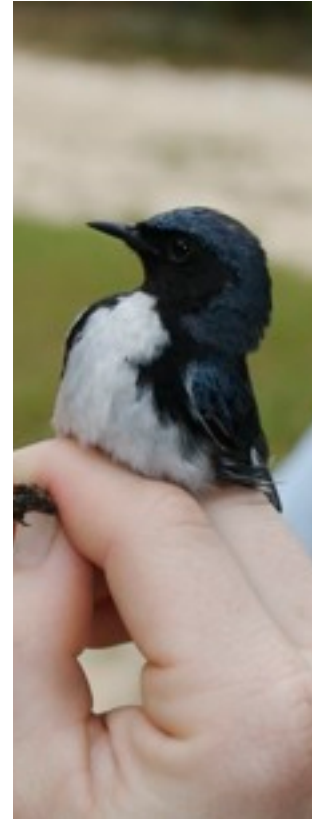
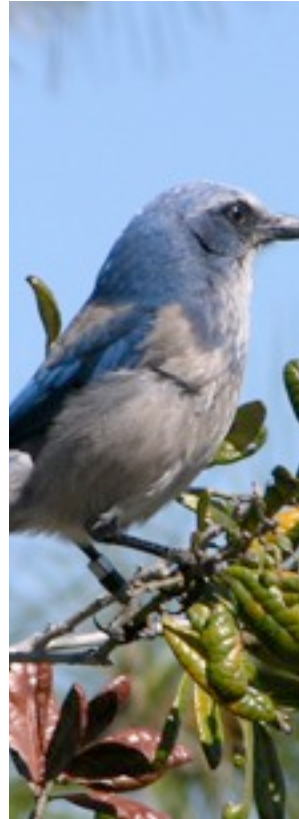


# ENVIROTHON WILDLIFE

## Birds



## Birds

Birds are one of the easiest forms of wildlife to view. Colorful and often conspicuous we see birds everyday no matter where you live in Florida. Some birds found in Florida are common while others are quite rare.

Over 500 species of bird can be seen in Florida. A skilled birder may even be able to see 100 in a single day.

For additional info on birds and other wildlife visit:

[Wildflorida.com](http://Wildflorida.com)

[FWC Species info](http://FWC Species info)

# Vultures



**Black Vultures** are the smaller of the two vultures found in Florida. Though the black vulture and the turkey vulture are both black, it is easy to remember which is which, because the black vulture has a bare black head. Turkey vultures have a bare red head. In flight the undersides of the wings of black vultures have a white area near the tip of the wing.

Black vultures are gregarious, often seen in flocks. They are quite common in campgrounds where they sometimes become quite bold and tame. They are scavengers - the clean-up crew at road kills – groups of them are often seen along the side of the road feeding on road-killed deer, raccoons and other animals. Black vultures dominate turkey vultures when feeding at carcasses.

Black vultures form monogamous pair bonds, and in Florida they nest in hollow trees, palmetto thickets and beneath the roots of tipped up trees. They do not carry food back to the nest in their beaks or feet, but regurgitate food to feed the young.

Turkey vultures and black vultures are similar in size and coloration, but turkey vultures have red heads and necks. The turkey vulture is so named because its head resembles the head of a wild turkey. The black vulture has a bare black head.

The two species can also be distinguished in flight by the fact that only the tips of the black vulture's wings are white, whereas the back half of the undersides (flight feathers) of the turkey vulture's wings are silvery white.



**Turkey Vultures** are scavengers and use their sense of smell to locate carrion. They are even able to detect dead animals that are not visible beneath a forest canopy. Unlike the more social black vulture, turkey vultures usually forage alone.

Little is known about the nesting habits of turkey vultures and only a few nests have been found. They usually lay two eggs on the ground in a cave or under the roots of a tipped up tree.

Though vultures resemble hawks and eagles, they are actually related to the storks. They have bare heads, and toes adapted for walking and standing rather than the grabbing toes of birds of prey. Vultures often appear to have white legs because they squirt feces onto their legs and feet to cool themselves.



# Raptors

## Bald Eagle

Florida has the largest bald eagle population in the lower 48 states.

Easily identified by their white heads, distinctive size and soaring flight, bald eagles are often seen flying above Florida's lakes, estuaries and wetlands. Adults have a white head and tail, chocolate colored plumage, and yellow bill and feet. The characteristic white head and tail develops when the bird becomes sexually mature at about 5 years of age.

Bald eagles feed mainly on fish snatched from the water's surface with talons, but also take wading birds, small mammals, and carrion. You may occasionally see them feeding on a road kill with a group of vultures.

