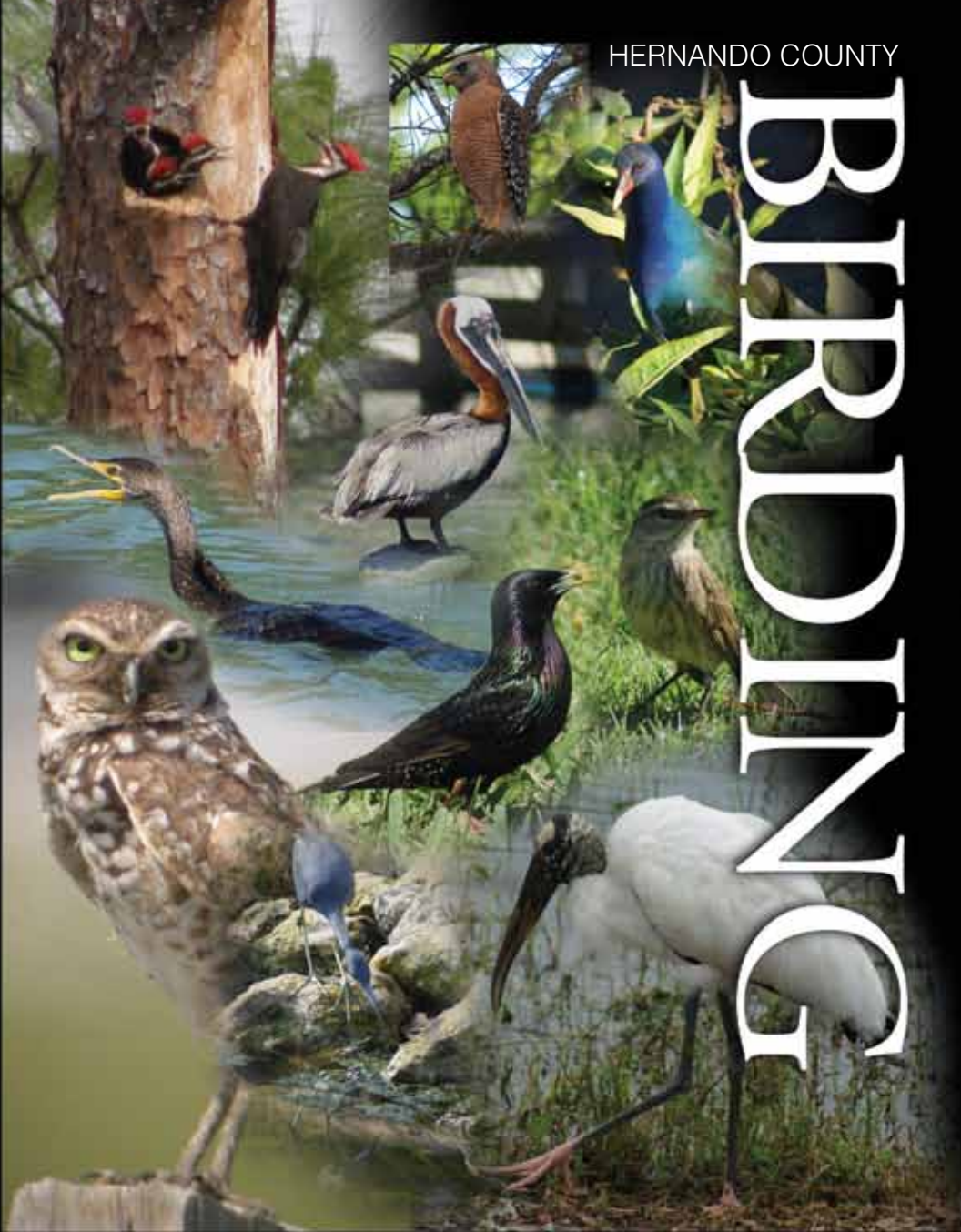
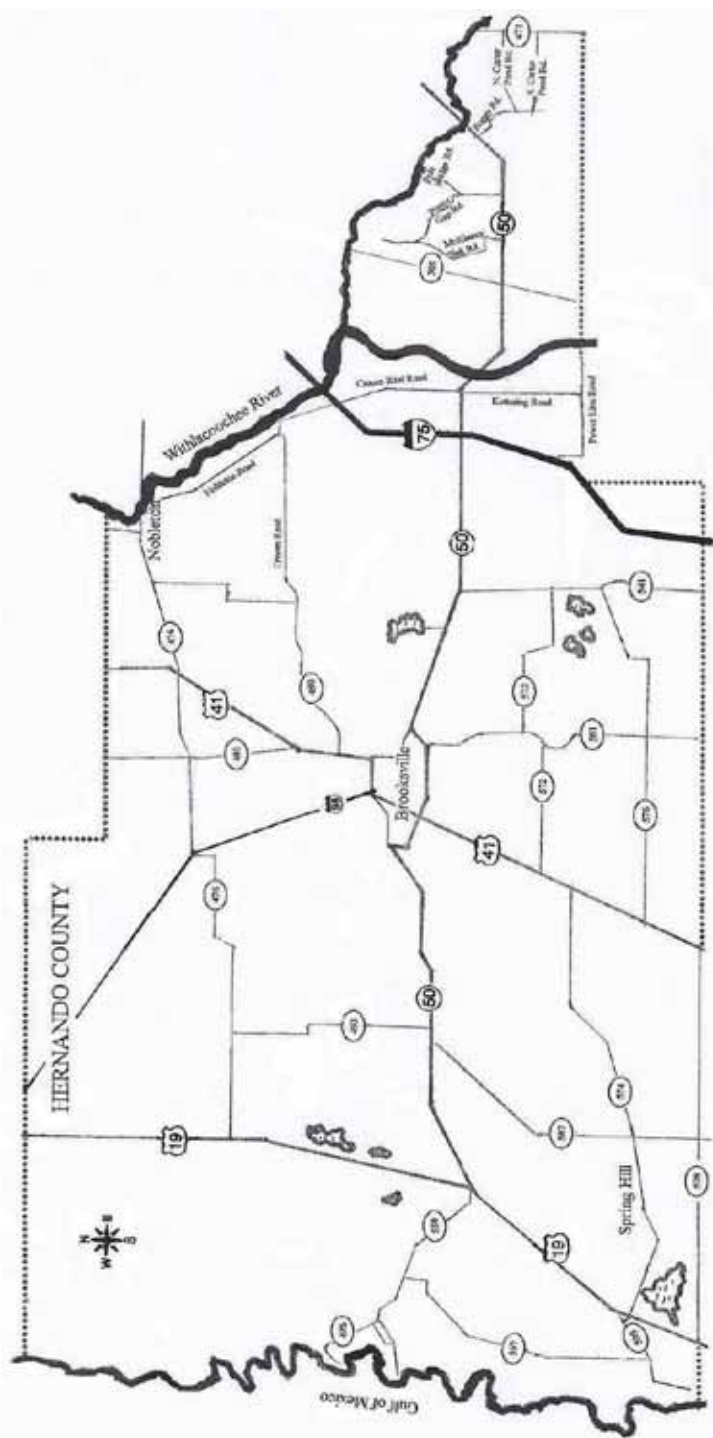


HERNANDO COUNTY

# BIRDING



Birding Sites in Hernando County



### Hernando County

The only roads shown on this map of Hernando County are those that are mentioned in the text.

## **BIRDING SITES IN HERNANDO COUNTY**

This pamphlet is designed to help local and visiting birders by indicating the localities and times of year when birds are most likely to be found in Hernando County. The accompanying bird checklist indicates the seasonal distribution and the probability of finding each species in suitable habitat.

In addition to birds that live here year round, neotropical migrants pass through the area during the spring and fall, while other birds are resident here only in winter, and still other birds arrive for summer nesting. Spring migration begins in early March and lasts through mid-May. Fall migration starts in August and continues through October. The best time to look for birds is during the relatively cool early morning hours, when most birds are actively feeding.

