

THE SNAIL KITE

NEWSLETTER OF THE
FLORIDA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

www.fosbirds.org



Join us October 4-9 for our joint meeting with the Raptor Research Foundation in Fort Lauderdale!

We hope sincerely that all members of the FOS will come to the meeting and celebrate our 50th Anniversary with us. Bring your friend birders! We are offering student supplements for up to \$300 to cover travel. *See page 2 for more meeting details.*

Florida BBA II Updates

The Florida Breeding Bird Atlas II is coming along and is set to be published online by the fall meeting. Data analysts and authors have been working hard on species accounts this spring. This has been a colossal effort, and we dutifully thank all of those who have been involved. *See page 13 for a preview account of the Little Blue Heron.*

Apply for the Helen G. and Allan D. Cruikshank Education Award

This award is given to projects that expand and enhance knowledge of Florida's native birds during primary and secondary education. This award is generally given to a Florida primary or secondary teacher to create or enhance teaching of classes on the scientific study of birds or to provide support for continuing education for teachers. Applications must be received by **September 1st** of each year. *Please check out our website for details on how to apply.*



Page	Content
2	President's Message by Ann Paul
3	Fall 2022 Meeting Information
4	Documenting the FOS History with USF Libraries By Andy Huse
5	Editorial Re-print: The FFN Editor Experience by Peter Merritt
6	Local Elections and Land Acquisition by Ann Paul
7	Florida Young Birders Club by Jim McGinity
8	Brown-headed Nuthatches at Jonathan Dickinson State Park by Jim Cox
9	Unraveling the Mysteries of the Bachman's Sparrow— A Summary of Current Research from the Anderson Lab at FAU by lab members
11	Featured Native Plant for Birds: Elderberry by Donna Legare
12	Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail by Bert Alm
12	Breeding Bird Atlas II is Reaching the Finish Line
13	Breeding Bird Atlas II Example Account: Little Blue Heron

President's Message by Ann Paul

Vice President Mary Mack Gray and I are very excited about the upcoming Fall Florida Ornithological Society Meeting in Ft. Lauderdale. Let me tell you why!

- Our co-host for this meeting is the Raptor Research Foundation, an international scientific society whose primary goal is the accumulation and dissemination of scientific information about raptors. FOS Past President Jim Cox and Vice President Mary Mack Gray have been planning this joint meeting for the last three years, and it starts on Tuesday October 4!
- It is our FOS 50th Anniversary Celebration! FOS began in 1972, when members held its inaugural meeting in Lakeland on October 14th. Members had been working under the auspices of the Florida Audubon Society, but it became clear that a separate organization was needed, focused on the advancement of ornithology in Florida and nearby regions. This society which would support research and education about birds and bring together amateur birdwatchers, bird enthusiasts, and professional bird biologists together to study wild birds in the state. Now, 50 years later, we will celebrate at the Fall Meeting on Saturday, October 8th, with a Membership Meeting, Scientific Session and Banquet.
- University of South Florida librarian-historian and FOS archivist Andy Huse will give a talk based on the archives about the history of FOS! And Andy is bringing video equipment to record FOS members' reminiscences about their involvement, memories, and other comments to add to the archives.
- Florida State Museum of Natural History's Andy Kratter will be challenging us with a typically exciting Skin Quiz. He is thinking of focusing on south Florida species, so STUDY UP, folks!



- The Board of FOS voted to provide Student Supplements for young folks to attend this meeting. Students should register and attend the Meeting to receive the financial supplement. Checks for the \$300 supplements will be given at the Banquet celebration!
- Scientists' lectures for the Scientific Session are included in the Fall meeting details on the following page.
- Students will be presenting short descriptions of their bird studies, too.
- Jim Cox and Ann Hodgson will bring us up-to-date on the publication of the second Florida Breeding Bird Atlas.
- Jim and Kirsten Kushlan are our Keynote speakers, to cap our celebration, speaking about "75 years of conserving the Everglades".
- Field trips to south Florida bird sites. Stand-by for more news on these!
- We will be selling 50th Anniversary FOS ball caps and bucket hats for \$15.00



I hope you will register for the Meeting RIGHT AWAY and hurry to make your plans to join us in Ft. Lauderdale!

See you there!

Ann



Fall 2022 Meeting Details

General Information

We have been planning the 50th Anniversary Celebration of the FOS and a joint meeting with the Raptor Research Foundation (RRF) for quite some time now! The plans are coming together in a very exciting way! We hope sincerely that all members of the FOS will come to the meeting and celebrate our 50th Anniversary with us. Also, bring your friend birders!

The meeting will be held as the finale of the joint meeting with the RRF, which is scheduled for **October 4-9, Tuesday through Sunday, in Ft. Lauderdale at the Embassy Suites, 1100 SE 17th Street, (954) 527-2700**. Please contact the hotel to make your reservations. When making reservations, members should mention that they are attending the joint RRF/FOS meeting, so that they can get the conference discount. The hotel is reserving rooms in a block until Sept 14; after then they will open the rooms up to anyone making reservations and our attendees may find the hotel is full.

For the RRF portion of the meeting which they are handling, events, lectures, plenaries, and so forth scheduled from Tuesday-Friday, please register [here](#). This includes several events, plenaries, and all the seminars. The banquet on Friday night is \$40 in addition. There is a special FOS registration fee which gives us the RRF/FOS members' rate - before September 8, the registration is \$230, later the registration fee is \$285. If you are only interested in the FOS portion of the meeting, register [here](#).

Note to students and professors: FOS is offering a Student Supplement of \$300 for students to attend the RRF/FOS meeting. This is a special FOS Board effort to encourage students to learn about FOS. Payments may be collected at the Saturday evening banquet. Students must register to receive a Student Supplement. In addition, there will be Student Presentation Award for the best presentations given on the Saturday afternoon session. Please submit abstracts for student presentations to Mary Mack Gray, graymarymack@gmail.com.

SCHEDULE

Friday, October 7

FOS activities begin. These will also be at the Embassy Suites, Ft. Lauderdale location. The FOS portion of the joint meeting registration is [here](#). Note: the meeting's Early Bird Registration ends on September 30; after that there is a \$10 late fee.

We are planning field trips on Friday at 7:30 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. with car pools that leave from Embassy Suites hotel or you can meet at the field trip site. These field trips are still in the planning development stage, and we will share this information as soon as we have it.

As usually happens, our FOS Board of Directors' Meeting is scheduled for 2 p.m. Friday, at the Embassy Suites. Members can register and pick up their registration materials from 2:00-5:30 p.m. at the hotel.

The Friday Banquet with RRF is at 6 p.m. at Embassy Suites. You can either reserve your Friday evening banquet dinner on the Raptor Research registration site or with your FOS registration; again, the cost of the banquet is \$40.

Saturday, October 8

There will several field trip choices – see the announcements for those soon. The field trips car pools will leave from Embassy Suites or plan to meet at the field trip site. Lunch at Embassy Suites will be a make-your-own-fajitas meal with salad, tortillas, rice and beans, and flan for dessert at 11:30-1:00.

