

Birds of the Kissimmee-Okeechobee-Everglades Watershed

WADING BIRDS



Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*)

Identification: Adults are large, grayish-blue with a black stripe extending over the eye. Breeding adults have a yellowish bill and long plumes on head, neck and back. In southern Florida, an all-white morph is found, having yellow bill and legs.

Flight: They curl their neck into a tight “S” shape; its wings are broad and rounded and its legs trail well beyond the tail.

Habitat/Diet: Found in freshwater marshes. Food is obtained by “still-hunting” and includes fish, frogs, lizards, snakes, small mammals, and occasionally, other birds.



Tricolored Heron (*Egretta tricolor*)

Identification: Adults have a bluish head, neck and wings, maroon at the base of the neck, and a white stripe down the front of the neck.

Flight: Direct flight with steady quick wing beats.

Habitat/Diet: Found in freshwater marshes as well as the peninsular coast. Diet consists primarily of fish.

Status: Numbers of tricolored herons have declined due to the loss of wetlands.



Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*)

Identification: Adults are slate-blue overall and have lime-green to blue-green legs. Juveniles are white.

Flight: Direct flight with steady quick wing beats.

Habitat/Diet: Utilize a variety of nesting and feeding habitats but prefer fresh water. Diet consists of small fish, frogs, and invertebrates.

Status: Populations are declining due to loss of wetland habitat. It is also speculated that the competition with Cattle egrets for nesting sites may have some effect on their decline.

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WADING BIRDS



Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*)

Identification: Adults are small and stocky with short legs. The back and sides of the neck are a deep chestnut, the upperparts of the body are green, the center of the throat and neck is white, and legs are sometimes a bright yellow-orange.

Flight: Direct flight with slow steady arched wing beats.

Habitat/Diet: Found in wooded ponds, marshes, rivers, reservoirs, and estuaries. Diet is primarily fish, crustaceans, mollusks and a variety of insects. Known to “fish” by dangling items in the water.



Black-crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*)

Identification: Adult is stocky with short legs and neck, and have a black crown and back. White plumes behind the head are longest in breeding season. Juvenile birds have brown upperparts with bold white spotting.

Flight: Direct flight with slow steady wing beats.

Habitat/Diet: Found in shrub-bordered stream margins. Diet is fish, amphibians, crustaceans, snakes, and insects. Large eyes allow for nocturnal feeding.

Status: Species of special concern.



Yellow-crowned Night Heron (*Nyctanassa violacea*)

Identification: Adults have a buffy-white crown, black face with white cheeks, and in breeding season, head plumes. Juveniles lack the black face and white cheek and are, instead, speckled uniformly with white.

Flight: Slow wing beats

Habitat/Diet: Roost in trees in wet woods and swamps. Diet is primarily crustaceans but a variety of other wetland prey is eaten. Large eyes allow for nocturnal feeding.

Status: Species of special concern.

Information used in the text of this guide were obtained from Florida's Birds, by Kale and Maehr. Photos were obtained from Captain David Gilliam and the South Florida Water Management Districts web page. Produced by the Florida Center for Environmental Studies at Riverwoods Field Lab. Contact 800/432-2045, x3190 or <http://www.ces.fau.edu/riverwoods>

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WADING BIRDS

Great Egret (*Casmerodius albus*)



Identification: Adults stand about 40 inches tall, with a yellow bill and long black legs.

Habitat/Diet: Found in shallow wetlands such as lake margins and in the littoral zone along rivers diet consists of fish and invertebrates.

Flight: Buoyant direct flight with deep steady wing beats.

Status: Hunted for its plumes, great egrets were almost wiped out in the early 1900's. Currently this species is abundant and widespread, threatened primarily by loss of wetlands.

Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*)



Identification: Adult is small and white with a slender **black bill, yellow eyes, black legs and bright "golden slippers"**. Breeding adults have graceful plumes on head, neck and back.

Flight: Buoyant flight with steady fast wing beats.

Habitat/Diet: Active feeders that are found in various wetland habitats. Diet includes frogs, fish, worms, crustaceans, invertebrates and small snakes.

Status: Hunted for its plumes, snowy egrets were almost wiped out in the early 1900's and are still listed as a species of special concern.

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)



Identification: Adults are all white with a **yellow bill and legs and black feet**. Breeding plumage on the back, head and chest is buff-colored.

Flight: Direct flight with rapid wing beats.

Habitat/Diet: Found near livestock or along roadsides. Diet consists of a variety of invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, and small rodents.

Status: An Old World species associated with the East African plains. It migrated to South American in the 1930's and breeding individuals were found in Florida in 1953.

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WADING BIRDS



White Ibis (*Eudocimus albus*)

Identification: Adults have distinctive white plumage and pink facial skin, with a slender, downward-curved bill. Juveniles are mostly brown above with white below. In flight, the tips of the wings are dark.