Of the many locations for watching birds described in this pamphlet, the following are particularly recommended. **Pine Island** is the best area for birds that prefer saltwater. **Weekiwachee Preserve** attracts many resident birds, as well as spring and fall migrants. **Withlacoochee State Forest** has many resident birds, including Red-cockaded and Pileated woodpeckers, Barred and Great Horned owls, Eastern Screech-Owls, and Bachman's Sparrows. **Bystre Lake** draws a variety of waterfowl in the winter, and herons, egrets, Osprey, Bald Eagles, and Barred Owls year round.

Suggested birding sites in close proximity have been grouped, with directions and mileage given from one site to the next in a continuous route. When you are deviating from this route to explore only one site or to pinpoint a search for a specific bird, it is suggested that you obtain a map of the county, so that you can plan a more direct route to the spot. When planning a birding trip, you may want to consider what birds you particularly want to see, and visit those sites early in the morning to maximize your chances of finding the desired birds. When looking for birds in areas that do not have parking spaces, it is recommended that you pull off the road completely before stopping.

Hernando County maps are available from Hernando County Tourism Bureau at 800-601-4580. If any unusual birds are sighted, please contact the Hernando Audubon Society with details about the species, location, and date of the sighting. The address is P.O. Box 1678, Brooksville, FL 34605. The phone number of some members are: Bev at 352-686-0460, and Clay at 352-592-4949. The Hernando Audubon Society web site is: [www://hernandoaudubon.org](http://www://hernandoaudubon.org).

### **COASTAL SWAMP**

Paralleling the Gulf of Mexico and extending inland 4 to 6 miles are tidal marshes, including the Aripeka, Weeki Wachee, and Chassahowitzka swamps. Aside from the residential developments in Hernando Beach and along the Weeki Wachee River, much of the county's coastal area is sparsely populated and relatively wild, with few roads, making access for bird watching difficult. The area is underlain by

limestone with elevations up to 10 feet, covered by tidal marshes, many small springs, and drainage runs. The vegetation is primarily salt marsh grasses, with palms, pines, cedars, and mixed hardwoods in hammocks.

To reach **Pine Island Park**, 7.5 miles from the traffic light at the intersection of US-19 and SR-50, go west on CR-550. At a junction in 5 miles, veer right on CR-495 (Pine Island Drive). Unfortunately, there are very few places you can safely pull off this road, but as you drive, look and listen along the salt marsh for rails, waders, and Marsh Wrens. When you reach the houses, check the power lines for Eurasian Collared-Doves. At the end of the road (2.5 miles) is a 3-acre county park



(open 8 a.m. to sunset; \$5 February 15 to November 14, \$2 after 5 pm; \$2 November 15 to February 14). This is the only publicly accessible sand beach with an open view of the gulf in the county. Birding is best early in the morning, as soon as the park opens, before the birds are flushed by sunbathers. Check for rails, shorebirds, gulls, terns, Marsh Wrens, herons and egrets, including an occasional Reddish Egret or Yellow-crowned Night-Heron. Magnificent Frigatebirds are rare here. Piping Plovers, a Lesser Black-backed Gull, and Gull-billed Terns have been seen here a few times in winter, and a Snowy Plover and Sandwich Tern in August. There are rest rooms and picnic tables here.

### **Yellow-crowned Night Heron**

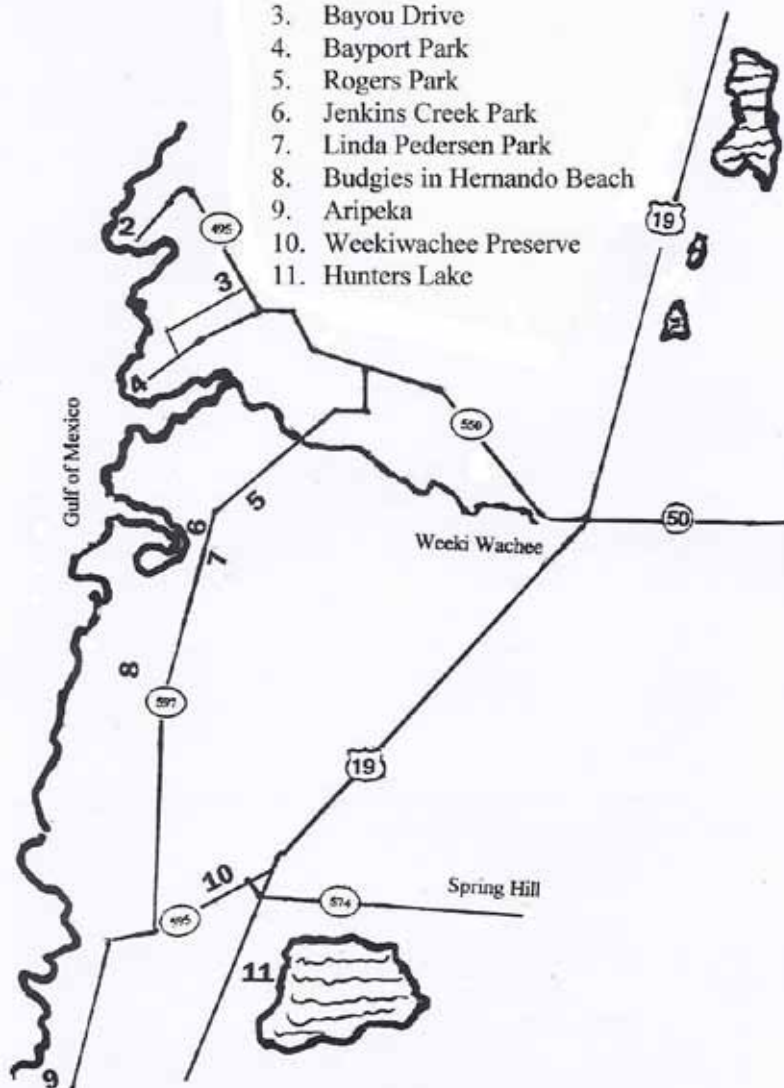
Reverse your route, and just before reaching the intersection of CR-550, turn right onto **Bayou Drive**, a 1.1-mile loop that offers more views of salt marshes, before ending on CR-550. At dusk, Great Horned Owls sometimes perch on snags near Bayou Drive and CR-495, and in daytime Red-tailed Hawks, Bald Eagles, or Ospreys are occasionally on the same snags. The wooded area on the left, near the left turn, sometimes has migrants.

At the end of Bayou Drive, turn right on CR-550 to **Bayport Park** (1.3 miles). In winter and early spring, look for Common Loons, Horned Grebes, Hooded and Red-breasted mergansers, and Buffleheads. At low tide, American Oystercatchers are occasionally seen feeding on the distant oyster bars. A Bald Eagle sometimes perches on the prominent snag across the river from the pier. Occasionally manatees can be seen here. There are rest rooms and picnic tables in this 7-acre park.

Return north on CR-550 1.6 miles to the junction with CR-495, bear right, and continue east on CR-550 another 1.6 miles to a right (south) turn on CR-597 (Shoal Line Boulevard). **Rogers Park** (\$5 February 15 to November 14, \$2 after 5 pm; \$2

## Western Hernando County

1. Chassahowitzka WMA
2. Pine Island
3. Bayou Drive
4. Bayport Park
5. Rogers Park
6. Jenkins Creek Park
7. Linda Pedersen Park
8. Budgies in Hernando Beach
9. Aripeka
10. Weekiwachee Preserve
11. Hunters Lake



November 15 to February 14), on the left in 1.5 miles, provides access to the Weeki Wachee River. The current is fast-running at 9 miles per hour, but it is possible to canoe or motor boat 7.5 miles upstream close to its source in Weeki Wachee Springs. En route birds that may be seen are Ospreys, herons, egrets, and occasionally Wood Storks and Limpkins, as well as alligators, river otters, and manatees. Alternately, canoes can be rented from the parking lot of the Weeki Wachee Springs State Park, with a pick-up at Rogers Park. It is also possible to head downstream from Rogers Park to the boat ramp at Bayport Park, mentioned above, but fewer birds will likely be seen. There are rest rooms and picnic tables in 3-acre Rogers Park.