At 1:00 p.m. we start our Membership Meeting. There will a short FOS Business Meeting followed by Student Scientific Presentations. After a break about 3:00 p.m. we will hear a series of Scientific Presentations by Florida biologists including:

- ◇ Ricardo Zambrano, FWC, Roseate Terns in Florida
- ◇ Steven Whitfield, ZooMiami, Flamingos in Florida
- ◇ Jeff Bouton, Hawk Watch, The Hawk and Peregrine Migration across the Florida Keys
- ◇ Stephen A. Nesbitt, Whooping Cranes – the Florida Non-Migratory Flock
- ◇ Janell Brush, FWC, 45 Years of Eagle Surveys in Florida
- ◇ Other talks to be announced.

Andy Kratter from the Florida Museum of Natural History will challenge us with a Bird Skin Quiz. He is thinking of concentrating on the birds of south Florida, so everyone should “study up” in anticipation!

Meeting details continued on next page.



Fall 2022 Meeting Details Cont.

At 5:30 p.m., there will be a Flocking Reception with hors d'oeuvres and a cash bar, followed by a banquet dinner. During the dinner, Jim Cox and Ann Hodgson will give a report on the Status of the Florida Breeding Bird Atlas II and we will hear a presentation by Andy Huse, University of South Florida Library staff and our archives manager, about the 50-Years History of the Florida Ornithological Society. After dessert, our Keynote Lecturers are Jim and Kirsten Kushlan, talking about the *75 years of the Everglades National Park*. The evening will end with Announcements, Field Trip Reports, and disclosure of the winners of the Bird Skin Quiz.

A special treat is the opportunity offered by Andy Huse for FOS members to record their memories of participation in FOS as a part of the FOS' archival history project. Andy will bring along video recording equipment of this purpose. Members are encouraged to share photos and written memories of FOS in advance of the meeting as well. See more details about this on page 3. Please send these to Heather Levy, heather.levy789@gmail.com, for inclusion in the next edition of the *Snail Kite* newsletter as part of our 50th Anniversary celebration.

Sunday, October 9

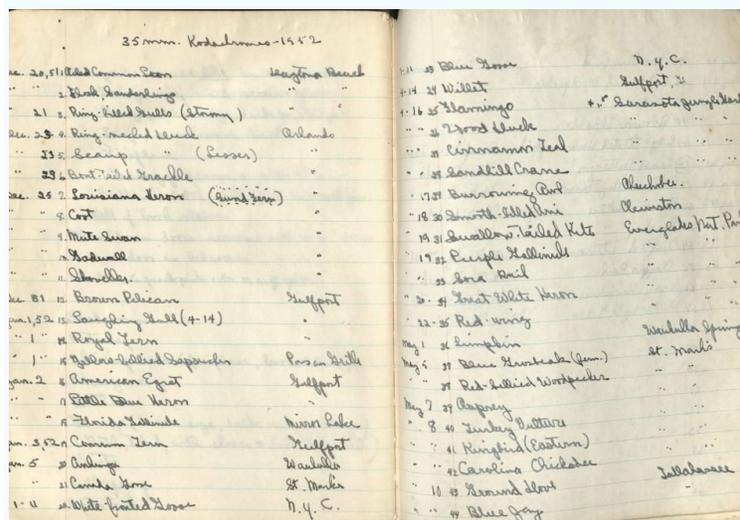
Field trips will car pool from Embassy Suites or you can meet at the field trip site. Field trip details will follow.

Documenting the Society's History with USF Libraries

By Andy Huse

There will be much to celebrate at the society's 50th annual meeting in Ft. Lauderdale. The formal partnership with the University of South Florida Libraries is less than a year old and is already bearing fruit. Here is a quick update on our activities and how you can help.

The archival records of the society are being preserved at USF's Special Collections as part of the libraries' Florida Environment and Natural History initiative. The society's entire collection will be digitized and freely available on the web by the time of the meeting in October. For those unfamiliar with the collection, it will be a great opportunity to explore.



Helen Cruickshank's field journal from 1952.

To celebrate fifty years of birding and advocacy, we are working on creating an online exhibit focusing on the FOS records. Because the records are composed largely of the papers of founders and predecessors (such as Allan and Helen Cruickshank), the exhibit will cover these people in detail. We look forward to unveiling the exhibit for you in Ft. Lauderdale.

Because there are relatively few records from recent years in the collection, we are eager to acquire more material that represents the history and activities of the society, and we need your help. Do you have photos or other unique documentation from past events? If so, here are several ways you could help. First, send us your digital or physical photos. Physical photos can be scanned and quickly returned. For ornithologists with research and/or data records, we may be interested in your materials. Please contact Andy Huse with any questions at 813-974-7622 or ahuse@usf.edu

The library is also keen to glean your memories. We will have an interview "booth" at the meeting to allow members to share their memories verbally. Have a good story about the society, its activities, and/or its members? Please consider sharing!



Editorial Re-print: The FFN Editor Experience

By Peter Merritt

This editorial was originally published in 1994 in the *Florida Field Naturalist* Vol 22 No. 4 (page 127).

It was a little more than four years ago when I spoke with Bud Owre and he recommended that I accept the editorship of the *Florida Field Naturalist*. At the time I did not realize that this would be the last time I would ever speak to him. Nor did I realize the amount of time that I would spend as editor.

This is my last issue as editor of the *Florida Field Naturalist*. I have enjoyed serving as editor for the past four years. One of the benefits of being editor has been frequent interaction with many FOS members and some of the state's leading naturalists and scientists. I am grateful to the FOS for giving me this opportunity.

The most rewarding part of being editor has been in assisting others to bring to press a number of manuscripts that required a great deal of work. I have always thought of writing

to be like working with modeling clay; some manuscripts required shaping or sculpting more than others. I hope that my efforts will make future publications easier for some authors.

The editorial duties that I enjoyed the least were related to rejecting manuscripts. In working as an assistant editor with a former mentor, Richard Brewer, I learned a long time ago that an editor can make two types of errors in considering a manuscript. One can accept an undesirable manuscript or reject a desirable manuscript. Of these possibilities, it is better to err on the side of rejecting a desirable manuscript. A dedicated and persistent author eventually will be able to publish a worthy manuscript. Indeed, I have noted that modified version of papers rejected by the *Florida Field Naturalist* have appeared in other journals. Similarly; the *Florida Field Naturalist* has published several manuscripts that were originally rejected by other journals. The rigors of the review process helped to bring out the best in all of these papers.

I thank Associate Editor Reed Bowman, Howard P. Langridge, and Richard T. Paul for their assistance during my time as editor. I am indebted to Victoria L. Merritt for help in proofreading every issue of the *Florida Field Naturalist* during the past four years. The journal has benefited from her critical eye and attention to detail. Finally, I thank the individuals listed below for serving as referees during the past year [please see the original article for the list of names]. Their efforts have contributed to improving the quality of the journal. An asterisk indicates the individual reviewed more than one manuscript. *

Biography: Peter Merritt received a Ph.D. in Biology from the University of Miami in 1985 with the dissertation "Song Function and the Evolution of Song Repertoires in the Northern Mockingbird." He served as Editor of the *Florida Field Naturalist* from 1990-1994, President of the FOS from 2001-2002, and Treasurer of the FOS from 2007-2011.



The Three Editors: R. Todd Engstrom, Peter G. Merritt, and Walter K. Taylor. Current and former editors of the *Florida Field Naturalist* on a field trip on Elliot Key, Florida, 25 April 1998. Photo credit: Karin S. Taylor.

