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Laughing Gull Breeds in Northeast Florida

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there has been an increase in the number of cranes wintering on agricultural lands in Marion and Lake Counties. Three birds color marked on Paynes Prairie in February 1974 and February 1976 were subsequently observed wintering on areas in these two counties during 1975 and 1977. Many cranes which previously wintered on Paynes Prairie now are apparently wintering elsewhere.

Since State acquisition, land-use practices on the prairie have changed substantially. The intensity of cattle grazing was reduced and finally eliminated in 1975. The effects of grazing were to be replaced with fire and water management, but increases in vegetation height have made much of the prairie unattractive to cranes. Some increased crane use has resulted from uncontrolled burning of several hundred acres during 1976-77. About 95 cranes foraged throughout the winter on these burned areas. However, the increased crane use noted for the roost area during 1977 was probably the result of expanded cultivation and grazing on the private land adjacent to the state holdings. It is hoped that controlled burning can be continued and expanded and that other positive management practices will be implemented. It would be unfortunate if an area so uniquely suited for Sandhill Cranes did not support an appropriate winter population.— Stephen A. Nesbitt, *Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Wildlife Research Laboratory, 4005 S Main Street, Gainesville, Florida 32601.*

Laughing Gull breeds in northeast Florida. —Although the Laughing Gull (*Larus atricilla*) is widely distributed along the Florida coast during the breeding season, it only breeds in a few widely scattered localities, chiefly the Tampa Bay area (Howell 1932). The species has recently established a large breeding colony at Merritt Island, Brevard County, which contained 1050 nests in June 1974 (Jim Baker in Ogden 1974) and 1350 pairs in 1975 (A. E. Ellis in Ogden 1975). In "about 1866" the species bred in "large numbers" on an island in the Halifax River near Port Orange, Volusia County (Howell 1932).

On 30 May 1976 we found a single pair of Laughing Gulls nesting on (Big) Bird Island in Nassau Sound, Duval County, Florida. The nest contained two eggs, and we observed an adult incubating. On 8 June Loftin returned during a very high tide and found the two eggs awash. The adults were wheeling and screaming overhead. On 10 July the first nest was gone, but another nest, also with two eggs, was about 10 m from where the first had been. This is very late for a first nest of this species in Florida (Dinsmore and Schreiber 1974), therefore it was probably a second effort by the same pair of birds. On 25 July there were two downy chicks in the nest. On 1 August no young

could be located, but they could easily have been hidden in the dense vegetation somewhere on the island, as the adults were calling excitedly overhead. No further sign of the young was seen on subsequent visits to the area.

This is apparently the first breeding record of Laughing Gulls in northeastern Florida. The species does not breed in Georgia (Denton and Hopkins 1969, Burleigh 1958). According to Sprunt and Chamberlain (1970), the species is "an abundant breeding bird along the South Carolina coast." The southernmost nesting they mention is St. Helena Sound, Beaufort County, which is roughly 150 miles north of our record at Bird Island.

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A Razorbill at St. George Island, Florida. — On 11 April 1976, on the north side of St. George Island, Franklin County, Florida, we discovered an alcid swimming with several Laughing Gulls (*Larus atricilla*) and a Common Loon (*Gavia immer*) near old dock pilings. The alcid, about half the size of the loon, was observed carefully for about 15 minutes as it dove infrequently and then swam out into the sound and eventually out of binocular range.

Later we compared sketches of the alcid with several field guides and identified the bird as an immature Razorbill (*Alca torda*), based on size, and particularly, the irregularly shaped stubby bill. We did not see the bird on a return visit later that day.

The only previous Florida Razorbill, also an immature, was captured 18 / Florida Field Naturalist / Vol. 5, No. 1 / Spring 1977