Another 0.9 mile further south on CR-597 is 3-acre **Jenkins Creek Park** on the right. In winter, look for Swamp Sparrows on both sides of the footbridge, and for waterfowl in the creek. Visit 135-acre **Linda Pedersen Park at Jenkins Creek** across the road, where a forty-foot-high observation tower provides a panoramic view of the marsh. There is a second entrance to this park 0.2 mile further south. At low tide in winter, rails are sometimes seen in the marsh grass to the east of the road, after the U-turn, but before reaching the parking lot with restrooms. The oaks in this parking lot and picnic area sometimes attract songbirds. In winter, manatees may be seen in the canal west of the swimming area.

**Hernando Beach** is one of the few places in Florida where Budgerigars are regularly found, though the population has declined considerably. When looking for Budgies, it is important to drive with the windows down and listen for their parrot-like chatter. Budgies are often seen on the power lines, as well as in trees, and sometimes are in the company of European Starlings. Continue south on CR-597 another 2.2 miles and turn right on Gulfview Drive. Go to the end, turn left onto Gulf Winds Circle, and continue around to the right. On Gulf Winds Circle, Budgies are sometimes found near the intersection of Bayfront Circle.

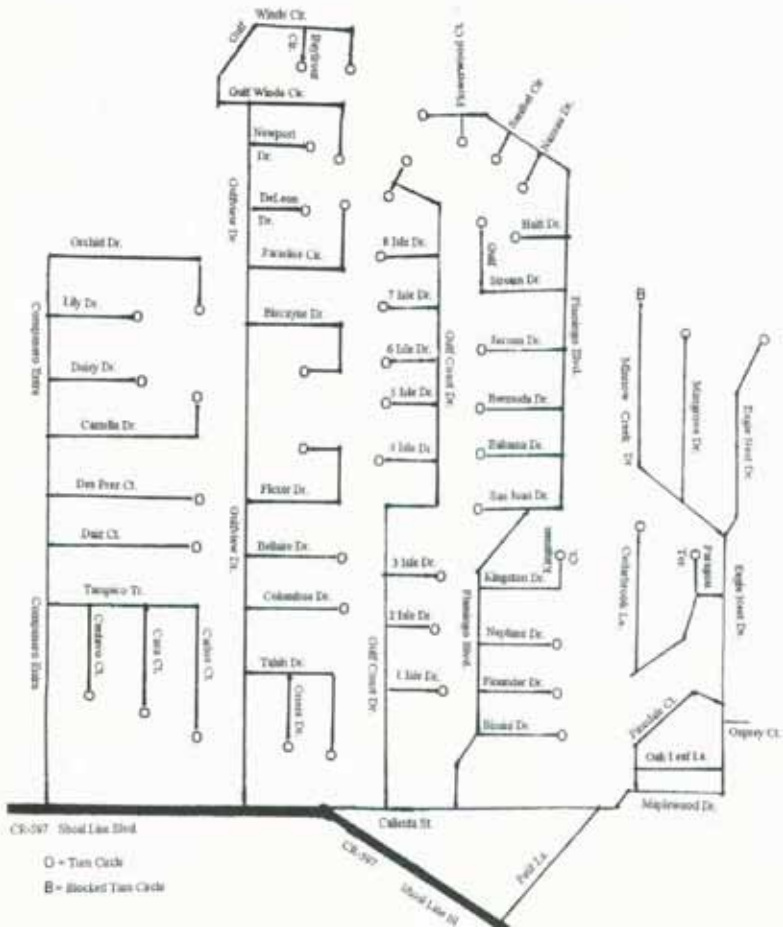


**Budgerigars**

Also look for Budgies on Companero Entra, one block south of Gulfview Drive, as well as Gulf Coast Drive and Flamingo Boulevard, which are just north of Gulfview Drive, both heading west from Calienta Street. If unsuccessful, look for Budgies by driving all the side streets in the area between the gulf and Calienta Street, from Eagle Nest Drive on the north to Companero Entra on the south (see map on next page).

Proceed south on CR-597 until it ends at the intersection with CR-595 (Osowaw Boulevard). Turn right and go 2 miles to the first of two bridges in **Aripeka**, which is just across the Pasco County line. Watch for hawks, Ospreys, etc., en route. From the bridges, look for shorebirds and waders.

# Gulf of Mexico



**Budgerigar Sites in  
Hernando County**

## GULF COASTAL LOWLANDS

The Gulf Coastal Lowlands are a discontinuous area between the Coastal Swamp and the Brooksville Ridge, with an elevation of between 10 and 50 feet. The area is mostly palmetto and pine flatwoods with numerous small ponds in areas of broad, grassy sloughs. There is some patchy development.

Southwest Florida Water Management District (known as Swiftmud) has purchased over 9,000 acres west of US-19, known as **Weekiwachee Preserve**. There is no charge to enter the preserve, which is open every day, sunrise to sunset, for hiking, biking and fishing. The second and fourth Saturdays of every month, cars are admitted only along the one-mile paved road. This entrance is 1.1 mile east of the intersection of Shoal Line Boulevard and Osowaw Boulevard. If coming from US-19 and Spring Hill Drive (CR-574), turn west from the traffic light onto Osowaw Boulevard (CR-595), and follow the road through a right and left turn, then turn right to the parking area for the preserve (0.5 mile). A trail map is posted inside the gate. There is a 5.5 mile loop trail, as well as many trails through wooded areas.

Since the preserve was purchased in 1995, 250 species of birds and 77 species of butterflies have been seen there. A checklist for birds and another for butterflies are available from the Swiftmud office: 2379 Broad Street, Brooksville, FL 34609; phone: 1-800-423-1476 or 352-796-7211 ext. 4470. Additional information is available on the web site: [www.swfwmd.state.fl.us](http://www.swfwmd.state.fl.us)

Because the lakes were created by mining, they are deep, with steep sides, and thus are not attractive to most birds. Mottled Ducks can be found on a few lakes. (Note: feral Mallard Ducks are interbreeding with Mottled Ducks with increasing frequency throughout the county, particularly in developed areas. A careful look is required to attempt to distinguish the resulting hybrids from Mottled Ducks.)

The surrounding wooded areas draw songbirds, especially during spring and fall migration. The best birding is often found by walking the paved road and turning left at the first trail. In December and January, American Woodcocks can be found displaying in open fields at dawn and dusk. Whip-poor-wills sometimes winter in the pines along the paved road, or linger during spring or fall migration. Short-tailed Hawks and Swallow-tailed Kites have been seen in the preserve in summer, and a White-tailed Kite was seen briefly in October 2000. Since 2008 wintering sparrows, includ-



**Swallow-tailed Kite**



ing Le Conte's, Henslow's, Grasshopper, and Swamp, have been banded in the preserve. Several of these banded birds returned to the same site in subsequent years.

### Le Conte's Sparrow

Hundreds of herons, egrets, ibis, blackbirds, and grackles roost at a lake inside the preserve. To reach that site, walk 1.1 to the end of the paved road. Walk through the pass-through next to the metal gate, and continue on the road another 0.1 mile to the lake on the right.

A second entrance to Weekiwachee Preserve is off Shoal Line Boulevard (CR-597). From the main parking lot of Weekiwachee Preserve, turn right onto Osowaw Boulevard, go west 1.1 mile, and turn right on Shoal Line Boulevard. Proceed 3.0 mile and turn right into the small preserve parking lot.



### BROOKSVILLE RIDGE

The Brooksville Ridge, chiefly at an elevation of 50 to 100 feet, with a portion climbing to 200 feet, occupies most of the county. It extends from US-19 eastward to US-301. This area is mostly rolling, deep, sandy ridges with numerous depressions and sinks. Natural vegetation is largely turkey oak, bluejack oak, post oak, scrub live oak, and scattered longleaf pines. In places there are sand-bottomed ponds. The highest areas support pine and hardwood stands, although portions have been cleared for crops and pastures. A large portion of this area is highly developed in two communities, Brooksville and Spring Hill.

While much habitat has been lost due to this development, a side effect has been the required construction of numerous retention areas to hold the runoff during heavy rains. The water level fluctuates in these many retention areas throughout the county, depending on the accumulated rainfall. These should be checked for ducks, waders, and shorebirds.