This photo was originally published in 1999 in the *Florida Field Naturalist* Vol. 27, No. 4 (page 194).

Florida Ornithological Society Executive Committee Members

Officers:

- President: Ann Paul
- Vice President: Mary Mack Gray
- Secretary: Judith Milcarsky
- Treasurer: Valerie Sparling

Board of Directors:

- Christopher Ferro
- Beth Forys
- Heather Levy
- Rindy Anderson
- Jon Hoch
- David Goodwin
- Jim Cox (past president)

Editors:

- Florida Field Naturalist*: Scott Robinson
- Florida Field Naturalist*: Allison Cox
- FOS Special Publications: Ann Hodgson

Local Elections and Land Acquisition

By Ann Paul

As we collectively look to the future, in some respects, political things look very scary.

There is one thing that I seriously think will improve the future for human, avian, and other lifeforms in Florida. Several counties have placed the following question on their ballots to be decided during the November elections referenda for voters to vote on: **should their counties tax them to purchase key environmental lands?**

At least three counties that I know of have this question on the ballot – Polk, Pasco, and Seminole. And I am hoping with all my heart that the voters approve these land acquisition initiatives. Why? Well, I will tell you.

In Hillsborough County, where I live, the county’s Environmental Lands Acquisition and Protection Program has purchased over 64,000 acres of river corridor, wildlife protection areas, scrublands, open space, and coastal restoration sites, to protect and properly manage environmentally sensitive areas and provide appropriate public access and compatible recreational use, including birding.

The benefits of this land acquisition program have been surprising:

- Acquiring riverine corridors including the key water resources of the Hillsborough, Alafia, and Little Manatee rivers provide clean, plentiful water necessary to Tampa Bay and the water supply for the City of Tampa. Protecting riverine corridors and aquifer recharge lands from development ensures water supplies for the future.
- Forests, stream banks, upland habitats, and prairies store water upstream and prevent flooding downstream from heavy rains inland. Purchase of lands as open space and vegetated landscapes ensures they are not paved or developed, saving Hillsborough County taxpayers, both homeowners and businesses, from flooding and from the expense of installing artificial stormwater facilities.
- Trees and other landscape vegetation sequester carbon and remove air pollutants, protecting the clean air so important for the health of citizens, including children and the elderly.

- Hillsborough County hired University of Florida economists to assess preserves acquired by the Environmental Protection Program. The study showed \$99 million dollars in valuable economic services provided every year – one third the total cost of the lands. Every three years, citizens “recoup” the total cost of the environmental lands acquired in demonstrable economic benefits.
- Real estate values for homes adjacent to conservation preserves are demonstrably higher, providing taxes for needed county projects. People select and prefer homes adjacent to preserves.
- Preserves increase regional ecotourism, attracting visitors and providing jobs and income to local restaurants, hotels, and businesses.
- Providing preserve lands for recreating, walking, and nature observation adds significantly to the quality-of-life of residents and their guests, as we learn from health professionals. Experiences in nature reduce stress, increase happiness, and improve the emotional health for our citizens, providing distinct physical health benefits.

These are important benefits. Let’s add the habitats for birds, wildlife, and our native plants, and the landscapes and ecosystems, that make our Florida heritage so unique and irreplaceable.

If you are a resident of a county with land acquisition measures on your ballot, please vote in favor. And if your friends or relatives live in one of those counties, please ask them to support protection of our open spaces and wildlife habitats.

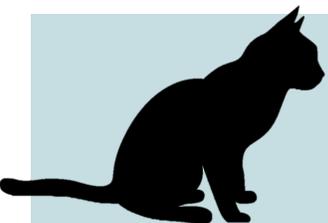
Because -- It’s now or never for our rapidly developing Florida landscape.

Thanks for all you do for Florida’s birds, wildlife, and special ecosystems and habitats.



FOS Conservation Committee Highlight: Outdoor Cats Position Statement

The Florida Ornithological Society (FOS) is deeply concerned about the threat that free-roaming domestic cats pose to Florida’s native birds, mammals, and other imperiled wildlife. Check out the FOS’ position on outdoor cats [here](#).



Florida Young Birders Club Taking Flight

By Jim McGinity

This year three Audubon chapters (Tampa, Orange County and St. Johns County) decided to join forces to organize and grow this new club for kids. Each chapter had begun doing bird walks for kids in their area but the organizers decided to join forces to create a new state-wide effort to reach young birders where ever they live. Following the model set forth by the Black Swamp Bird Observatory in Ohio and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the group has formed a teen advisory panel including members from each club. The panel has met monthly with the 3 adult mentors to discuss topics including creating a logo (in process), monthly expert speaker series and joint field trips.

The club is for kids ages 9 – 17 years of age with an interest in birds. The goal is to expand the number of chapters around the state and to build membership to support an annual, one day conference. Organizers Jim McGinity, Tampa Audubon Society, Kathy Rigling, Orange Audubon and Kate Milutin, St. Johns County Audubon, each are coordinating monthly outings for young birders in their area. Each Audubon chapter is sponsoring the local chapters assisting with all aspects of starting up a new group.

As one of the founders and mentors of the club, it has been really rewarding to see the teen birders on the advisory panel assume leadership roles in directing their club. One stepped up to take the lead on lining up monthly bird researchers/expert birders to present and a few others are leading the development of the logo design. It will be exciting to see the club expand around the state and how these young birders enhance their skills and knowledge of Florida birds and avian conservation.

If you know of a young birder who would be interested in joining the club and learning about birds/bird conservation with their peers, please direct them to the FOS website. Depending on where they live in the state, they will be connected with the chapter closest to them. If you are interested in getting involved with the club as a mentor or would like to support this effort (financially or otherwise), please contact Jim McGinity at: jmcginity53@gmail.com

Biography: Jim McGinity is a teacher/environmental educator at an environmental charter school in Lutz, Florida. He is also a federal and state permitted Master bird bander and runs a migratory bird banding station in the Tampa area and is a life-long bird watcher.



Kids that participated in a banding demonstration helped release this Painted Bunting. Photo by Jim McGinity. 2022.



All smiles during a Florida Young Birders outing! Photo by Jim McGinity. 2022.

Bander and educator Jim McGinity shows kids the proper way to safely measure birds. Unknown photographer. 2022.



Brown-headed Nuthatches at Jonathan Dickinson State Park

By Jim Cox

eBird records for the Brown-headed Nuthatch are starting to accumulate on Jonathan Dickinson State Park. Jonathan Dickinson has been a black hole for nuthatches ever since the bird was extirpated over 70 years ago, but staff at Tall Timbers Research Station and Jonathan Dickinson initiated a reintroduction effort in 2018 and have established a small but growing population.



A photo of flatwoods habitat at Jonathan Dickinson State Park. Photo taken by Heather Levy. April 7, 2021.

Avian restoration projects come in different forms, but many are costly, labor intensive, and often have high failure rates. One goal of the project was to test out a fairly simple procedure for restoring extirpated populations of a small, non-migratory passerine. Juvenile nuthatches are targeted for capture at a point in life where they have attained independence from adults and are beginning to explore areas outside their natal territories. Field procedures consist simply of catching young birds on St. Sebastian from late September through mid-December and hauling them down and releasing them on Jonathan Dickinson a few hours later. Use of distinctive male and female calls to lure individuals into nets helps to catch a balanced mix of males and females.

