tallahassee, FL 32303 or register on-line at [fosbirds.org](http://fosbirds.org)

For more information, contact Mary Mack Gray [graymarymack@gmail.com](mailto:graymarymack@gmail.com) David Goodwin [David.goodwin@aol.com](mailto:David.goodwin@aol.com) or Ann Paul [annpaul26@gmail.com](mailto:annpaul26@gmail.com).

# Naturalist's Note—Gone Fishing: Big Cypress' Common Grackles Show Novel Learned Problem-Solving

By Rachel DePietro

While learned problem-solving skills among wild birds are best known among the crow family, one can never rule out the capacity of other kinds of birds to also acquire novel learned behaviors. While on an excursion with a companion on Loop Rd. in Big Cypress National Preserve this spring, I discovered that members of the blackbird family also have this potential. At stops along a few of the culverts under the road, I would notice a small flock of Common Grackles with some space in between each other, each foraging right along the water's edge. When I looked closer, I saw that they were periodically dipping their open beaks into the water as they walked, and then, one of them caught a small fish! It was then that I realized they were using the exact foraging behavior as the much bigger Wood Stork. Given that the water was lower when we visited and we did see a few storks along the road as well, it is very likely that some of the grackles could have watched how the storks fished under the proper conditions over the years, and from there learned the behavior and even shared it with their network. Just as likely, some grackles could have observed the behavior from outside the preserve and then applied the technique to the culverts in turn as they moved around the area. While I do not know for how long the grackles of Big Cypress have adapted this foraging strategy, it is yet another example of how

tough, opportunistic, and adaptable Florida's birds can be in the face of both extremely wet conditions throughout the year and of rapid development and water issues continuing to encroach on their natural habitat. In my original home state of Illinois, I reviled grackles as bullies at my birdfeeders, who scarfed down the seed in huge flocks and left nothing of interest to smaller birds, and I did everything I could to repel them. Now, many years later and living five states south on the edge of what has been described for centuries as an 'impenetrable swamp,' I have gained a whole new appreciation for them, seeing them away from the birdfeeders as rugged survivors in a vast wild land, no different than the larger wading birds the River of Grass is most famous for. Who knows what other tricks different birds of the Everglades and Big Cypress could have learned away from our constant gaze? This encounter exemplifies that if you take the road less traveled, you never know what you might find, even among things you thought you knew well.

**Bio:** Rachel DiPietro is an avid Florida naturalist and a ranger at Everglades National Park. Originally from Chicago, she enjoys exploring new birding spots, painting illustrations of Florida's wildlife, and volunteering at the Cape Florida Banding Station in Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park.



A Common Grackle preying on fish in Big Cypress National Preserve. Photo by Rachel DePietro, March 18 2023.



A Common Grackle preying on fish in Big Cypress National Preserve. Photo by Rachel DePietro, March 18 2023.

# Chronic Wasting Disease Found in Florida for the First Time

From the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) has confirmed that a road-killed 4.5 year-old female white-tailed deer in Holmes County sampled during routine surveillance activities has tested positive for chronic wasting disease (CWD). It is the first known case of CWD in Florida. CWD is a contagious disease of the brain and central nervous system that is always fatal to deer.

The FDACS Announcement with additional information and resources on the response is attached and available on the website here: <https://www.fdacs.gov/Divisions-Offices/Animal-Industry>

**Who to contact:**

Anyone who sees a sick or abnormally thin deer or deer dead of unknown causes, is asked to report its location to the CWD hotline, (866) CWD-WATCH (293-9282). Since 2002, FWC has tested over 17,500 hunter-killed, road-killed, and sick or diseased deer for CWD. Learn more about the FWC's CWD monitoring program. If you are a permitted captive Cervidae premises and have any questions regarding CWD, please reach out to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Division of Animal Industry, at (850) 410-0900.

**Resources:**

For more information about CWD: 1) visit [MyFWC.com/CWD](http://MyFWC.com/CWD), 2) read the article titled "Reducing the risk of CWD spreading into Florida through requirements on importing deer carcasses," and 3) check out the following infographics, which are available at [MyFWC.com/CWD](http://MyFWC.com/CWD) (under the subhead "Additional information and resources about CWD").