**Hunters Lake**, like all other lakes in the county, recedes greatly during periods of drought and has been fenced off and posted "no trespassing" in recent years. If it is reopened, to reach it from the traffic light at the intersection of US-19 and CR-574 (Spring Hill Drive), travel south on US-19 0.3 mile to the next traffic light at Applegate Drive. Turn left on Applegate Drive, and go 0.4 mile to Kenlake Avenue. Turn right, then immediately left at the beginning of the ballpark. Terns,

egrets, and herons are here year round, and ducks in winter. Least Bitterns and Purple Gallinules are sometimes here, particularly in the summer. When the boat ramp is open, a canoe or small boat can be launched to explore more of the lake.

Return to the intersection of Applegate Drive and US-19, and turn south 0.6 mile to a wetland on the east side of US-19, between a truck/trailer rental business and a car wash. When there is water, Purple Gallinule, Green Herons, and other marsh birds may be seen, and Great Blue Herons and Sandhill Cranes have nested here. An American Bittern spent several winters here. Since US-19 is a busy high-speed road, park well off the highway.



**Purple Gallinule**

The 33,919-acre **Chassahowitzka Wildlife Management Area** is 9.5 miles north of SR-50, on the west side of US-19. There is a sign at the entrance for it, and also for Hernando Sportsman’s Club. There is a fee of \$3 per person or \$6 per vehicle, which is waived for those with a Florida Wildlife Management Area permit or a sportsman’s or lifetime or disabled license. Go straight on Indigo Lane when the road to the Sportman’s Club turns right in half a mile. In 1.7 miles from the gate, there is a parking lot for two walking trails. Cypress Circle, a 1.5-mile loop that passes through a wetland, can attract a few migrants in the spring and fall. On Wild Turkey Trace, a three-quarter-mile loop trail, upland resident songbirds can be seen.

After driving out of this parking lot, Indigo Lane bears left and becomes 3 Bridge (formerly Swamp Grade) Road. Where the trees form a dark canopy over the road and there is water on either side of the road, migrating waterthrushes can be found in spring and fall, and an occasional Yellow-billed Cuckoo can be heard. Migrating Prairie Warblers are sometimes in the nearby willows. In the fall, Eastern Wood-Pewees frequent the open areas near the swamps. You can turn left on Rattlesnake Camp Road, and left on Gopher Road to complete the 9.7-mile loop.

Caution: Various types of hunting occur in the Chassahowitzka Wildlife Management Area from late September through early January and in late March. Information about hunting dates can be obtained by calling 352-754-6720 or at: <http://myfwc.com/viewing/recreation/wmas/lead/chassahowitzka/when-to-visit/>.

A pond at a wastewater treatment plant attracts shorebirds and waders in season. It is one mile north of SR-50 on Grove Road, which is the first street west of the

Suncoast Parkway. Park off the road and look through the chain-link fence. A spotting scope is useful.

This concludes the loop of birding sites in the western part of the county. Below are sites near Brooksville.

From the intersection of US-41 (Broad Street) and SR-50A (Jefferson Street) in Brooksville, go north on US-41 1.2 miles and turn right onto CR-480 (Croom Road). To reach a pasture that is often flooded near the Brooksville Country Club, drive east on Croom Road 1.7 miles. Turn right on Dogwood Estates Drive, then in 0.1 mile, turn right on **Wallien Drive**. In 0.1 mile view the pasture on the right that often attracts waders and shorebirds, when flooded. Continue straight ahead 0.5 mile to the pond on the left, which attracts a mixture of waders, shorebirds, and ducks.

Backtrack to Croom Road and continue east for the beginning of the **Croom Tract of the Withlacoochee State Forest**. In 2.6 miles, the road turns to a graded dirt road. In another 0.3 mile, American Woodcocks sometimes display in January in the pasture on the left. Park well off the road, on the south side, and watch the field from the gate just before dawn or just after dusk.

In another 1.8 miles, a power line joins the road on the right. On the north side of the road, between here and the next intersection 0.5 mile to the east is a good place to find Bachman's Sparrows singing from March to September. When singing, these sparrows are usually perched on a bare branch 6 to 15 feet above the ground, and are often closer than they sound, so approach them slowly. Other birds that nest in the Croom Tract include Swallow-tailed Kites, Wild Turkeys, Yellow-billed Cuckoos, Yellow-throated Vireos, Northern Parulas, and Summer Tanagers. All of the eastern woodpeckers can be found in the Croom Tract.

Caution: there are many sand roads penetrating the forest that get very soft when it hasn't rained for a while. It is best to navigate these with a high-clearance or 4-wheel-drive vehicle, to avoid getting stuck. "General gun" hunting occurs in Croom in mid-November to early December. Inquire about the specific dates at the Withlacoochee Forestry Center, 15019 Broad Street, Brooksville, FL 34601; 352-754-6896,

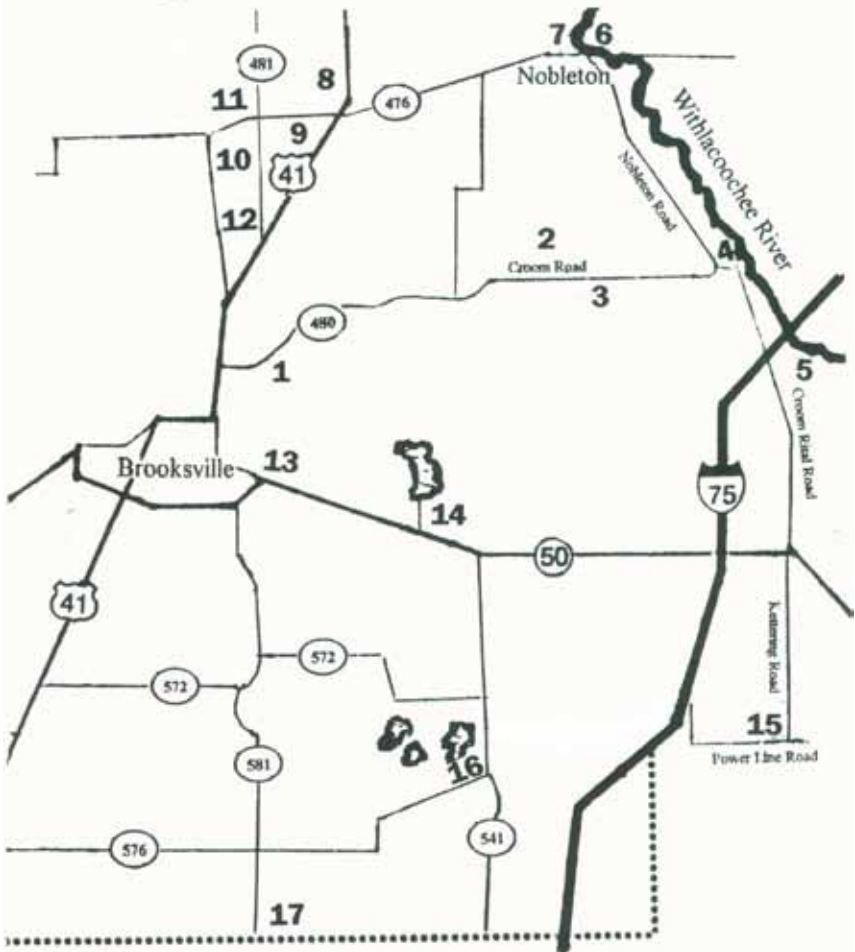


**Bachman's Sparrow**

[http://www.floridaforestservice.com/state\\_forests/withlacoochee\\_wma.html](http://www.floridaforestservice.com/state_forests/withlacoochee_wma.html)

## Brooksville Ridge

- |                              |                           |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Wallien Drive pond        | 10. Lake Lindsey          |
| 2. Croom Tract               | 11. Lake Lindsey cemetery |
| 3. Trail 9                   | 12. Big Pine              |
| 4. Trails to river           | 13. Brooksville cemetery  |
| 5. Silver Lake               | 14. Bystre Lake           |
| 6. Nobleton Wayside Park     | 15. Power Line Road       |
| 7. Lake Townsen river access | 16. Mountain Lake         |
| 8. McKethan Lake             | 17. Culbreath Road        |
| 9. Chinsegut Nature Center   |                           |



In the 1990s, the Croom population of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker was in a steep decline, due to lack of controlled burning during the critical growing season. But with a renewed effort by staff of the Florida Division of Forestry, with assistance from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, to restore the habitat, and with the translocation of woodpeckers from other areas, the population is now increasing. In recognition of the significant advances that have been made, in 2005 this project received the prestigious federal Red-cockaded Woodpecker Recovery Program Award for management of the Croom Tract. In 2012 the Croom and Citrus tracts of the Withlacoochee State Forest were designated Global Important Bird Areas by the National Audubon Society.