A second goal is establish a copy of a distinctive genetic signature found among the nuthatches at St. Sebastian. In work performed with Kin-lan Han and Rebecca Kimball at the University of Florida, we've found 3 distinct genetic clusters among nuthatch populations in Florida. The clusters consist of a northern group, a southern group, and a unique population at St. Sebastian. The significance of the unique St. Sebastian cluster is difficult to peg, but, if a copy of those distinctive genes can be established elsewhere in

southeast Florida using inexpensive tools, it may prove valuable.

Additional positives include the return of a small cavity-nesting species that excavates new nest cavities almost every. Former nuthatch nests provide nest cavities Great Crested Flycatcher, Eastern Bluebird, and other species.

There's also lots of neat biology wrapped up the nuthatch's 10 g frame. Nuthatches breed in cooperative groups, regularly use tools, and engage in vocal duets, seed caching, communal roosting, and other social interactions. If a nuthatch nest is taken by a predator, adults tending the nest regularly redirect their caregiving efforts to a neighboring nest rather than trying to re-nest. Watching the emergence of these and other complex behaviors in a new population may help understand how and why such behaviors occur.

eBird will help to track the growth of the population, but for birders that visit the park regularly, Tall Timbers has developed a phone app that can be used to log more specific information (such as the color bands that have been placed translocated birds). Drop a note to jcox@talltimbers.org to receive more information.

Biography: Jim Cox heads up the Stoddard Bird Lab at Tall Timbers Research Station. The focus of the award-winning lab ranges from assessing how fire management affects habitat for several birds that inhabit coastal marshes and upland pine forests to performing hands-on activities that benefit Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Black Rail, Brown-headed Nuthatch, and Frosted Elfin (an imperiled butterfly). Cox received his MSc from Florida State University where he studied genetic variation among North American blackbirds.



NUTHATCH REINTRODUCTION TO JDSP

Tracking Brown-headed Nuthatches Released to JDSP

≈ 810 ENTRIES

LAST ON:
29 SEP 2021

VIEW DATA

Supplemental Links

- Link to more information on how to use the mobile app can be found [here](#)
- Link to the epi-collect data can be found [here](#)

Unraveling the Mysteries of the Bachman's Sparrow— A Summary of Current Research from the Anderson Lab at FAU

By Rindy Anderson, Hans Gonzembach, Heather Wolverton, and Billy Abbott

If you take a morning hike in the springtime down the winding dirt paths at Jonathan Dickinson State Park in Hobe Sound, you're likely to hear little brown sparrows singing their hearts out. Bachman's sparrows reside in the pine flatwood habitat preserved within the park year-round, but like many songbirds in temperate regions, they only sing during the breeding season. Many South Florida birders wander the trails of Jonathan Dickinson to add the Bachman's sparrow to their lists, as this is the farthest south these birds will venture. However, graduate students from Florida Atlantic University seek out these sparrows for reasons beyond just another checkmark in their Sibley books.

Dr. Rindy Anderson and students working in her Behavioral Ecology and Bioacoustics laboratory at Florida Atlantic University have been studying these sparrows since 2016. Their research has shed light on these enigmatic little sparrows, but many questions remain. Unlike most other New World sparrows, the Bachman's sparrows at Jonathan Dickinson have an impressively large repertoire averaging 48 distinct song types per male. In addition, they have three types of song; primary, whisper, and a wren-like 'complex song'.

The social function of the Bachman's sparrow's communication system drives much of the research from Dr. Anderson's lab. Ph.D. student Hans Gonzembach is interested in deciphering the function of complex song. Hans hypothesizes that complex song is a vocal threat aimed at rival males. Hans has tested the responses of territory-holding males to primary, whisper, and complex songs by simulating an intrusion

onto a male's territory using a model of a Bachman's sparrow paired with an audio speaker playing another male's songs. During the 'intrusion' Hans measures aggressive responses and singing behaviors. More aggressive behavior toward an intruder singing complex song, as opposed to primary song, would support Hans's idea that male Bachman's sparrows perceive complex song as a stronger threat than other modes of singing.

Ph.D. candidate Heather Wolverton is also studying the feistiness of these little songbirds, but she is asking if males treat neighbors more like friends than enemies. For a given male, his neighbors that each have an established territory pose less of a threat than do strangers, who are likely 'floaters' seeking to take over a territory. Heather's research should determine if male Bachman's sparrows can discriminate neighbors from strangers using song alone, and react accordingly.

Finally, Master's student Billy Abbott is studying Bachman's sparrows to monitor their ability to handle heat stress. As Floridians know, a Florida summer is no joke, and heat waves are predicted to be more frequent and intense. Some birds are more adept at thermoregulation than others due to larger bill or leg size. Billy is asking if morphological differences correlate with how vigorously a male can defend his territory from a potential rival, a behavior critical to breeding success. Billy's research could provide valuable information about the ability of songbirds to adapt to rising temperatures, which could impact conservation efforts for Bachman's sparrows and other species.

Story continued on page 10



A Bachman's Sparrow in the hand. Photo by Billy Abbott, 2022.

Unraveling the Mysteries of the Bachman's Sparrow cont.

If you're interested in learning more about these little sparrows with a big voice, check out the lab's newest paper, "Ba-Ba-Bachmans: A Note on Song Production in Juvenile Bachman's Sparrows (*Peucaea aestivalis*)" which will be published in the upcoming edition of the *Florida Field Naturalist*.



Researchers Billy and Hans conduct a simulated territory intrusion. Photo by Heather Wolverton. 2022.

Biographies:

Dr. Rindy Anderson is an Associate Professor of Biological Sciences at Florida Atlantic University. She uses field and laboratory experiments to study the behavior of songbirds, in particular intra-species competition, mating behavior, and vocal communication. Current projects include studying social behavior and communication in Bachman's sparrows at Jonathan Dickinson State Park, and in Northern Cardinals in Broward County Parks.

Hans Gonzembach completed his Bachelor's from the University of Massachusetts with an undergraduate thesis in evolutionary biology. Hans is a jack of all trades, from working as a wildlife keeper at AZA-accredited institutions, to working as a research technician for a developmental and regenerative biology laboratory. He is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Integrative Biology at Florida Atlantic University. He enjoys bird watching, recording bird vocalizations, surfing, and hiking.

Heather Wolverton was born and raised in South Florida and has always been an avid nature-lover. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in integrative biology from Florida Atlantic University and hopes to become a professor of animal behavior.

After graduating with a B.S. from UW-Platteville, Billy Abbott spent the next several years working on bird research and conservation projects mainly in Northern California. He loves nature and being out in the field learning about birds.



Researcher Heather Wolverton safely handling a Bachman's Sparrow. Photographer unknown. 2022.

Call for Submissions for the *Florida Field Naturalist*

The *Florida Field Naturalist*, quarterly publication of the Florida Ornithological Society, welcomes submission of articles and notes containing the results of biological field studies, distributional records, and natural history observations of vertebrates, especially birds. Manuscripts of original articles and notes should follow the Guidelines for Manuscript Preparation and sent to the Editor. Suitable manuscripts are sent by the editor to referees for evaluation of scientific merit. Check out our [website](#) for more details.

