

*Advancing
Ornithology in
Florida.*

*Supporting Research
and Education about
Birds.*

*Uniting Amateurs
and Professionals in
the Conservation and
Study of Wild Birds*

the
Snail Kite

Summer 2010
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Some birds potentially affected by the spill:

- 20 species of duck
- More than 12 species of wading birds
- More than 30 species of shorebirds
- About 20 species of gulls and terns
- Passerines including Gray Kingbirds,

The Oil Spill and Birds by R. Todd Engstrom

All members of the Florida Ornithological Society should be concerned about the short- and long-term effects of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill on birds that inhabit our coastal ecosystems and the Gulf of Mexico.

Recently, Bill Pranty, Andy Krattter, Adam Kent, and I compiled and posted on the FOS website [a list](#) of 144 species of birds that could be affected by the oil spill.

This web posting also offers a number of ways in which FOS members can get involved in response to the spill (e.g., collecting data on bird numbers and volunteering for coastal clean-up) and sources of information about the oil spill, such as NOAA updates.

It is important that FOS members make sure that

any conservation actions be done within a planned framework using methods that will help and not harm any birds in question. We will try to get more information to the FOS membership as volunteer opportunities with government agencies,

such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, are organized.

R. Todd Engstrom
Chairman, FOS
Conservation Committee



Reddish Egret with oiled legs. Note oil boom in background.

President's Note by Adam Kent

This is a great time to be a member of the Florida Ornithological Society. I am excited about the role this fine organization plays in the conservation and study of birds in Florida. Please read on!

Birders around the state know that birding, in addition to being a fun hobby, contributes to conservation.

Birders around the state know that birding, in addition to being a fun hobby, contributes to conservation. FOS encourages birders to make their observations useful for conservation. Your observations add to our knowledge about bird distributions, especially through participation in Christmas Bird Counts and Breeding Bird Surveys.

FOS organizes Florida's [North American Migration Counts](#), which provide a means of contributing information on the timing of and pathways used during migration. Birders also contribute through sightings provided to [eBird](#), the [Great Backyard Bird Count](#), and similar projects. Species-specific monitoring and conservation projects such as [Jay Watch](#) continue to expand. FOS is discussing an update of the Florida Breeding Bird Atlas, which we believe may provide another great source of distribution and trend information for Florida birdlife.

Many birders also report their sightings to the FOS Field Observations Committee, which enables FOS to amass a collection of notable distribution records. These [records](#) can be found on the FOS website. For the rarest sightings, FOS Records Committee [reports](#) are also online. [County listing](#) is quickly increasing in popularity and birders can use these excursions as opportunities to contribute to our knowledge of bird distribution. The "June Challenge" for which birders try to find as many species as possible during one of our slowest birding months is also gaining popularity.

In addition to all the work described above that is done mostly by non-professionals, ornithologists continue to advance our understanding of Florida's birds. At the present time, intensely studied bird species in Florida include Wood Storks, Roseate Spoonbills, Reddish Egrets, both Snail and Swallow-tailed Kites, Southeastern American Kestrels, Snowy Plovers, American Oystercatchers, Red Knots, Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, Florida Scrub-jays, Florida Grasshopper Sparrows and Painted Buntings among others. Look for updates about some of these projects and more in future issues of the Snail Kite.

On a broader scale relating to Florida birds, the [Florida Bird Conservation Initiative](#) was formed recently to address bird conservation statewide and to promote the sustainability of native Florida birds and their habitats. Another recently-formed bird partnership is the [Florida Shorebird Alliance](#). These partnerships now cover most of our coast and contribute valuable information about breeding and roosting areas. The groups also play an educational role as stewards on busy beaches. Don't miss the [FSA bird quiz](#).

Not all is good news, however. We currently face what may turn out to be one of the worst environmental disasters of our generation, the April 20 Deepwater Horizon oil spill. [Many birds](#) potentially are affected by the spill. One immediate concern relating to the spill is that well-intentioned clean-up crews may disturb beach-

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Wood Stork photo by Alex Kropp.

FOS October 8-10 Meeting At a Glance:

- **Keynote speaker:** Dr. Felicia Coleman, Director, Florida State University Coastal and Marine Laboratory: The Deepwater Horizon oil disaster: the tragedy from oyster beds to oystercatchers.
- **Location:** Tallahassee/Tall Timbers Research Station
- **Hotel:** Days Inn-Tallahassee Northwest, 2714 Graves Road, Tallahassee. Phone: (850) 562-2000; Toll Free: (800) 329-7466
- **Deadline** to register for hotel and receive a discount: September 24th
- **Discount lodging** available for student presenters
- **Field trips** to Alligator Point, Wakulla Springs, St. Marks NWR and more!

FOS Fall Meeting in Tallahassee



Red-cockaded Woodpeckers may be seen on one or more of the Fall FOS meeting trips. Photo by Adam Kent.

Looking forward to seeing you in Tallahassee on October 8th for the Fall FOS meeting!