**What is Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)?**

This always fatal disease of the deer family is caused by abnormal, misfolded proteins called prions that spread throughout the body and mutate normal prion proteins.

The prions multiply, accumulating in and damaging the brain and nervous system. Certain parts of infected deer have higher concentrations of CWD prions, but all tissues can contain prions.

Infected deer may transmit CWD via direct contact with other deer.

CWD can be transmitted indirectly when deer consume prions in soil contaminated by infected bodily fluids or carcasses. Prions persist in the environment, remaining infectious for years.

Signs of infection don't appear for up to 1 ½ to 3 years after exposure to CWD. Infected deer may look normal but are contaminating the environment and other deer by shedding prions.

Signs of CWD include extreme weight loss and abnormal behavior. Death is certain and occurs within months of showing symptoms.

**UNITE AGAINST CWD FLORIDA**

Learn how to prevent the spread of CWD into Florida at [MyFWC.com/CWD](http://MyFWC.com/CWD)

FLORIDA FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION  
MyFWC.com

# New Bird Protection Rules at Skyway Fishing Pier State Park

By Ann Paul

In mid-July, the Board of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation took steps to reduce the numbers of pelicans caught accidentally by fishermen at the Skyway Pier. The measures are considered by the people concerned about impacts to pelicans as not nearly enough, and by fishermen as too much. Commission Chair Rodney Barreto suggested that the rule-making might have hit the right note, as no one was happy with the results.

The rules approved by the Commission are designed to reduce the likelihood and severity of fishing-gear entanglement and protect seabirds, including pelicans at the Skyway Pier. The new rules will establish an education requirement for anglers, prohibit use of fishing rigs with more than one hook or a multiple hooks from November 15 – March 15, and limit anglers to no more than two sets of hook-and-line gear at a time. Staff are also directed to monitor the effectiveness of these rules, and return with a preliminary report next summer. The Commission will review these rules in two years to determine whether they should be repealed or expanded.

It's not a new problem. Ralph Schreiber, a biologist working in Tampa Bay in the 1970s and 80s, repeatedly warned that entanglement in fishing gear was the main cause of mortality for Brown Pelicans in Florida. In 2013, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's *Species Action Plan for the Brown Pelican*, after the Commission down-listed the species from "Species of Special Concern", reported fishing gear entanglement as a significant problem for pelicans. Starting in 2013, Tampa Audubon volunteers lead by then Board Member Sandy Reed and other rescuers have actively captured and removed fishing hooks, line, and other gear at the Skyway Fishing Pier State Park from hundreds of ensnared pelicans and other birds, and taken hundreds to rehabilitation centers for advanced care, where approximately half died, too injured to recover. In addition, FOS has written a Position Statement on Fishing Gear and Bird Protection <https://www.fosbirds.org/style/docs/position%20statement%20on%20fishing%20practices.pdf>.



An entangled pelican that sadly perished. Photo by Bonnie Samuelsen.

The rescue efforts numbers and continued pressure from the local Audubon chapters and others have caught the attention of the Wildlife Commission, the State Park managers, and the concessionaire at the Skyway Pier. A study by Eckerd College's Dr. Elizabeth Forsy and her students identified the Skyway Pier as the site where more birds are snared by fishing gear than the other regional piers. The Commission has convened stakeholder discussions under the umbrella of the Hooked Pelican Working Group, including conservation-minded people, fishermen, agency staff, biologists, and others to collaboratively find solutions.

As President of the Florida Ornithological Society, I am one of those who is not "happy" with the rules approved by the Commissioners, but gladdened that they acted **at all** to protect pelicans and other seabirds from accidentally becoming ensnared by fishermen at the Skyway. As President, I spoke at the Commission Meeting and asked for year-round restriction of the use of multi-hooked fishing gear on the Pier.

*Story continued on next page.*



# New Bird Protection Rules at Skyway Fishing Pier State Park

## *continued*

In my view, the restriction of multi-hook gear is a good step – multi-hook lures and other gear cause significant damage to the bird, hooking it in several places, sometimes attaching beaks or wings to the bodies, making flight impossible. These hooks also make disentangling a birds a challenge, discouraging release of the birds by the fisherman who caught it, and making it more likely that the fisherman will “cut the line”, dooming the bird to death.