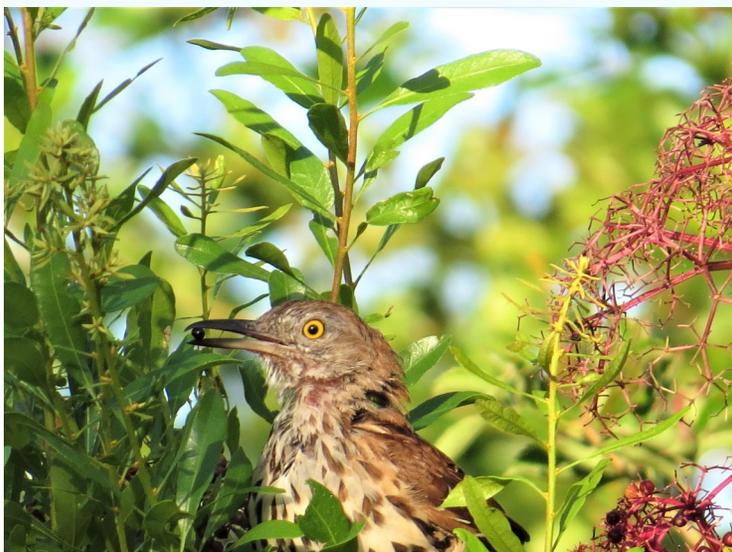


Featured Native Plant for Birds: Elderberry

By Donna Legare

I was working at Native Nurseries in Tallahassee on the last Saturday in July when my eye detected movement in an elderberry bush in a nearby hedgerow. An immature cardinal sat at eye-level picking off one deep purple elderberry after another. I noticed that almost all the fruit in the berry clusters had been consumed.

Elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*), is often overlooked as a landscaping plant, for two reasons. One it is deciduous; most people are prejudiced against deciduous landscape plants. Most native shrubs are not evergreen. Learn to appreciate the structural forms of deciduous plants in winter and the changes that occur with each season. The second reason is that elderberry is colonial; others will pop up from elongate subterranean runners. This can be a good thing if you have room for lots of elderberry but not so good if you want a specimen of one. Unwanted sprouts can be pruned or mowed back.



This Brown Thrasher appears to be sitting in a wax myrtle but has plucked an elderberry from a nearby cluster of elderberries. Photo by Don Morrow. Date unknown.

Elderberry, found throughout Florida, is a large shrub standing up to twelve feet with graceful compound leaves and small white blossoms arranged in large flat-topped inflorescences in springtime. It is a good pollinator plant, visited by bees and other insects. Juicy, purplish black berrylike drupes are very showy in mid-summer in North Florida. If you can beat the birds, the ripe fruit can be collected and made into elderberry jelly or wine.

Plant elderberry in moist to average garden soil in light shade to sun. It will grow in heavy shade but will not flower or produce much fruit there.

Elderberry's living stems are soft with white pith that quickly shrivels up in dead stems, becoming hollow. These hollow stems are excellent nesting sites for small cavity-nesting native bees. Therefore, it is best not to prune off dead growth. If you must tidy up your elderberry, use the stems in a brush pile or tuck them in below the elderberry.

I remember reading about birds and elderberry in a New York conservation brochure in the early 1970s – a figure stands out in my mind. Fifty-one species of birds had been observed feeding on elderberry fruit. This was higher than any fruiting plant in the brochure. Local birder Don Morrow has recently recorded Northern Mockingbird, House Finch, Brown Thrasher and Red-bellied Woodpecker dining on elderberries.

As humans, our eyes are drawn towards color, so we are highly likely to notice berries in the landscape as well as colorful birds eating this fruit. But long after the fruit is gone, native plants like elderberry support birds during reproduction when most bird species depend on insect protein and fat for nesting. We may not notice caterpillars and other insects that feed on tender elderberry leaves in springtime. They are most likely there and, in turn, become high quality protein for nesting birds.

Elderberries are easy to grow, graceful and colorful in appearance, and beneficial for birds, pollinators and other wildlife. Why not plant one along a border in your yard this year?

Biography: Donna Legare is retired co-founder of Native Nurseries in Tallahassee. She is co-author of *Planting a Refuge for Wildlife*, a publication by FWC.



Elderberries are quite showy in the landscape, but are quickly eaten by birds. Photo by Donna Legare. Date unknown.

Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail

By Bert Alm

In 2018 I thought I would challenge myself to visit the 530-plus Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail (GFBWT) sites. In the first year I visited 116 sites, mostly in Brevard County where I live and the GFBWT East Section. There are four sections – East, West, South and Panhandle. I have visited all 38 sites in Brevard County and over 75% of the East Section sites. I have visited less than 20% of the Panhandle sites, but my son recently moved to Panama City Beach so I'm sure I'll be starting to visit that area more. I have now visited 291 sites and have quite a few to go, but what a wonderful challenge this has been.

I moved to Florida in 2014 and knew very little about Florida's environment, fauna and flora. I took the Florida Master Naturalist Program courses and Special Topics to gain a greater appreciation of what Florida has to offer. What's great about the GFBWT sites is that you get to experience practically every type of habitat and so much more. Some of the sites are commercial operations such as Gatorland and the St. Augustine Alligator Farm (visit them in April – June for their fantastic rookeries). Other sites are well off the beaten track and give you a glimpse of what old Florida was like. And the visitor centers and kiosks at many of the sites let you know how the land managers are caring for our precious resources.

I am sure it will take me a while to complete this goal and I may not get 100% since some are not easily accessible without a boat or may not even be open to the Public any longer. The wonder of this challenge is how it takes me to nearly every corner of the state and down some of the most beautiful rural roads that I would never consider visiting otherwise. I encourage everyone to check out the GFBWT sites in your area and on your travels. It's a beautiful world out there – explore it.



Biography: Bert Alm moved to Florida in 2014 with his wife Val and retired in 2016 and seriously began birding. Since then, he has been active in many environmental volunteer activities including being the past Field Trip Director and currently Treasurer for Space Coast Audubon Society.