The woodpecker's active roosting cavity in a longleaf pine tree has clear fresh sap streams glistening near the cavity entrance. It is best to look for the woodpeckers at dawn, when the birds are just leaving their roosting trees, or an hour or two before dusk, when they are returning to those trees. Red-cockaded Woodpeckers usually leave the area soon after dawn to search for food, though they may still be located occasionally by listening for their soft call. Please take care not to disturb these woodpeckers during the nesting season.



### **Red-cockaded Woodpecker**

For Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, continue east on Croom Road, and turn right in 1.5 miles onto **Trail 9**. A sedan can usually navigate this road to the RCW cluster. Use the by-pass track around two puddles that can be treacherous even when they are dry. In 0.3 mile, look for RCWs roosting in the trees marked with white paint. Notice the nest boxes inserted into trees here, which supplement the available natural cavities.

For access to the Withlacoochee River, after returning to Croom Road, drive a total of 1.1 mile east, passing Nobleton Road and the paved rails-to-trails Withlacoochee State Trail and proceeding another 500 feet to a dirt road on the left. Follow this road, which is passable in all but the worst weather, 1500 feet to the river. This site is easy to reach in a car, and it is a popular fishing access site. The walking trail described below leads to a less frequently visited area with better birding.

This view of the river is located 0.5 mile further east on Croom Road. Park near the power line and substation on the left side of the road. Walk along the power line east to the river (0.4 mile), then walk along the river trail. This area is good if the



low spots have standing water. Ovenbirds and Hermit Thrushes are reliably found here in December.

Drive another 1.5 miles on Croom-Rital Road, and turn left at the sign for the **Silver Lake Recreation Area**, where there is a boat ramp and camping. Drive through the entrance gate (\$2 per person), and go straight to the day use area to check the river for birds. Limpkins may be found here, and Rock Pigeons nest under the I-75 bridge. The three separate campgrounds are restricted to registered campers.

### Limpkin

Driving about 3 miles south on Croom-Rital Road, on the left you will find the Ridge Manor trailhead for **River Trail**. Here is also a parking lot and restroom for the 46-mile rails-to-trails Withlacoochee State Trail. The River Trail is 5.2 mile miles long and terminates in the Silver Lake Recreation Area. To find the beginning of the trail, walk past the picnic table, and through the gate. In the open pasture, Eastern Bluebirds, Red-headed Woodpeckers, and American Kestrels may be found. A flock of songbirds can occasionally be found in the woods as the trail follows alongside the Withlacoochee River. Some birders walk along the river a while before retracing their steps.

To end the tour now, continue south on Croom-Rital Road about half a mile to the junction of SR-50. Otherwise, retrace your route to the fork of Croom and Nobleton roads, and turn right onto Nobleton Road.

For another access to the **Withlacoochee River**, from the intersection of Croom and Nobleton roads, proceed north on Nobleton Road 1.9 miles. Park off the road at a dirt track on the right and walk this track a short distance through the woods to the paved bikeway. Walk left on the bikeway 300 feet to a sign on the right marked “river path” and follow this trail about 500 feet to the river. Limpkins, Wood Storks, and Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks have been found here, as well as at other viewpoints along the river. Scan the sky here



**Barred Owl and chick**

and at other river sites, looking for Swallow-tailed Kites and Short-tailed Hawks in the spring and summer.

In 2.9 miles from the intersection of Croom and Nobleton roads, the road becomes pavement, and is called Edgewater Avenue. At this point you have left the Withlacoochee State Forest. In 1.0 mile, Edgewater Avenue intersects with CR-476 (Lake Lindsey Road).

Directly across the street is a 2-acre county park, **Nobleton Wayside Park**, with a boat ramp and picnic tables. Stop briefly to scan the river edge. Nobleton Outpost, 0.2 mile to the east, rents canoes and offers drop-off transportation to launch sites. A pleasant birding experience is the 10-mile trip from Silver Lake downstream to Nobleton.

**Lake Townsen Regional Park**, where there are restrooms and picnic tables, is on CR-476 0.9 mile west of Nobleton Wayside Park. The fishing pier and boat ramp provide a good view of a section of the Withlacoochee River where Limpkins are often seen and Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks occasionally fly by. The current fee for parking in the boat ramp area is \$5, but there is free parking in the main section of the park. From there walk 700 feet east on the bikeway, and cross the berm when you see a covered bench on the left. At this spot you will also see a bat box on a tall pole, and a white sign marked R809 just beyond it.



#### **Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks and their chicks**

Continue west on CR-476 1.5 miles to Daly Road. This 1.4-mile road through pastureland offers possible sightings of Northern Harriers, American Kestrels, and other hawks in winter, as well as Eastern Bluebirds, Eastern Meadowlarks, and other grassland birds. Some years Burrowing Owls have nested within sight of the road.

Returning to CR-476, drive west 2.4 miles, turn right (north) on US-41, and in 0.5 mile, turn left at the wooden gate across from the Withlacoochee State Forest sign (which is easy to miss) to enter **McKethan Lake** (open at 8 a.m., \$2 per person).

A two-mile nature trail winds through the woods. The combination of hardwood hammock, marsh, and open water

**Red-headed Woodpecker**

provides good habitat for a variety of birds. Herons, egrets, ducks, and songbirds can be found here, though the water level fluctuates with rainfall. There are picnic tables and rest rooms.



Return to the intersection of US-41 and CR-476, and turn right (west). In 1.0 mile, turn left at the sign for **Chinsegut Conservation Center**, a 408-acre tract managed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. The center is open to the public every Friday and Saturday, from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. There is a nature trail through turkey oak, longleaf pine, and hardwood hammocks circling a prairie. As result of efforts to restore the pine habitat, Red-headed Woodpeckers are seen here frequently. Another 3.5-mile trail links Chinsegut Conservation Center to nearby Big Pine (described below). This trail is open every day during daylight hours. Trailheads are located at Chinsegut Conservation Center, Big Pine, and midway at the junction of US-41 and Snow Memorial Highway. The public is invited to attend the scheduled activities and talks that occur at Chinsegut Conservation Center every month throughout the year. For information about these events, call 352-754-6722, or look at the web site at: <http://myfwc.com/education/outdoor-skills/chinsegut/>

Turn left (west) on CR-476, and drive 0.4 mile to the intersection of CR-481 (Snow Memorial Road). Turn left (south), and in 0.3 mile, turn right at Lake Village Lane. Proceed to the end, turn left, and immediately right, for the **Lake Lindsey** public boat ramp. A very few Purple Gallinules are resident on this lake, and Wood Ducks are here year round. Though you can't get much of a view of the lake from the boat



**Wood Ducks**

ramp, with a scope it may be possible to spot the birds walking on the lily pads. Return to CR-481, and turn left (north). In 0.4 miles, turn left on Lake Lindsey Road (CR-476). The cem-



etry on the right (0.4 miles) can attract songbirds in migration and winter. Quickly scan the pasture to the west, as shorebirds and ducks are sometimes attracted when there is water at the low point of this field.

Continue south on CR-476 and turn left at the first intersection, Old Crystal River Road (0.9 mile). In 2 miles, you will see a sign for the parking area for 420-acre **Big Pine** on the left. Several miles of trails bisect this second largest contiguous tract of old-growth longleaf pine in Florida, which includes some pine trees that are over 250 years old.

Typical pine woodland resident birds can be found there. If approached quietly, Wood Ducks may be found in the wetland at the far end. Sign in at the sign-in box, and pick up a trail map at the kiosk. A trailhead for the trail (mentioned above) to Chinsegut Conservation Center is located here.

Turning left from Big Pine parking area, you will reach US-41 in 0.5 mile.