Most bald eagles migrate, but some stay in their territories year around. Males and females form life-long bonds. Pairs return to the same breeding territory year after year – usually in late September or early October in Florida - and will reuse the same nest if the site is still there.

Bald eagles were once common in Florida, more than a thousand nesting pairs are thought to have lived along the states coasts and inland waterways. But in the 1960's the species was almost completely eliminated from the lower 48 states - a combination of habitat loss and pesticide use reduced the total US population to only about 500 pairs. When the use of DDT was banned in 1972, numbers began a steady increase. In 40 years the bald eagle has gone from 400 breeding pairs in



the contiguous US (excluding Alaska), to more than 5,000 breeding pairs today.

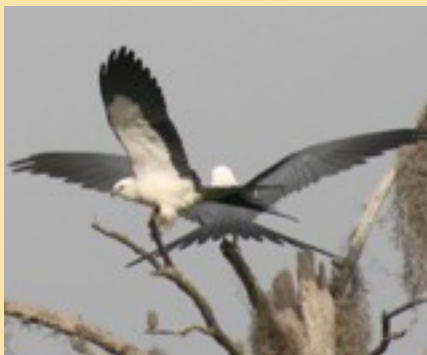
## Osprey

The osprey looks like a smaller version of the eagle. The bottoms of the feet are covered with spiked scales, which help the bird to grip and hold slippery fish.

The tail is white with alternating bands of white and dark brown. The head is white except for a brown stripe from the eye to the back of the head. Females are slightly larger than males and have darker streaking and a ring of brown spots around the neck. Osprey can be distinguished in flight by the characteristic downward bend or crook in their long narrow wings.

Ospreys are usually found near water, primarily large lakes, slow-moving rivers, and coastal areas where trees or man-made structures provide perches or nesting sites. Ospreys feed mainly in mid-morning

and late afternoon, hunting either from high perches or by soaring high above the water. When they spot a fish they hover briefly or dive straight into the water - head down, legs, toes and talons extended on either side of the head. During the dive they sometimes completely disappear under the water. Ospreys usually hold fish with both feet. If you watch closely, when they take off after a dive with a fish in their talons, you will often see them move their feet around and change their grip on the fish. They move the fish so that its head is pointing forwards, which reduces the drag.



## Swallowtail Kite

One of the most beautiful birds in Florida, the unmistakable, elegant swallow-tail kite is easily recognized by its deeply forked tail, distinctive black and white plumage, and graceful aerial displays. Juvenile birds can be identified by the lack of the deeply forked tail.

Swallow-tailed kites are almost always seen in the air. If you are lucky enough to be able to watch one for any length of time you will notice them swoop to pluck an insect out of the sky or a fledgling bird from a nest, and then eat the meal while flying. Swallow-tail kites feed entirely on the wing, primarily on insects, lizards, frogs, snakes and small birds. They drink on the wing like a swallow, swooping low to snatch water

from the surface of a river or lake.

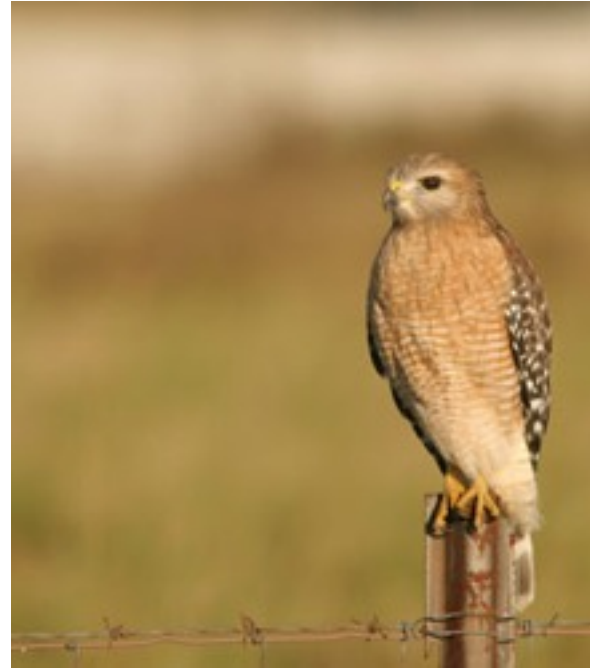
Swallow-tail kites arrive in Florida from South America in late February to mid-March. They are most obvious at this time of the year as they carry sticks, moss and other nesting material to their chosen nest site. Nests are usually in the top of one of the tallest trees in a pine or cypress stand.