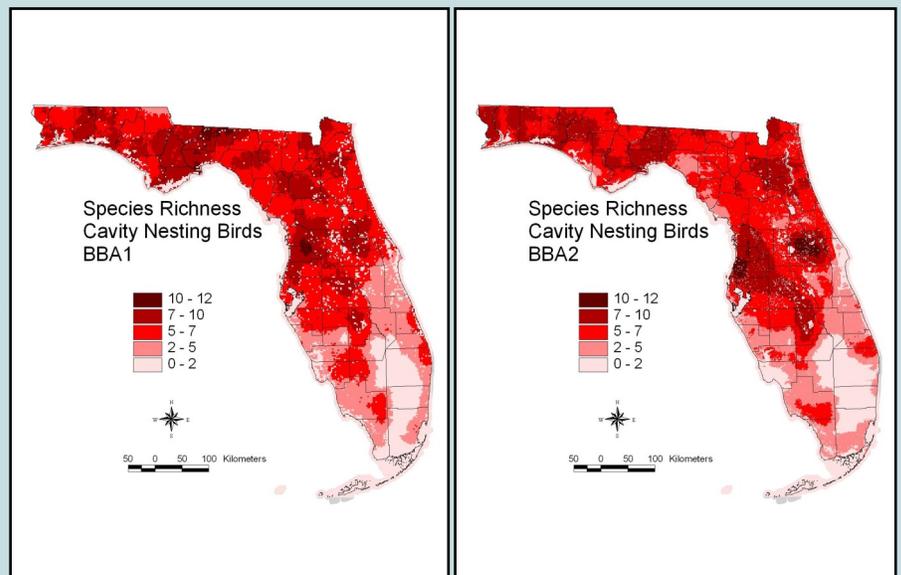
Supplemental Links

GFWT Website: <https://floridabirdingtrail.com/>

Florida Master Naturalist Program: <https://masternaturalist.ifas.ufl.edu/>

Breeding Bird Atlas II is Reaching the Finish Line

As of now, the great undertaking of the Florida BBA II is set to be completed by the fall meeting. We are very excited to announce we will be partnering with USF libraries to create a hard copy booklet for distribution! On the following pages, we have included an example account, the Little Blue Heron, as a preview. This is a draft copy and may be adjusted before the finalized version is produced. The maps on the right, produced by Jim Cox, are an example of the information that can be gleaned from the efforts. These maps compare species richness of cavity-nesting birds between BBA I and BBA II. Please note this is preliminary data and is not to be reproduced.



Breeding Bird Atlas Example Account



LITTLE BLUE HERON

Egretta caerulea

Citation: Cook, M. I. 2022. Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*). Pages xx-xxx in A. B. Hodgson, editor. Florida Breeding Bird Atlas II. Special Publication Number 9. Florida Ornithological Society, Tampa, Florida, USA.

The Little Blue Heron is a New World ardeid with a widespread distribution. Along the Atlantic coast, it breeds from Maine to northeastern Mexico, throughout the West Indies, and from Colombia to Brazil. Along the Pacific coast, it breeds in northwestern Mexico and from Colombia to southern Peru. In the autumn, breeding populations from northern North America migrate to the southern U.S., the Caribbean, and Central America (Rodgers and Smith 2020). No subspecies are currently recognized.

The Little Blue Heron favors freshwater wetlands for nesting in North America (Smith 1997), but it is an estuarine specialist in South America (Olmos and Silva e Silva 2002). In Florida, the species likely shifted nesting habitat from coastal to freshwater colonies in the 1930s (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). It nests colonially in mixed-species assemblages of wading birds but in relatively small numbers compared to other species. In Florida, the commencement of courtship occurs in late March or early April. A clutch of 3 to 5 blue-green eggs hatches in 20 to 24 days, and juveniles fledge after 28 days.

UPDATED STATUS

Compared with BBA I (Anderson 2003), BBA II recorded 32% fewer comparison blocks containing confirmed breeding records for Little Blue Herons (Table 1). In both BBA I and BBA II Little Blue Herons were distributed widely throughout the state with confirmed nesting reported in most counties from the southern Keys through to the western Panhandle (Figures 1 and 2). However, breeding records were not uniformly distributed through the state; breeding occurred in more quads in the central and southern peninsula than



in the northern peninsula and Panhandle where records were more widely dispersed. Compared with BBA I, BBA II had fewer quad-level records overall (Figure 2), and the declines occurred primarily in the Everglades.

The decline in the number of occupied quads and their geographic locations indicate a decreased distribution of breeding Little Blue Herons in Florida in BBA II compared with BBA I. Accordingly, data from the BBS show a declining population trend both at the scale of the nation and the state. For Little Blue Heron, the BBS survey-wide abundance trend from 1966 to 2019 is -1.25 (95% CI = -1.9 - -0.6; n = 686) and the Florida trend is -2.3 (95% CI = -3.4 - -1.3; n = 99) (Figure 3).

These patterns of decline might be partly a consequence of poor detectability because of survey limitations or shifts in colony locations to inaccessible coastal areas. Little Blue Herons are dark-plumaged, nest under the tree canopy, and have confusing white plumage juveniles, making nests difficult to detect and identify

Breeding Bird Atlas Example Account

These survey deficiencies limit the precision of nest count data and can confound population and distribution trends. Nonetheless, there are indications that the species has exhibited a slow but steady population decline in the state since the late 1990s, especially in South Florida. Systematic ground surveys in the Everglades, which result in relatively accurate nest counts, have detected declines comparable to the BBA and BBS. For example, annual numbers of nests in the Everglades were reduced 78% between 2007 and 2020 (Cook and Baranski 2021).

The causes of the decline are poorly understood but probably center around the loss and environmental degradation of wetland foraging habitat, especially alterations to hydrology, resulting in a reduction or shift in prey base composition. The impacts of nest predators might also be important. Black-crowned Night-Herons are predators of Egretta nestlings (Kelly et al. 1993) and have increased considerably in nesting colonies in South Florida over the past decade (Cook and Baranski 2021). Other potential threats include exposure to contaminants, increasing non-native predator populations, parasitic infection, and disturbance at foraging and breeding sites.

Figure 1: Expanded on page 3

Figure 2: Expanded on page 4

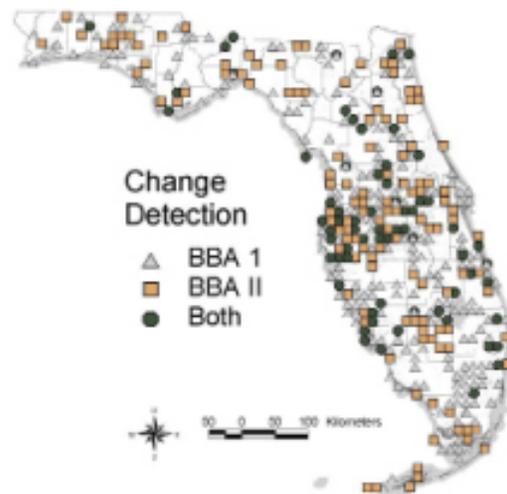
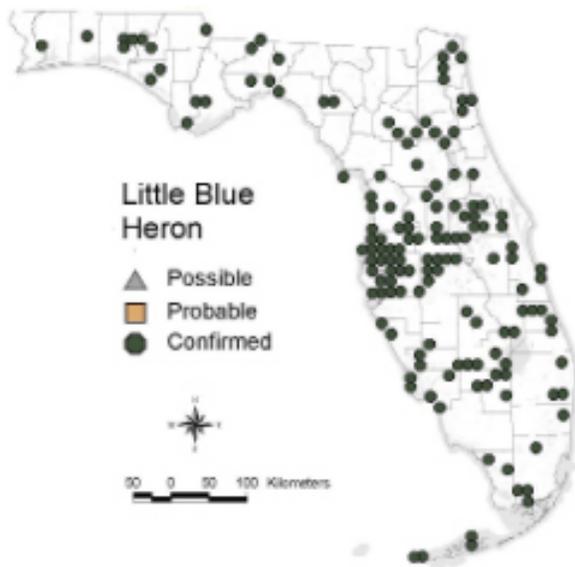