Flight: Flap and glide with rapid wing beats in a straight line.

Habitat/Diet: Found in freshwater marshes and shallow lakes. Diet includes crayfish, aquatic insects, grasshoppers, crabs, grass shrimp, and small snakes. Feeds by probing (“feeling”) mud for food items.

Status: Species of special concern.



Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*)

Identification: Adult plumage is dark reddish overall, glossed with green or purple iridescence, and has a slender, downward-curved bill.

Flight: Direct flight with purposeful wingbeats and short glides, characteristic profile due to outstretched drooping neck and slightly droopy legs.

Habitat/Diet: Found in wetlands and prefer fresh water. Diet consists of crayfish, fish, snakes, grasshoppers, and other insects.

Status: Species of special concern.



Limpkin (*Aramus guarauna*)

Identification: Limpkins are chocolate brown overall, with dense brown and white streaking above. Their bill is long and curved slightly downward.

Flight: Strongly, the neck projecting forward and the legs backward. In flight, the wings have a rapid upstroke and slower down stroke.

Habitat/Diet: Found in Southern swamps and marshes. They feed primarily on apple snails and freshwater mussels.

Status: These birds are listed as a species of special concern due mostly to their dependence on apple snails as a food source. South Florida “specialty”.

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WADING BIRDS



Wood Stork (*Mycteria americana*)

Identification: Adults have a bald, blackish-gray head, with a dark legs, and a downward-curved bill.

Habitat/Diet: Found in freshwater or brackish wetlands and swamps. Food is small fish and crustaceans.

Flight: In flight, their black tail and wingtips contrast with their white body, and have a slow-beat flight pattern.

Status: Due to degradation of nesting and feeding habitat, wood storks have declined in numbers and are on the state and federal endangered species lists.



Roseate Spoonbill (*Ajaia ajaja*)

Identification: 32" The adult male and female look very similar, with a white neck and a pink back and wings highlighted in red. The head has no feathers and is greenish in color, while the distinctive spatulate bill is pale gray with darker gray black mottling. The eyes are red, the legs are red with dark feet. The

immature bird has yellow eyes and a yellowish bill, with white head feathers, and it's body is white or a very pale pink.

Flight: They hold their head straight out, flapping their wings relatively slowly.

Habitat/Diet: Marshes, lagoons, mangroves, mudflats. The adults swing their distinctive spoon-shaped bills back and forth through shallow water to catch small fish, crustaceans and aquatic invertebrates. They sometimes eat plant material.

Status: Roseate Spoonbills were once hunted for their plumes, which were used in the millinery trade, but now despite the destruction of their habitat in some areas their numbers in America have increased.

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DUCK-LIKE SWIMMERS



Purple Gallinule (*Porphyryla martinica*)

Identification: Adults have a metallic green back and purplish-blue head, neck and undersides. The bill is red with a yellow tip and they have a white frontal shield.

Flight: Swift strong direct flight.

Habitat/Diet: Found in wetlands where nests are placed over water in marsh vegetation. Food consists of invertebrates, such as frogs, grasshoppers, and spiders, and a variety of wetland vegetation.

Common Gallinule a/k/a Common Moorehen (*Gallinula chloropus*)



Identification: Adults are dark gray below and brownish above with a yellow-tipped red bill and red frontal shield.

Flight: Before flight, they run across the surface of the water.

Habitat/Diet: Commonly seen along the river in amongst the wetland vegetation or swimming on the open water. Diet consists of a variety of wetland vegetation, seeds, insects and aquatic invertebrates.

American Coot (*Fulica americana*)



Identification: 15" slate-colored; ducklike; white bill; partial ring around tip of bill. Immature: grayish overall; whitish chin and throat; bill light-colored with no partial ring at tip. Immature plumage gradually changes to adult through winter.

Flight: Swift direct flight with rapid wing beats.

Habitat/Diet: Year-round found in all wetland habitats. Feeds on water by diving or tipping its body like a duck, eating seeds, leaves, roots, and small aquatic animals. Also feeds on land.

BIRDS OF PREY



Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)

Identification: Adults are easy to identify by their white head and tail, and their large, yellow beak. Juveniles are mostly dark.

Flight: Eagles fly with wings straight distinguishing them from vultures, which fly with their wings in a slight v-shape.

Habitat/Diet: Nests are usually built in tall pine trees near lakes, marshes or coastlines. Eagles feed mainly on fish.

Status: At one time considered endangered. Ban on DDT has allowed for a strong population rebound.



Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*)

Identification: Adult birds have reddish shoulders and wing linings.

Flight: Fly with several quick wing beats and a glide.