After the two or three young fledge, the adults and young birds fly south again, first gathering in communal roosts in south Florida before migrating to South America.

### Red-shouldered Hawk

This forest hawk has broad wings and a relatively long tail. Adults have a brown head and back and reddish underparts, streaked with dark brown. The tail is black with white bands.

Red-shouldered hawks are territorial and monogamous; both sexes build the nest, incubate the eggs and feed the young. Their distinctive, screaming kee-aah call is often heard around the breeding territory. They are sit-and-wait hunters, using perches as vantage points from which to dive onto prey. Their diet consists of rabbits, squirrels and other small mammals. They also eat snakes, frogs and lizards.



# Owls



## Great Horned Owl

Florida's largest owl, standing more than two feet tall (61 cm) tall, the great horned owl is fairly common throughout the state, but it is not found on the Keys. This striking-looking owl has large yellow eyes and ear tufts (horns). For such a large bird, the great horned owl has a rather weak voice — its call is a low “hoo-hoo-hoowha,” and much quieter than the smaller barred owl.

Great horned owls eat a huge variety of prey — from rats and rabbits to skunks, opossums, egrets, turkeys and other owls.



## Eastern Screech-Owl

The most widely distributed owl in North America, the Eastern Screech-Owl can be found in the Eastern two thirds of the US.

There are two distinct color morphs. One is rufus (red) and the other grey. All screech owls have very conspicuous ear tufts (not actually ears).

Their diet is highly variable and may consist of insects, rodents, and song birds. To capture prey they sit on perches, look and listen, then dive on the unsuspecting prey.

These small owls can be found in many different areas, both wild and urban. Their call is a penetrating, almost eery trill.

## Barred Owl

You are more likely to hear this owl than see it. Its loud “Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you all?” call is often heard and easily recognized. Barred owls are relatively large birds, standing about 1.5 – 2 ft (0.46-0.6 m) tall with a wing span of 40-50 inches (101-127 cm).

Barred owls live in woodlands and swamps, especially in forests with large trees. They hunt from perches, feeding on small mammals, birds and insects.





# Cranes

## Sandhill Crane

The sandhill crane is one of Florida's largest birds— 1.2 meters tall, with a wingspan of about 2 meters. Sandhills fly with neck and legs extended and vocalize frequently when in flight. Great blue herons are about the same size, but fly with their neck curled backward. There are an estimated 4,000 Florida sandhill cranes.

Sandhill cranes prefer pasture, prairies and shallow wetlands. They roost in shallow marshes at night. They feed in variety of open habitats such as sod farms, golf courses, airports, and suburban subdivisions, and are sometimes seen foraging beside highways or along the median strips of roads.

Sandhill cranes form monogamous pairs, which often remain together for several years. Pairs have a characteristic antiphonal vocalization known as a [unison call](#), which can be heard several kilometers away. They also have a [guard call](#) which signals danger.

In addition to the resident population of sandhill cranes that stays in Florida year around and breeds here, Florida is also the winter destination for a migratory population of cranes that breed in Wisconsin, Michigan and Canada. These migrating cranes arrive in Florida in November, and fly north again in the middle of February.



## Whooping Crane

Whooping cranes stand almost 5 ft. tall, and have a wingspan of 6-7 ft. (2 meters). Adult whooping cranes have snow-white plumage with black wing tips and a red patch on the face that extends from the forehead to the cheek.

Whooping cranes mate for life.

“Whoopers” once wintered in Florida, but hunting and habitat loss eliminated the Florida population by the 1920's. By the 1940's the entire species was on the verge of extinction, with only 21 birds surviving in the wild.

Like other migratory birds, whooping cranes learn their migration routes by following older birds – usually their parents. But when the migratory flock dwindles and disappears, as happened with the eastern whooping crane population, the knowledge is lost.

Efforts to establish a

migratory population of whooping cranes began during the summer of 2000 when a coalition of government, non-profit and private organizations joined to form the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership (WCEP). ['Operation Migration'](#), a non-profit charitable organization works within this partnership.

The goal was to establish a new, migratory flock of whooping cranes that would re-establish the migration route between Wisconsin and Florida.

Whooping crane chicks are taught to follow an ultralight aircraft. In the fall, young cranes follow the ultralight from Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in Wisconsin to the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife refuge in Florida – a journey of 1,600 miles (2,575 km). The first 6 birds arrived at Crystal River in Florida on December 3rd 2001, and as of spring 2007, 63 birds have been taught the migration route.