To reach **Perry Oldenburg Mitigation Park**, head north 2.3 miles on US-41, from the intersection of Old Crystal River Road. Turn right on Deer Run Road and bear left. Drive 1.3 miles to the sign for the park. Stay in the grassy right lane, since the left lane is a private driveway. This 385-acre park was established in 1995 as a gopher tortoise mitigation preserve. Both resident and migrant songbirds can be seen along the 1.5-mile trail winding through sandhills and hardwood hammocks. American Kestrels and Eastern Screech-Owls reside here, and in 2004 a pair of Mississippi Kites raised two chicks from the first known nest in the county.



**American Kestrel**

This concludes this birding route loop. The following birding sites are scattered.

The **Northwest Waste Management Facility** is located on US-98, 10.4 miles north of the intersection of SR-50A and US-98 in Brooksville. The entrance is on the left, on Landfill Drive, and is well marked. Birders need to call one day in advance to make arrangements to bird the landfill: 352-754-4113.

Tell the operator at the scale house that you are birdwatching and ask where you are permitted to bird. They are accommodating, but please don't interfere with their

work, and avoid the trucks and other equipment. Around the edge of the retention pond, the usual herons and egrets can be found, along with an occasional shorebird. Palm Warblers and sparrows use the grassy areas along the road in winter. The flocks of starlings, cowbirds, blackbirds, and grackles might contain Yellow-headed Blackbirds or tropical cowbirds.

Landfill birding is best in winter. Ring-necked Ducks, Blue-winged Teals, Buffleheads, and Hooded Mergansers use the pond then, and gulls congregate around the garbage disposal area. The gulls are mostly Ring-billed and Laughing, with a few Herring, but a careful look might pick out something unusual from the thousands of birds present. The gulls and garbage attract Bald Eagles, which are present from December to February each year. As many as ten or twelve can sometimes be seen at one time by scanning the trees bordering the property.

The **Brooksville cemetery**, like many old cemeteries, can attract a variety of birdlife. From the intersection of SR-50 and SR-50A, on the east side of Brooksville, drive north several blocks on Jasmine Road. Turn left on Olmes Road, and immediately turn right into the cemetery.

To reach **Bystre Lake**, from the eastern intersection of SR-50 and SR-50A, head east on SR-50 2.8 miles. Turn north on Clayton Road, drive 0.5 mile to the end of the road, and turn right into the grassy field. This small, undeveloped county property provides a view of a portion of the lake. The rest of the lake front is private property. Bystre Lake attracts a variety of waterfowl in winter, as well as White Pelicans and sometimes Glossy Ibis. Year-round residents include herons, egrets, White Ibis, Ospreys, and Barred Owls. Limpkins can sometimes be seen or heard here, and Roseate Spoonbills are occasionally seen in the summer.



For a location for Burrowing Owls, from the intersection of SR-50 and Interstate-75, head east one mile and turn right at the traffic light on Kettering Road. (Turning left would take you to Silver Lake via Croom-Rital Road, as described previously.) In 1.6 miles, just past the Wal-Mart distribution center, the road becomes dirt. As you drive south on Kettering Road in the winter, scan for American Pipits, sparrows, and raptors. Kettering ends at **Power Line Road**. Go right (west) 0.5 mile to the hilltop, and in the pasture

### **Burrowing Owl**

on the right with the lone oak tree, check the fence posts and grass for Burrowing Owls. Unfortunately, a housing development is planned for this area.

In June and early July Swallow-tailed Kites, along with occasional Mississippi Kites, are frequently seen flying above pastures on Kettering Road, Power Line Road, and Lockhart Road (at the western end of Power Line Road), as well as pastures to the north along SR-50.

To reach a pond that attract waders year round and wintering ducks, return to SR-50 and turn west. At the traffic light at CR-541 (Spring Lake Highway), turn left. Drive south 2.8 miles, and turn right on Mountain Lake Road. Drive 0.5 mile to the **Mountain Lake** boat ramp at the end of the road.

Return to CR-541, continue north 0.6 miles to the intersection with CR-572 (Powell Road), and turn left. Proceed west 5.4 miles to the intersection with CR-581 (**Culbreath Road**). Drive south on CR-581 4.2 miles to the Hernando/Pasco county border. Concentrations of Sandhill Cranes are often seen here in the winter, as well as a mile further south, on the west side of the road. While most of these cranes migrate north in the spring, some Sandhill Cranes are permanent residents here, and are usually seen in small family groups scattered throughout the county.

**Cypress Lake Preserve** (324 acres) is open for hiking. Take SR-50 east from I-75, approximately two miles. Once you cross the Withlacoochee River, turn left on Paul R. Steckle Lane. Drive in front of the fire house, and again turn left on the outer road. In about 200 yards, you will see the sign “Cypress Lakes Preserve.” Turn right to a small parking lot at the caretaker’s residence. Trails are marked with blazes. The ponds attract a few ducks, along with herons and egrets, and the woods draw both migratory and resident songbirds, as well as Wild Turkeys.



**Wild Turkey**

### **EASTERN PORTION**

The portion of the county east of US-301 is a plain at an elevation of 75 to 85 feet, mostly covered by pine and palmetto flatwoods, with numerous ponds and depressions of broad, grassy sloughs. Most of the area is in natural vegetation and has been preserved for woodland and wildlife.

Areas of the **Richloam Tract of the Withlacoochee State Forest** are outlined

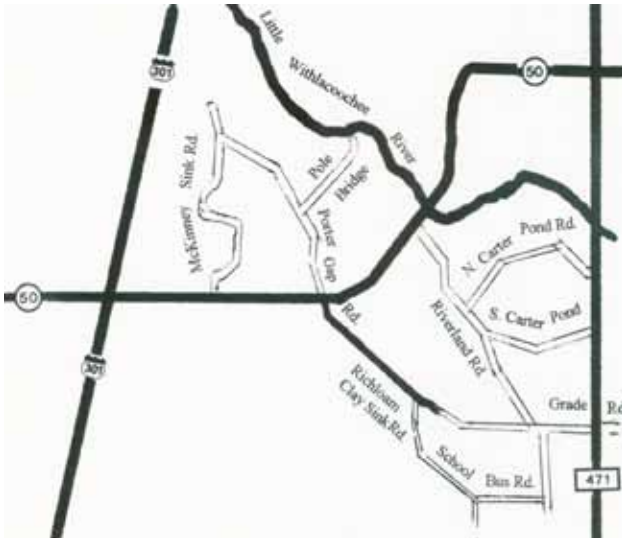
**Brown-headed Nuthatch**



below. To make a loop route near the Little Withlacoochee River, which can be good during migration, from the intersection of SR-50 and US-301, head east on SR-50 1.4 miles to McKinney Sink Road on the left. Drive north on this road, parking and walking sections of the road that look promising. In 3.0 miles, turn right on Porter Gap Road. In 1.8 miles, turn left on Pole Bridge Road and drive 1.5 miles until the road ends at the Little Withlacoochee River. Return to Porter Gap Road, turn left, and drive 1.2 miles to the junction of SR-50.

Cross SR-50 and continue south on Porter Gap Road (2.9 miles east of US-301) to reach habitat of Brown-headed Nuthatches. Soon this road turns left and becomes Richloam Clay Sink Road. In another mile,

the paved road turns to a good graded road. Nuthatch habitat begins east of School Bus Road (1.3 miles). When Richloam Clay Sink Road turns south, continue looking for Nuthatches on eastbound Grade Road, which ends at SR-471 (2.3 miles from School Bus Road).



To search more for Nuthatches on South and North Carter Pond Roads, turn left (north) on SR-471. Unlabeled South Carter Pond Road is 1.4 mile north, on the left, and North Carter Pond Road is 0.7 mile further north, also heading west. Note that both these sandy roads may not be passable without a high-clearance or 4-wheel-drive vehicle.

**Richloam Tract of Withlacoochee State Forest**

Caution: There is “general gun” hunting in Richloam from November to early January, and Wild Turkey hunting in mid-March to mid-April. Inquire about the specific dates at the Withlacoochee Forestry Center, 15019 Broad Street, Brooksville, FL 34601; phone: 352-754-6896; or check the web site: [http://www.floridaforests-service.com/state\\_forests/withlacoochee\\_wma.html](http://www.floridaforests-service.com/state_forests/withlacoochee_wma.html)

### **BIRDING "HOT SPOTS"**

Local birders have found that there are several excellent parks for birding near Hernando County. Highly recommended during both migration and year around are Honeymoon Island State Park in Dunedin and Ft. De Soto County Park at the southern tip of St. Petersburg. Saddle Creek Park in Lakeland can be excellent for migrating warblers in September and early October, and for Limpkins all year.