Fishermen learning how to avoid catching a bird by accident, how to release it without getting hurt or causing further injury to the bird, to never feed the birds, even with extra bait or especially the filleted bones of large fish, and to properly dispose of fishing gear and tangled or used line – all of this requires fishermen to change their customs and behaviors. But these measures are needed allow populations of pelicans and other birds to be part of our Florida future. I ask fishermen, managers of piers and fishing sites everywhere, agency staff, and leaders to help protect our pelicans and other birds and wildlife.

But the multi-hook restriction covering only the winter months won't protect the young pelicans and terns, newly fledged, independent, and hungry, from entanglement, from August when they first leave their nests and the protection of their parents, through their first year of life. It won't protect nesting adults with new eggs laid in February and March, their pelican chicks hatching in April and May, through their growth to become flying independent young-of-the-year in mid-summer. Since it takes both members of the pair to raise their young – if one of the pair is snared by line and killed or injured, ending up in a rehabilitation facility, the chicks will die, starved to death, dooming the whole family. The multi-hook restriction needs to be year-round.

Educating the fishermen has been a high priority, with signs, brochures, and even videos produced by both the Wildlife Commission and the Audubon chapters and other groups. But the Skyway Pier has 200,000 customers a year - teaching all of them how to avoid accidentally catching a bird and how to safely release it is difficult.

The extra education measures that the Wildlife Commission has recommended should help.

And restricting the use of many rods to only two at a time is very good. It will focus the fishermen's attention on the two rods, instead of fishing with as many as ten or twelve rods as has been the case sometimes on the Pier. The education program and rod restriction will start immediately and are not seasonal conditions.

I expect the Hooked Pelican Working Group will meet again and continue to find additional management solutions that can be instituted by the Skyway Pier concessioner and the State Park staff.

I also would point out that although the Skyway has been identified as the pier with the most pelican entanglements, pelicans and other birds and wildlife are also being caught in numbers at the other piers, by fishermen on boats, fishing from shorelines, and essentially everywhere fishermen fish and birds live, all across Florida. Therefore, educating fishermen about best measures to avoid accidental ensnaring birds and how to safely release them when caught should be statewide.

Fishermen should never feed pelicans, as that teaches them to come to people fishing for food – enticing them where fishing is happening and entanglement is a hazard. Feeding wild animals is never a good idea, as we know regarding alligators, bears, and other wildlife. For seabirds, it is especially dangerous to be fed the filleted bones and carcasses of big fish. Pelicans and other seabirds as gulls and terns are designed by thousands of years to swallow small fish whole. Their stomachs dissolve the small fish, allowing safe digestion of the small bones. In contrast, when pelicans swallow the bones of large, filleted fish carcasses, as is often the case where fishermen are cleaning their catch at the end of the day, these bones can pierce pouches, gullets, stomachs, and intestines, causing painful peritonitis and eventual death.

# Florida Field Naturalist

## The FFN Migrates to USF Libraries

The University of South Florida Libraries' is proud to be extending our relationship with the Florida Ornithological Society as the new online host of *Florida Field Naturalist*. Soon all past and current articles from the *Florida Field Naturalist* will be fully searchable from the libraries' Digital Commons platform, home to the FOS Archives and the upcoming Breeding Bird Atlas II. You can view the journal online now [<https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/ffn>], with the full historic run available by September 2023.

In addition to easy navigation, Digital Commons will also provide advanced analytics, allowing authors and readers the chance to see how many times an article has been downloaded. USF Libraries' dedication to preservation standards also keep the journal contents safe with several layers of safeguards to prevent data loss. Advanced optical-character recognition and search-engine optimization features will help audiences far and wide discover *FFN*.