Habitat/Diet: Found in moist, mixed woodlands near water. Nests are usually in a well-foliaged tree, with two to the usual number of eggs laid during late winter. Diet consists of small mammals, lizards, snakes, frogs, crayfish and insects.



Snail Kite (*Rostrhamus sociabilis*)

Identification: Adults have a thin, deeply-hooked bill. Males are grey-black above and below, with white uppertail and undertail coverts, square white tail, with a broad dark band, legs orange-red, eyes and facial skin are reddish. Females are dark brown, with light patches on their face.

Flight: Flight is slow with much flapping of wings when hunting for apple snails.

Habitat/Diet: Found in freshwater marshlands. Diet of only apple snails, which their beak is specialized for opening.

Status: Endangered species, found in southern Florida.

Birds of the Kissimmee-Okeechobee-Everglades Watershed

BIRDS OF PREY



Crested Caracara (*Caracara plancus*)

Identification: Brownish-black overall, with a white throat and neck, barred underparts and facial skin that changes from red to orange to yellow.

Flight: In flight, white patches are visible at the ends of the wings.

Habitat/Diet: Found in open prairie and can be seen feeding on the ground with vultures, feeding primarily on carrion. Also feed on insects and small animals.

Status: Threatened species.



Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)

Identification: Dark brown above and white below, with a white head and noticeable dark eye stripe, hooked bills and strong talons.

Flight: Deep, slow wing beats alternate with glides.

Habitat/Diet: Nest near salt or fresh water.

Ospreys build bulky nests in trees, on poles and on specially made platforms. Diet consists of fish.

Status: Threatened species.



Swallow-tailed Kite (*Elanoides forficatus*)

Identification: Deeply-forked tail, white body, and dark tail and wing tips are most obvious in flight.

Flight: Buoyant flight with deep slow wing beats and glides.

Habitat/Diet: Found in flatwoods in tall pines or cypress trees. Diet consists mostly of insects, but also snakes, lizards and young birds. Swallow-tailed kites often eat prey in flight and drink in flight skimming the water like a swallow.

Status: The loss of tall trees for nesting has contributed greatly to the listing of this bird as a threatened species.

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BIRDS OF PREY



Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*)

Identification: Adults are mostly black all over, with a **black head** and shorter wings and tail than the Turkey Vultures.

Flight: Wings are held flat and feet usually extend beyond the tail. Flap less often than Turkey Vultures.

Habitat/Diet: Diet consists of carrion and can be aggressive, often dominating the kill.



Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*)

Identification: Adults have a bare **red head**, and a relatively long tail. Light color on the wings.

Flight: Wings held in a nearly flat "V".

Habitat/Diet: Diet consists of carrion. Has an extremely sensitive sense of smell.

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WATERFOWL



Mottled Duck (*Anas fulvigula*)

Identification: Both males and females have brown plumage. Males have bright yellow bills with a black spot at the base. Females have dull orange bills flecked with black.

Flight: Swift direct flight with strong wing beats.

Habitat/Diet: Often found in freshwater marshes. Diet is mostly vegetarian. In summer, insects and snails account for 1/3 of diet.

Status: Important game species in Florida. Over 13,000 are harvested each year.



Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*)

Identification: Male plumage on head and back is iridescent, eye and base of bill are red, tan sides, white throat, and white-spotted maroon chest. Female plumage is grayish above, white undersides, white eye ring and eye line, and a light blue wing patch.

Flight: Swift and direct

Habitat/Diet: Commonly found in wooded wetlands. Diet in the fall consists primarily of acorns.

Status: Readily nest in man-made nest boxes. Many have been placed along the Kissimmee River in hopes of recolonizing restored river runs.



Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

Identification: Large dabbling duck. Male has iridescent green head, rust colored chest, gray body. Female is mottled brown.

Flight: Swift direct flight with strong wing beats.

Habitat/Diet: Winter non-breeding resident of Florida. Found in all wetland habitats. Feeds on insects and larvae, aquatic invertebrates, seeds, acorns, aquatic vegetation, and grain.

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WATERFOWL



Black-bellied Whistling Duck

(Dendrocygna autumnalis)

Identification: Adults have long neck, long pink legs, black belly, and large white wing patch. Chest and back rufous, face gray, red bill.

Flight: Direct with rapid wing beats

Habitat/Diet: Year-round resident in small area of south-central Florida near Lake Okeechobee, along with other extreme southern areas of United States. Usually nests in a tree cavity without lining, but will use man-made nest boxes. Feeds on aquatic plants, grass, grain, insects, and mollusks.