Reports of bird sightings from throughout Florida are posted on Listservers called “Birdbrains” and “FloridaBirds-L.” These can be read on the Internet by going to [www.birdingonthe.net](http://www.birdingonthe.net) and clicking on the “regional/specialty” section and scrolling down to “Eastern US.” Reports are also submitted to <http://ebird.org>.



**Pileated Woodpecker and chicks**

# HERNANDO COUNTY BIRD CHECKLIST

This checklist presents a list of 304 birds of Hernando County. The list is arranged taxonomically.

Many birds have strict habitat preferences, small local populations, and/or irregular migration patterns. The symbols used in this checklist are defined as follows:

**Seasons:**

SP	Spring	March-May
SU	Summer	June-July
FA	Fall	August-November
WI	Winter	December-February

**Probability of Sighting:**

- C Common: These birds should be seen or heard in suitable habitat.
- U Uncommon: These birds are present, but not certain to be seen or heard, because of their low numbers, behavior, habitat, or distribution.
- O Occasional: These birds are only seen a few times in a season. Many of them are only in the county during migration.
- R Rare: These birds are not expected to be seen every year. They occur in low numbers and may be unreported for a number of years. Also included are erratics, those birds that are common some years and scarce or missing other years.
- X Accidental: These birds were seen outside of their normal range.
- \* Indicates breeding in the county.

	SP	SU	FA	WI
<b>Black-bellied Whistling-Duck *</b> .....	U	U	U	U
<b>Fulvous Whistling-Duck</b> .....	R		R	R
<b>Snow Goose</b> .....	R		R	R
<b>Canada Goose</b> .....	R		R	R
<b>Muscovy *</b> .....	C	C	C	C
<b>Wood Duck *</b> .....	C	C	C	C
<b>Gadwall</b> .....	U		U	U
<b>American Wigeon</b> .....	U		U	U
<b>American Black Duck</b> .....	R		R	R

	SP	SU	FA	WI
Mallard * .....	O		O	O
Mottled Duck * .....	C	C	C	C
Blue-winged Teal .....	C		C	C
Cinnamon Teal .....				R
Northern Shoveler .....	U		U	U
Northern Pintail .....	O		O	O
Green-winged Teal .....	U		U	U
Canvasback .....	O		O	O
Redhead .....	U	R	U	U
Ring-necked Duck .....	C		C	C
Greater Scaup .....	O		O	O
Lesser Scaup .....	C	R	C	C
Surf Scoter .....				R
Black Scoter .....				R
Long-tailed Duck .....				R
Bufflehead .....	C		U	C
Common Goldeneye .....	O			O
Hooded Merganser .....	C		C	C
Common Merganser .....				R
Red-breasted Merganser .....	C	R	C	C
Ruddy Duck .....	O		O	O
Northern Bobwhite * .....	U	U	U	U
Wild Turkey * .....	C	C	C	C
Red-throated Loon .....				R
Common Loon .....	U	R	U	C
Pied-billed Grebe * .....	C	U	C	C
Horned Grebe .....	U		U	C
Wood Stork * .....	C	C	C	C
Magnificent Frigatebird .....	O	O	O	R
Northern Gannet .....	O	R	O	O
Double-crested Cormorant * .....	C	C	C	C
Anhinga * .....	C	C	C	C

	SP	SU	FA	WI
American White Pelican .....	U		U	U
Brown Pelican * .....	C	C	C	C
American Bittern .....	O	R	O	O
Least Bittern * .....	U	U	U	O
Great Blue Heron * .....	C	C	C	C
Great Egret * .....	C	C	C	C
Snowy Egret * .....	C	C	C	C
Little Blue Heron * .....	C	C	C	C
Tricolored Heron * .....	C	C	C	C
Reddish Egret .....	U	U	U	U
Cattle Egret * .....	C	C	C	C
Green Heron * .....	C	C	C	C
Black-crowned Night-Heron * .....	U	U	U	U
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron * .....	U	U	U	U
White Ibis * .....	C	C	C	C
Glossy Ibis .....	O	O	O	U
White-faced Ibis .....	R		R	R
Roseate Spoonbill .....	U	U	U	U
Black Vulture * .....	C	C	C	C
Turkey Vulture * .....	C	C	C	C
Osprey * .....	C	C	C	C
Swallow-tailed Kite * .....	U	U	U	X
White-tailed Kite .....			R	
Snail Kite .....			R	
Mississippi Kite * .....	O	O	O	
Bald Eagle * .....	C	O	C	C
Northern Harrier .....	C		C	C
Sharp-shinned Hawk .....	U		U	U
Cooper's Hawk * .....	U	U	U	U
Red-shouldered Hawk * .....	C	C	C	C
Broad-winged Hawk .....	O		O	R
Short-tailed Hawk * .....	O	O	O	
Red-tailed Hawk * .....	C	U	C	C
Golden Eagle .....				X



	SP	SU	FA	WI
Crested Caracara . . . . .				X
American Kestrel * . . . . .	C	C	C	C
Merlin . . . . .	O		O	O
Peregrine Falcon . . . . .	O		O	O
Yellow Rail . . . . .	R		R	R
Black Rail * . . . . .	U	U	U	U
Clapper Rail * . . . . .	C	C	C	C
King Rail * . . . . .	U	U	U	U
Virginia Rail . . . . .	U		U	U
Sora . . . . .	U		U	U
Purple Gallinule * . . . . .	U	U	U	U
Common Gallinule * . . . . .	C	C	C	C
American Coot . . . . .	C	U	C	C
Limpkin * . . . . .	U	U	U	U
Sandhill Crane * . . . . .	C	C	C	C
Black-bellied Plover . . . . .	C	O	C	C
American Golden-Plover . . . . .				R
Snowy Plover . . . . .	R	R	R	R
Wilson's Plover * . . . . .	U	U	U	O
Semipalmated Plover . . . . .	C	U	C	C
Piping Plover . . . . .	R		R	R
Killdeer * . . . . .	C	C	C	C
American Oystercatcher * . . . . .	U	U	U	U
Black-necked Stilt * . . . . .	U	U	U	O
American Avocet . . . . .			R	R
Spotted Sandpiper . . . . .	U		U	U
Solitary Sandpiper . . . . .	O		O	R
Greater Yellowlegs . . . . .	C	O	C	C
Willet * . . . . .	C	C	C	C
Lesser Yellowlegs . . . . .	C	O	C	C
Whimbrel . . . . .	R		R	R
Long-billed Curlew . . . . .				R
Marbled Godwit . . . . .				R
Ruddy Turnstone . . . . .	U	U	U	U

	SP	SU	FA	WI
Red Knot . . . . .	O		O	O
Sanderling . . . . .	U		U	U
Semipalmated Sandpiper . . . . .	U		U	
Western Sandpiper . . . . .	U	O	U	U
Least Sandpiper . . . . .	C	O	C	C
White-rumped Sandpiper . . . . .	O	O	O	
Pectoral Sandpiper . . . . .	O		O	
Dunlin . . . . .	C	R	C	C
Stilt Sandpiper . . . . .	O		O	O
Short-billed Dowitcher . . . . .	C		C	C
Long-billed Dowitcher . . . . .	U		U	U
Wilson's Snipe . . . . .	U		U	C
American Woodcock * . . . . .	U		U	U
Wilson's Phalarope . . . . .			R	
Red-necked Phalarope . . . . .				R
Bonaparte's Gull . . . . .	O		O	O
Laughing Gull . . . . .	C	C	C	C
Ring-billed Gull . . . . .	C	O	C	C
Herring Gull . . . . .	U	O	U	U
Lesser Black-backed Gull . . . . .				R
Great Black-backed Gull . . . . .				R
Least Tern * . . . . .	U	U	U	
Gull-billed Tern . . . . .	O		O	O
Caspian Tern . . . . .	U	O	U	U
Black Tern . . . . .	O	O	O	
Common Tern . . . . .	O		O	
Forster's Tern . . . . .	C		C	C
Royal Tern . . . . .	C	C	C	C
Sandwich Tern . . . . .	O	O	O	O
Black Skimmer . . . . .	C	U	C	C
Pomarine Jaeger . . . . .				R
Rock Pigeon * . . . . .	U	U	U	U
Eurasian Collared-Dove * . . . . .	C	C	C	C
White-winged Dove * . . . . .	U	U	U	U