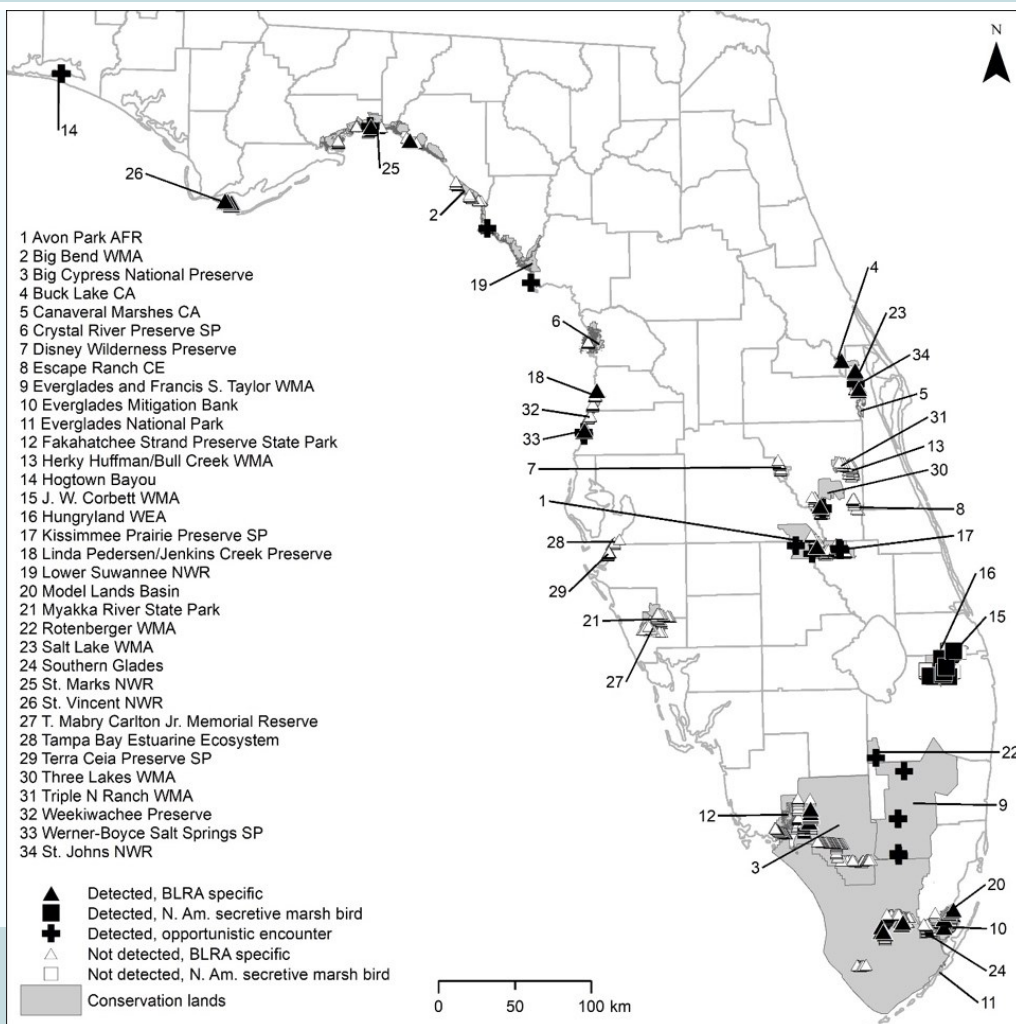
The FOS Archives and the *Florida Field Naturalist* are exciting new additions to the growing Florida Environment and Natural History collections at USF. FLENH is home to more than 30 archival and 10 digital collections that connect over 100 years of environmental and ecological research across the state of Florida and beyond. If you are interested in learning more about FLENH, please visit the FLENH Portal [<https://flenh-usflibrary.hub.arcgis.com/>].

### Featured FFN Article—Current Distribution of Black Rails in FL

By Amy C. Schwarzer, Gina Kent, Bryan D. Watts, Ken Meyer, Amanda Powell, Brittany Bankovich, and W. Andrew Cox

Schwarzer et al. conducted 2,045 Black Rail surveys at 725 points in 2016, 2017, and 2020 throughout Florida. They detected Black Rails at just 39 points on 15 of the 28 (54%) surveyed public properties during all three survey years. They report six additional properties are currently occupied by Black Rails as indicated by opportunistic sighting records over the past ten years, resulting in 21 total occupied properties in 19 Florida counties.

Map of Black Rail survey locations and detections.



# FOS Current Officers and Directors

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 Archives—Andy Huse (chair)  
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