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SHOREBIRDS

Greater & Lesser Yellowlegs

(*Tringa melanoleuca*)(*Tringa flavipes*)



Identification: Lesser is 10-11" and Greater is 14-15", slender bird, with a long neck, shorter, straight bill, about the size of the head width, and long, bright yellow legs. Its plumage is gray-brown overall, with black and white mottling above, white below, a white rump and a barred tail. Greater Yellowlegs beak has a longer bill, noticeably longer than head width, and slightly upturned towards end; **size difference only noticeable when birds are together.** Greater Yellowlegs call "Three or four-noted, "dew-dew-dew." Lesser Yellowlegs is Two-noted short whistled "tu-tu."

Flight: swift and direct with rapid wing beat

Habitat/Diet: Often found in shallow wetlands. Wades in shallow water, picking at the surface to snap up small fish, invertebrates and aquatic insects and their larvae.



Black-necked Stilt

(*Himantopus mexicanus*)

Identification: 14" Plumage is glossy black above and white beneath. The female is somewhat browner, as is the juvenile. They do not build a nest, but lay around 4 eggs in a shallow depression lined with grass and debris on open ground, or in the grass. The eggs are incubated by both parents for 22-27 days.

Flight: Swift direct flight with shallow wing beats.

Habitat/Diet: Often found in shallow wetlands. Diet is mostly insects and snails.

Status: Hunted almost to the point of extinction in the 19th century, the Black-necked Stilt was later protected and has recovered a great deal of ground.



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SHOREBIRDS

Least Sandpiper (*Calidris minutilla*)



Identification: Brown upperparts and white underparts, round bodied with short pointed wings, bills are black, and their legs are yellowish-green.

Flight: Least Sandpipers show whitish rumps bisected by a longitudinal black line.

Habitat/Diet: Often found in Mudflats, grassy marshes, rainpools, and shores. Wades in shallow water picking up tiny items from surface of ground. Sometimes probes in mud for food. Feed on tiny crustaceans, insects, and snails.

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DEEP WATER DIVING BIRDS



Anhinga (*Anhinga anhinga*)

Identification: Adults have **long, thin necks** and are black above, with silvery-white streaks and spots on the wings and upper back. During breeding season, the male grows plumes on neck and bill and facial skin become brightly colored. Females have a buff-colored neck and breast.

Flight: **Alternating flight pattern**

Habitat/Diet: Often seen perched on a branch above the water, with their wings spread out to dry. Diet consists of fish, which they stab with their needlelike bill.



Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*)

Identification: Adults are dark overall with an orange throat patch. Can be distinguished from Anhingas by their heavier, **hooked bills**.

Flight: **Constant flight pattern.**

Habitat/Diet: Found in large bodies of open water, both fresh and salt. Often found on pilings along the Kissimmee River. Diet consists of fish.

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SONGBIRDS



Red-winged Blackbird
(*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

Identification: Males are glossy black with bright red patches bordered with yellow on the wing. Females are sparrow like - brown above and streaked below.

Flight: Strong direct flight with deep rapid wing beats

Habitat/Diet: Commonly found in large flocks feeding in grasslands and near marshes. Diet consists of seeds as well as grasshoppers, dragonflies, and other insects.



Eastern Meadowlark
(*Sturnella magna*)

Identification: Medium-sized stocky song bird with short tail. Black “V” across chest. The back is brown and streaked with white outer tail feathers. Females are smaller with shorter wings. Beautiful song.

Flight: Several rapid wing beats followed by a glide.

Habitat/Diet: Year-round resident in Florida grasslands, pastures, croplands, and golf courses. Feeds on insects, especially grasshoppers and crickets, as well as insect larvae and grubs. They are ground feeders, and build their nest on the ground woven into vegetation.

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OTHER (Crane, Belted Kingfisher, & Pelican)



Sandhill Cranes

(*Grus canadensis*)

Identification: Adults have gray plumage, black legs, whitish cheeks and a red crown. Their rattling call can be heard over long distances.

Flight: Heavy, labored, steady wing beats with slow down stroke. Rapid jerky upstroke.

Habitat/Diet: Found in marshes and wet prairies. Diet consists of a variety of plants and invertebrates.



Belted Kingfisher (Ceryle alcyon)

Identification: Adults are stocky birds with large heads and a large beak. They are slate blue above with a white belly. Females have a reddish streak across their chest.

Flight: Slow direct flight with somewhat erratic pattern

Habitat/Diet: Found in streams, rivers, ponds, lakes, estuaries, and calm marine waters. Dive headfirst into water to catch prey. Diet consists of small fish, crayfish, frogs and insects.



White Pelican

(*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*)

Identification: All white body with black tips on their wings, pale orange legs and feet and an orange bill and pouch. Found in lakes, marshes, salt bays, and beaches.

Flight: Strong, slow deep wing beats

Habitat/Diet: Found in shallow water on inland marshes, along lake or river edges, and in wetlands. Feeds on fish by swimming on the surface in a semicircle and herd the fish to shallower water near the shore.