	SP	SU	FA	WI
Mourning Dove *	C	C	C	C
Common Ground-Dove *	C	C	C	C
Budgerigar *	U	U	U	U
Monk Parakeet *	R	R	R	R
Yellow-billed Cuckoo *	U	U	U	
Black-billed Cuckoo	R		R	
Barn Owl *	O	O	O	O
Eastern Screech-Owl *	C	C	C	C
Great Horned Owl *	C	C	C	C
Burrowing Owl *	U	U	U	U
Barred Owl *	C	C	C	C
Short-eared Owl				R
Common Nighthawk *	C	C	C	
Chuck-will's-widow *	C	C	C	
Eastern Whip-poor-will	U		U	U
Chimney Swift *	C	C	C	
Vaux's Swift				R
Ruby-throated Hummingbird *	C	U	C	O
Black-chinned Hummingbird				O
Rufous Hummingbird	O		O	O
Allen's Hummingbird				R
Belted Kingfisher	U	O	C	C
Red-headed Woodpecker *	C	C	C	C
Red-bellied Woodpecker *	C	C	C	C
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	U		U	U
Downy Woodpecker *	C	C	C	C
Hairy Woodpecker *	U	U	U	U
Red-cockaded Woodpecker *	U	U	U	U
Northern Flicker *	C	C	C	C
Pileated Woodpecker *	C	C	C	C
Eastern Wood-Pewee	U		U	
Acadian Flycatcher	O	R	O	
Least Flycatcher	O		O	
Eastern Phoebe	C		C	C

	SP	SU	FA	WI
Great Crested Flycatcher *	C	C	C	R
Western Kingbird	R		R	R
Eastern Kingbird *	U	O	U	R
Gray Kingbird *	O	O	O	
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher	R		R	R
Loggerhead Shrike *	C	U	C	C
White-eyed Vireo *	C	C	C	C
Yellow-throated Vireo *	C	C	U	
Blue-headed Vireo	C		U	C
Red-eyed Vireo *	C	C	C	
Blue Jay *	C	C	C	C
Florida Scrub-Jay *	O	O	O	O
American Crow *	C	C	C	C
Fish Crow *	C	C	C	C
Purple Martin *	C	C	C	U
Tree Swallow	C		U	C
Northern Rough-winged Swallow *	U	U	U	R
Bank Swallow	U		U	
Cliff Swallow	O		O	
Barn Swallow *	C	C	C	R
Carolina Chickadee *	C	C	C	C
Tufted Titmouse *	C	C	C	C
Red-breasted Nuthatch	R		R	R
White-breasted Nuthatch	R		R	R
Brown-headed Nuthatch *	U	U	U	U
Brown Creeper				R
Carolina Wren *	C	C	C	C
House Wren	C		C	C
Winter Wren				R
Sedge Wren	C		C	C
Marsh Wren *	C	C	C	C
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher *	C	C	C	C
Golden-crowned Kinglet				O
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	C		C	C

	SP	SU	FA	WI
Eastern Bluebird *	C	C	C	C
Veery	O		O	
Gray-cheeked Thrush	O		O	
Swainson's Thrush	O		O	
Hermit Thrush	U		U	U
Wood Thrush	O		O	
American Robin	C		C	C
Gray Catbird	C	R	C	C
Northern Mockingbird *	C	C	C	C
Brown Thrasher *	C	C	C	U
European Starling *	C	C	C	C
American Pipit	U		U	U
Cedar Waxwing	U		O	U
Ovenbird	U		U	U
Worm-eating Warbler	O		O	
Louisiana Waterthrush	O	R	O	
Northern Waterthrush	O		O	R
Golden-winged Warbler	O		O	
Blue-winged Warbler	O		O	R
Black-and-white Warbler	U	O	U	C
Prothonotary Warbler *	U	U	U	
Swainson's Warbler	R		R	
Tennessee Warbler	O		O	
Orange-crowned Warbler	O		O	O
Nashville Warbler			R	R
Connecticut Warbler	R			
Kentucky Warbler	O		O	
Common Yellowthroat *	C	C	C	C
Hooded Warbler	U		U	
American Redstart	U		U	O
Cape May Warbler	O		O	R
Cerulean Warbler	O		O	
Northern Parula *	C	C	C	O
Magnolia Warbler	O		O	

	SP	SU	FA	WI
Bay-breasted Warbler .....	R		R	
Blackburnian Warbler .....	O		O	
Yellow Warbler .....	U		U	R
Chestnut-sided Warbler .....	O		O	
Blackpoll Warbler .....	O		R	
Black-throated Blue Warbler .....	O		O	R
Palm Warbler .....	C		C	C
Pine Warbler * .....	C	C	C	C
Yellow-rumped Warbler .....	C		C	C
Yellow-throated Warbler * .....	C	U	C	U
Prairie Warbler .....	C	O	U	U
Black-throated Green Warbler .....	O		O	O
Wilson's Warbler .....	O		O	
Yellow-breasted Chat .....	O		O	
Eastern Towhee * .....	C	C	C	C
Bachman's Sparrow * .....	C	C	C	U
Chipping Sparrow .....	C		C	C
Clay-colored Sparrow .....			R	R
Field Sparrow .....	O		O	O
Vesper Sparrow .....	U		U	U
Lark Sparrow .....	R		R	R
Savannah Sparrow .....	C		C	C
Grasshopper Sparrow .....	U		U	U
Henslow's Sparrow .....	U		U	U
Le Conte's Sparrow .....	U		U	U
Nelson's Sparrow .....	O		O	O
Saltmarsh Sparrow .....				R
Seaside Sparrow * .....	U	U	U	U
Song Sparrow .....	U		U	U
Lincoln's Sparrow .....			O	O
Swamp Sparrow .....	C		C	C
White-throated Sparrow .....	O		O	O
White-crowned Sparrow .....			O	O
Dark-eyed Junco .....	R		R	R

	SP	SU	FA	WI
Summer Tanager .....	C	C	C	R
Scarlet Tanager .....	O		O	
Western Tanager .....				R
Northern Cardinal * .....	C	C	C	C
Rose-breasted Grosbeak .....	O		O	
Blue Grosbeak * .....	U	U	U	
Indigo Bunting * .....	U	O	U	O
Painted Bunting .....	O		O	O
Bobolink .....	O		R	
Red-winged Blackbird * .....	C	C	C	C
Eastern Meadowlark * .....	C	C	C	C
Yellow-headed Blackbird .....	R		R	R
Rusty Blackbird .....				R
Brewer's Blackbird .....	R			R
Common Grackle * .....	C	C	C	C
Boat-tailed Grackle * .....	C	C	C	C
Shiny Cowbird .....	R			
Brown-headed Cowbird * .....	C	C	C	C
Orchard Oriole .....	O	O	O	R
Baltimore Oriole .....	O		O	O
Purple Finch .....				R
House Finch * .....	U	U	U	U
Pine Siskin .....	R		R	R
American Goldfinch .....	U		C	C
House Sparrow * .....	C	C	C	C



Carolina Wren



# Birding Sites in Hernando County

This booklet is designed to help local and visiting birders by indicating the localities and times of year when birds are most likely to be found in Hernando County.

The accompanying birding checklist indicates the seasonal distribution and probability of finding each species in suitable habitat.



This guide prepared in August 2012 by  
**Hernando Audubon Society**  
PO Box 1678, Brooksville, FL 34605  
[www.hernandoaudubon.org](http://www.hernandoaudubon.org)

Printed and distributed by  
**Hernando Audubon Society** and **Hernando County Tourism Bureau**  
31085 Cortez Boulevard, Brooksville, FL 34602 • 800.601.4580 • 352.754.4405  
[www.naturallyhernando.org](http://www.naturallyhernando.org)

Cover photos: Todd Dripps, Carole Knudson and others. Cover design by jswCreative  
[www.jswcreative.com](http://www.jswcreative.com)