The Fall meeting will be October 8-10 in Tallahassee. Tall Timbers Research Station and Land Conservancy and Apalachee Audubon will be the hosts.

Keynote speaker: Dr. Felicia Coleman, Director, Florida State University Coastal and Marine Laboratory: The Deepwater Horizon oil disaster: the tragedy from oyster beds to oystercatchers. Dr. Coleman and her colleagues have scores of research projects that are about to be assaulted by the oil spill disaster. Dr. Coleman will provide a first-hand account of the effects the spill has had on coastal and marine organisms with a special emphasis on the effects to birds and other marine animals and fisheries resources.

Hotel: We've booked a block of rooms at the

Days Inn-Tallahassee Northwest, 2714 Graves Road, Tallahassee. Phone: (850) 562-2000 or (800) 329-7466. The rate is \$49 per night, if you register by Sept. 24.

Please mention you are with Florida Ornithological Society when making reservations.

The hotel's check-in time is 3 p.m. Checkout is 11 a.m. Continental breakfast is from 6 to 9 a.m.

Student Housing: Students making presentations on Saturday (see below) have the option of staying on Tall Timbers Research Station on Friday and Saturday evening. Bunk housing is available for student presenters at the rate of \$5 per night. Housing includes cookware, fridge, utensils, and separate baths for men/women, but please be sure to bring your own linens. The Den is located about 15 miles from

town, so be sure to bring breakfast items and snacks as well. Contact Lisa Baggett (lisa@ttrs.org; (850) 893-4153 ext. 241 to reserve a place.

Field Trips: Field trips will include behind-the-gate-tours of Wakulla Springs State Park and St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge as well as trips to Tall Timbers Research Station, Maclay Gardens State Park, Alligator Point State Preserve, and other favorite birding spots in the Big Bend Area. Fall is a great time for catching up with northern migrants and some early winter arrivals, and the weekend totals should exceed 250 species. Details on field trips will be available by early July. Some may include additional expenses (e.g., \$5 for a special boat trip at Wakulla Springs).

Photo feature: Atlantic Pelagics

The Snail Kite would like to see your photos of Florida birds. The following photos are from Michael Brothers from a Pelagic birding trip out of New Smyrna Beach on May 15, 2010.



Arctic Tern. Most were seen about 100 miles out from shore.

White-tailed Tropicbird. Three birds seen on return trip at approximately 80, 70, and 60 miles off shore.



Wilson's Storm-Petrel. Notice the inner primary molt.

Two of several Pomarine Jaegers seen on the trip.



Bird News

The Great Florida Birding Trail has a newly revised website www.floridabirdingtrail.com

The updated website features new sections on bird conservation, birding ethics and volunteer opportunities, and the trip-planning tool has been improved with several new features. New online guidebooks for the East (late 2010/early 2011) and Panhandle (fall 2010) sections of the GFBT are in progress.

**The Great Florida
Birding Trail has a
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with an improved
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Requests for Assistance

Anyone who sees color-banded Least Terns anywhere on the west coast of Florida should contact Marianne Korosy (mkorosy@GMAIL.COM) with details on location and band colors.. Photos graciously accepted.



Least Tern at Matanzas Inlet.. Photo by Alex Kropp.

**Have you seen
Least Terns on the
West Coast of
Florida? Report
sightings to
Marianne Korosy.**

Cornell's NestWatch and the Oil Spill

Will the Gulf Oil Spill Affect Backyard Birds?- NestWatch seeks data for backyard birds that may use the Gulf during their annual cycle. Learn how you can help.

We've seen images of oiled pelicans, plovers, and other birds from areas affected by the recent spill. Species that nest on beaches and in coastal marshes are being monitored by state wildlife officials. But many birds that nest in backyards all across North America, such as Red-winged Blackbirds and Tree Swallows, may winter in the coastal and marsh environments along the Gulf of Mexico where they could potentially be affected by the oil spill. We need your help to track nesting success of these birds in your own backyard and neighborhood.

Call for Data: Birds passing through the Gulf region could carry contamination with them, creating an "oil shadow" of declines in bird reproduction hundreds of miles away from the coast. NestWatch accepts data for all North American birds. Please see Cornell's NestWatch website for information about five backyard bird species and other migratory birds that may use the Gulf during some part of their annual cycle and could potentially be affected by the oil spill.

Click [here](#) for more info.



*Red-winged Blackbird photo
by Adam Kent.*

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Develops Strategy to Help Birds Weather the Gulf Coast

In a few weeks, millions of waterfowl and other migratory birds will begin their fall migration to wintering and stopover habitat along the Gulf Coast.

An early winter in northern portions of the Mississippi and Central Flyways, combined with dry habitat conditions in the northern Mississippi Alluvial Valley could result in large wintering waterfowl populations along the Gulf Coast.

WASHINGTON -- In a few weeks, millions of waterfowl and other migratory birds will soon begin their fall migration to wintering and stopover habitat along the Gulf Coast. In anticipation of this event, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with partners to anticipate and minimize the impacts of the Deepwater Horizon/BP oil spill on these birds.