TABLE 1

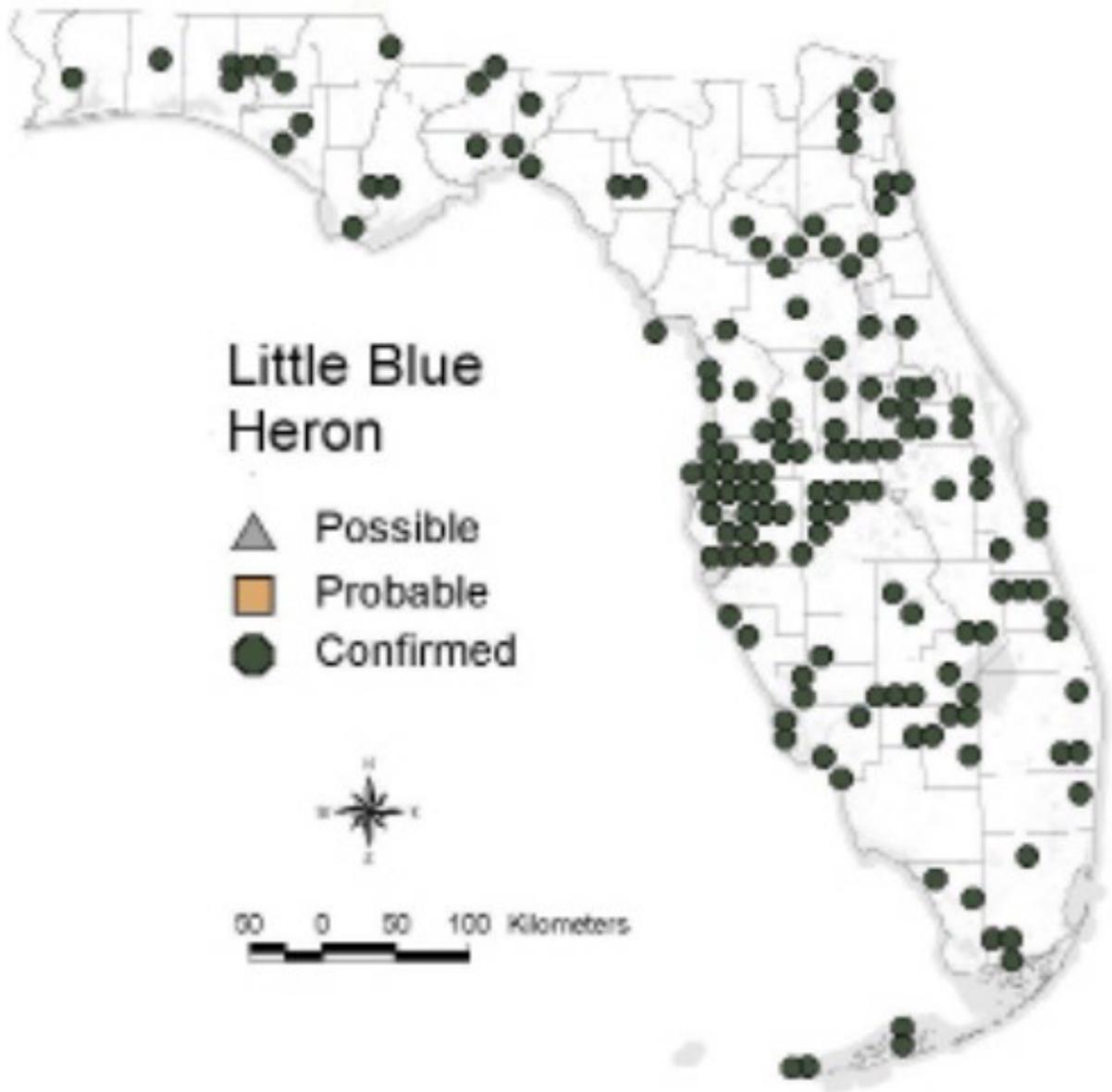
Breeding Code	BBA I	BBA II
Possible	0	0
Probable	0	0
Confirmed	91	62
Grand total	91	62

Table 1. Block 6 (the priority block) comparison of BBA I and BBA II based on the highest breeding code observed for a species exclusively within Block 6 in the southeast corner of each quad.

Breeding Bird Atlas Example Account

FIGURE 1

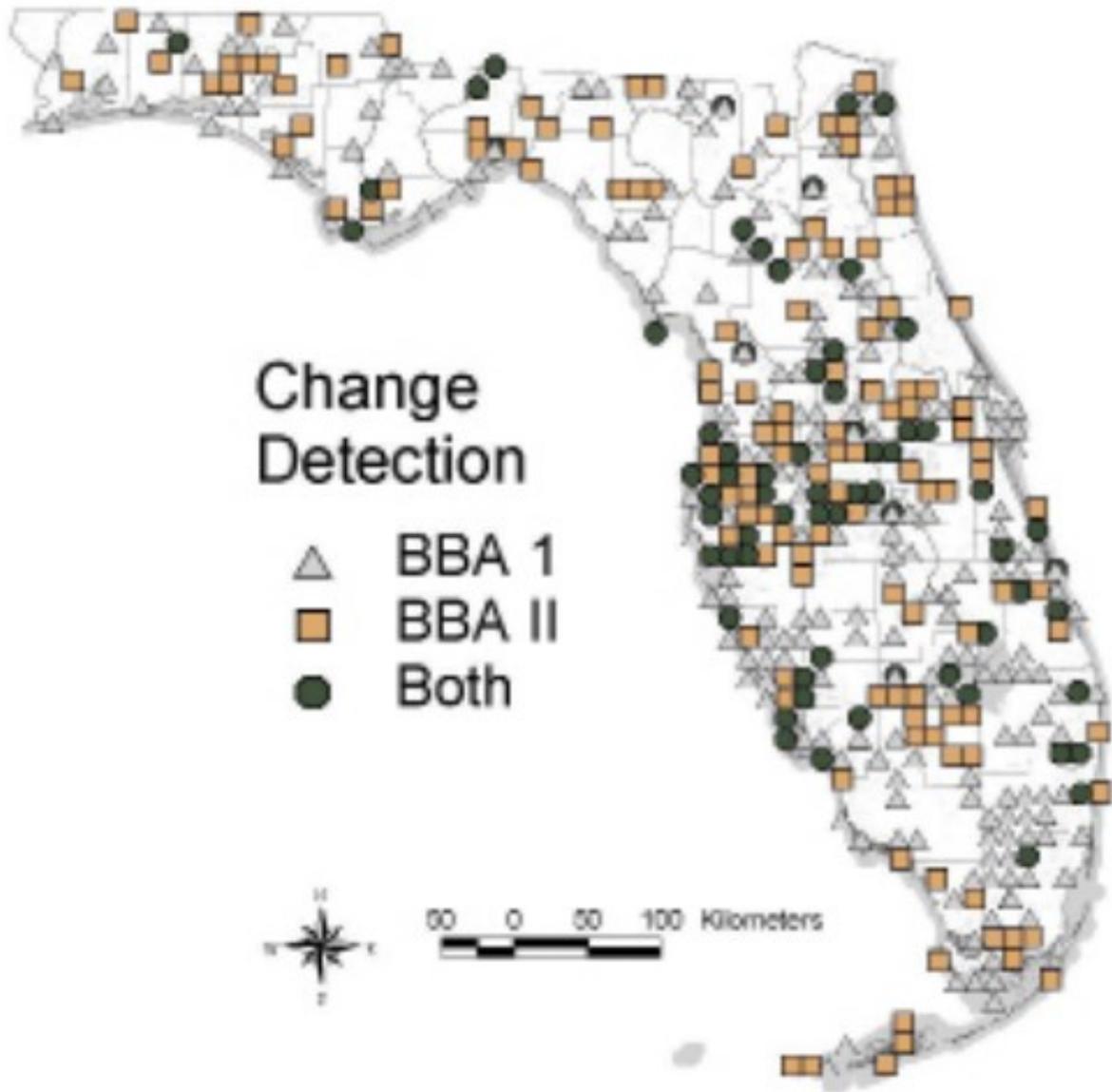
Figure 1. Little Blue Heron quad-level distribution, Florida Breeding Bird Atlas II. Figures 1 and 2 are based on data collected across all six atlas blocks within a quad. Figure 1 is based on the highest breeding code observed in each quad.