# Turkey and Quail

## Wild Turkey

Turkeys are large birds with strong legs and feet adapted for walking and scratching. They can run fast – up to 12 mile per hour, and surprisingly, they are strong fliers. Males can weigh up to 30 pounds (14 kg), females 10-12 pounds.

Turkeys are extremely wary birds, with good eyesight and hearing. They spend the day walking; they search out insects, acorns, berries and nuts, and use their strong feet to scratch through pine straw and leaf litter for seeds and other food. They roost in trees at night.

The American wild turkey is one of the most significant success stories in the history of North American wildlife management.

Turkeys were quite abundant at the time of European colonization of North America. By 1920, wild turkeys had been extirpated from 18 of 39 states, and by the Depression, only 30,000 turkeys were believed to survive in the United States.

Today there are an estimated 5.6 million turkeys in the United States, with sizeable populations in all states except Alaska.

The restoration is due largely to a consortium of federal and state agencies and sportsmen's groups. The Target 2000 program, for example, is a long-term restoration effort sponsored by the National Turkey Federation in cooperation with private sportsmen's groups and government agencies. The turnaround in the fortunes of the wild turkey began in 1937 with the passage of the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, which placed a tax on firearms, ammunition and other hunting equipment. This tax has raised billions of dollars for wildlife restoration.



The **Northern Bobwhite** or Bobwhite quail is named for its loud 'bob white' [call](#), this quail is a small chunky bird with short rounded wings. Males have a black cap, white throat and chin, and a white stripe through and above the eye to the back of the head. Females have a tan colored throat and no black neck collar.

Bobwhite quail live in brushy areas interspersed with fields. They prefer edges, fencerows and areas with vegetative cover.



Bobwhites are active during the day; they feed on seeds, fruit, insects and green plants. Pairs are monogamous with pair bonds sometimes persisting between breeding seasons. Males advertise during the May to August breeding season with a distinctive bob-bob-white call.

Females lay large clutches of up to 14 eggs, which hatch after 23 days. The precocial young are about the size of a quarter coin, and feed largely on insects. The chicks double their weight every 10 days can fly within 2-3 weeks.

Bobwhites are commonly seen in groups known as coveys. Coveys usually consist of about 10-30 birds, depending on the time of year. Every night, for safety, the covey forms a circle with their heads facing outwards, away from each other and their tails together. If a predator startles them, the covey flushes in all directions.

Bobwhite quail are a popular game bird in the United States. In 1970 an estimated 35 million of them were shot. In the southeastern US these tiny birds were instrumental in the preservation of some of the best examples of old growth high pine.



# Florida Scrub-Jay

The Florida Scrub-jay is the one and only bird found only in Florida and nowhere else. Similar to the more common Blue Jay in size and shape, the Florida Scrub-Jay lacks a crest on its head and is without bold black markings.

Florida Scrub-Jays are endemic to Florida, meaning they are only found here and not in any other state or country. They only live in scrub habitats found in Florida. Historically Florida Scrub-Jays could be found in 39 counties in Florida. In the last 100 years the number of Florida Scrub-Jays has declined by 80-90%. Currently it is listed as a Threatened species by the federal government.

As the name implies Florida Scrub-Jays require scrub habitat to survive. They prefer areas dominated by short scrub oaks with scattered areas of open sand. The ideal height for oaks is between 3-10 feet. Periodic fire is instrumental in maintaining the low stature of the oaks. Without it the oaks and other vegetation grow to tall and make the landscape unsuitable for Florida Scrub-Jays.

Florida Scrub-Jays eat a variety of foods. Much of the year they consume insects and other invertebrates as well as small vertebrates. In the fall they will gather acorns and bury them in open sandy areas. A single bird can bury over 6,000 acorns a year. They remember where each was buried and in the winter, when insects are scarce, locate and eat the acorns.

The social structure of Florida Scrub-jays is different than most birds. They live in family groups consisting of a breeding pair and often several related "helpers." These helpers are usually offspring from previous years. They assist in defending the territory, feeding nestlings, and watching for predators.



Florida Scrub-Jays groups often will forage with one member perched above keeping watch for predators. This bird is the acting sentinel. If a threat is seen this bird will alert the others.

The population of Florida Scrub-Jays is still declining due to habitat loss and lack of fire. Scrub habitat once was widespread in Florida but a majority has already been converted to agriculture and housing. Each year more of the remaining suitable scrub is destroyed. Even in protected areas the lack of fire allows suitable habitat to slowly become overgrown and too tall to be used by Florida Scrub-Jays. Survival of the Florida Scrub-Jay is dependent on conserving their habitat and returning fire to those that are overgrown.