The Service will continue to monitor the impact of the ongoing spill on waterfowl, and will take those impacts into account when establishing waterfowl hunting frameworks for the upcoming season.

Working with conservation partners, the Service is also preparing to implement a range of on-the-ground habitat conservation and management measures near the oil-impact area in the Gulf designed to minimize the entrance of oil into managed habitats along the Gulf and to enhance the availability of migratory bird food resources outside the oil impact area.

Recently obtained results

of annual spring waterfowl population surveys indicate that population sizes of most duck species and breeding habitat conditions are good this year.

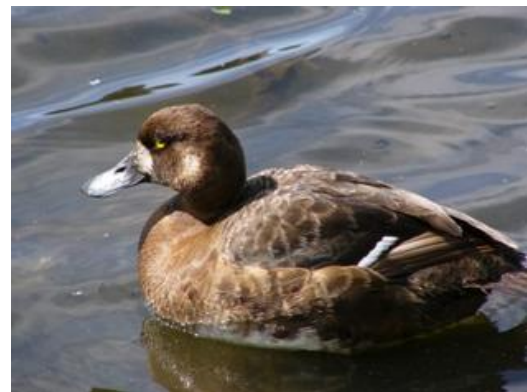
From a National harvest-management perspective, the Service intends to respond to the ongoing oil spill as it would any other non-hunting factor with the potential for substantial effects on mortality or reproduction – such as hurricanes, disease outbreaks or drought – by monitoring abundance and vital rates of waterfowl and other migratory game birds, and adjusting harvest regulations as needed on the basis of existing harvest strategies.

The provision of additional, reliable food sources could help buffer

against the worst-case scenario – an early winter in northern portions of the Mississippi and Central Flyways, combined with dry habitat conditions in the northern Mississippi Alluvial Valley that would result in large wintering waterfowl populations along the Gulf Coast. The Service is working with partners to determine whether certain refuges and other habitat should be available as “sanctuary” (areas closed to hunting) to encourage bird use of these areas and minimize redistribution due to disturbance.

The Service is working with partners to assess potential pathways for long-term acute and sub-

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Greater Scaup wintering on the Gulf coast could be affected by the oil spill. Photo by Adam Kent.

From the Editor by Tom Palmer

Just a note that I've been talking with President Adam Kent about changing the newsletter format to make it more attractive and to adapt to our new web presence. Tell me what you think.

Meanwhile, let me hear from you. Are you doing research you'd like to share? Do you have a favorite birding spot you'd like to tell us about? Have you been on an interesting trip? Why not share it and

make Snail Kite the main source for ornithological news in Florida.

Please submit material for the Fall 2010 issue of Snail Kite to Tom Palmer by September 15th.

Please submit material for the Fall 2010 issue of Snail Kite to Tom Palmer by September 15.

U.S. FWS Develops Strategy, continued

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lethal effects of the oil spill on the full suite of migratory birds utilizing impacted habitats during some portion of their life cycle. The intent of this assessment is to assist in identifying potential mitigation and conservation measures as well as long-term monitoring and assessment needs for migratory birds.

For more information on oil spill impacts to migratory birds and other wildlife, please visit the Deepwater Horizon Web site at <http://www.deepwaterhorizonresponse.com/>, or on the Service's web site at <http://www.fws.gov>.

President's note, continued

(Continued from page 2)

nesting birds. Long term consequences of the spill are difficult to predict because no similar deep-water spill has occurred anywhere before.

The spill puts FOS in a position of deep anguish over the threat it poses to our birds. FOS can help contribute to understanding the impact of the spill and to ameliorate the devastation caused by future environmental disasters. FOS encourages research on birds and the spill to fill holes in our knowledge. As research on the impact of the spill is absorbed, FOS members

will help interpret these findings and disseminate them to ornithologists, birders, industry, policy-makers, and the general public.

To end on a bright note, the FOS website has undergone some important updates and now includes all [Florida Field Naturalist](#) journals from 1973 to 2005 archived online. The [Snail Kite](#) newsletter is also online from Fall 2006 up to the current issue. The website site will continue to evolve to meet the changing needs of FOS members. Look for a new design soon.

I'm firmly committed to the goal of FOS of

“uniting amateurs and professionals in the study of wild birds.” For the professional ornithologist, biologist, ecologist or conservationist interested in birds, for land managers that want to know more about how to manage for birds, and for anyone interested in knowing more about Florida's rich birdlife and contributing to the knowledge and conservation of birds in Florida, FOS is for you!

Comments, questions, suggestions are welcomed. Contact Adam Kent at: kestrelkent@yahoo.com



Florida Scrub-jay photo by Alex Kropp.

Snail Kite is published by the Florida Ornithological Society as an information exchange among persons interested in the conservation, research and enjoyment of birds in Florida.

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Recent issues of the newsletter and other information are available on the FOS website.

www.fosbirds.org

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