Breeding Bird Atlas Example Account

FIGURE 2

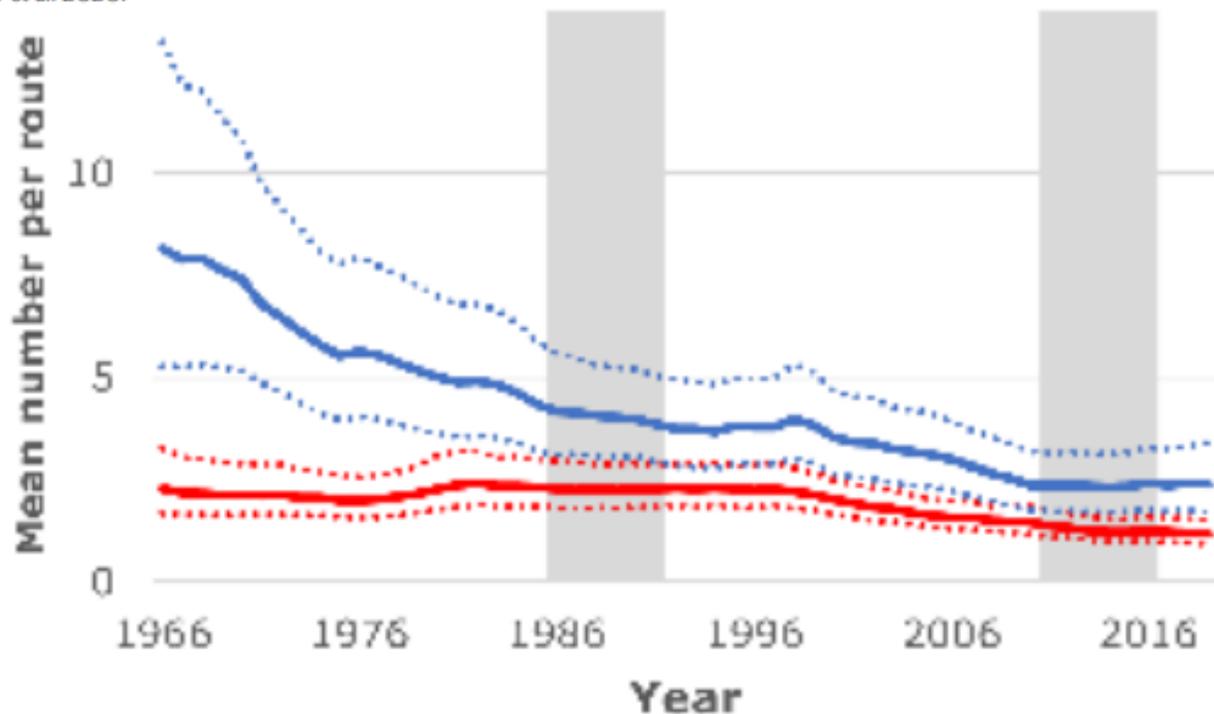
Figure 2. Little Blue Heron quad-level change detection based on the simple presence or absence of a species at any breeding code level within the quad during each atlas.



Breeding Bird Atlas Example Account

FIGURE 3

Figure 3. Mean number of Little Blue Heron per Breeding Bird Survey route, 1966-2019. Survey-wide routes are in red, Florida routes are in blue. Dotted lines are 95% confidence intervals. Vertical gray bars show years of BBA I (1986-1991) and BBA II (2011-2016). Source: Sauer et al. 2020.



LITERATURE CITED

Anderson, B. H. 2003. Little Blue Heron *Egretta caerulea*. In Florida's breeding bird atlas: A collaborative study of Florida's birdlife. Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), Tallahassee, USA. <https://myfwc.com/bba/>. Accessed 10 May 2022.

Cook, M. I., and M. Baranski, editors. 2021. South Florida Wading Bird Report, Volume 26. South Florida Water Management District, West Palm Beach, Florida, USA.

Frederick, P. C., J. A. Heath, R. Bennetts, and H. Hafner. 2006. Estimating nests not present at the time of breeding surveys: an important consideration in assessing nesting populations. *Journal of Field Ornithology* 77:212-219.

Kelly, J. P., H. M. Pratt, and P. L. Greene. 1993. The distribution, reproductive success, and habitat characteristics of heron and egret breeding colonies in the San Francisco Bay area. *Colonial Waterbirds* 16:18-27.

Olmos, F., and R. Silva e Silva. 2002. Breeding biology of Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*) in southeastern Brazil. *Ornitologia Neotropical* 13:17-30.

Rodgers, J. A., Jr., and H. T. Smith. 2020. Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*), version 1.0. In A. F. Poole, editor. *Birds of the World*. Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, New York, USA. <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.libher.01>. Accessed 10 May 2022.

Sauer, J. R., W. A. Link, and J. E. Hines. 2020. The North American Breeding Bird Survey, analysis results 1966 - 2019: U.S. Geological Survey data release. <https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/>. Accessed 15 July 2022.

A Message from our Social Media Coordinator Morgan Slevin

If you're one of our esteemed student presenters at the fall FOS-RRF meeting, we want the world to get as excited about your research as we are! Write a brief blurb about your research in layman's terms, plus anything else you want to share about you or your research story, and send it with a few cool photos of your project in action (fieldwork, neat figures, whatever gets you going) to the FOS Communications Coordinator (mslevin2018@fau.edu). FOS will happily blast out your story and photos on social media as the meeting draws nearer. Don't be shy, we want to hear about your awesome work!



Donate to FOS through AmazonSmile!

If you shop on Amazon, be sure to use Amazon Smiles to donate to FOS! Just type in 'Florida Ornithological Society' on smile.amazon.com. For eligible purchases at AmazonSmile, the AmazonSmile Foundation will donate 0.5% of the purchase price to the customer's selected charitable organization."

Letter from the Editor

As always, thank you to all those who contributed articles and photos for this issue. Todd Engstrom and I will be working hard this winter to revamp the newsletter. If you'd like to contribute an article, please contact me at levy.heather789@gmail.com. We have created guidelines for submission that will soon be housed on the FOS website, but in the meantime I am happy to send them to anyone interested.

After years without seeing all of the smiling faces of FOS members, I can say I'm thrilled to see you all in person in October (and to see what migrants South Florida has to offer!).

All of our board members and volunteers have been working diligently on various projects, including, but not limited to, the planning of our fall meeting, the release of Breeding Bird Atlas II, ramping up our communication and social media outlets, working on our partnership with the USF libraries, publishing the *Florida Field Naturalist*, and much more.

See you soon!

Heather

