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## Prairie Falcon Sighting in Florida

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SAFINA, C., AND J. BURGER. 1983. Effects of human disturbance on reproductive success in the Black Skimmer. *Condor* 85: 164-171.

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**Prairie Falcon sighting in Florida.**—On 8 October 1986 I observed a large falcon I believe was a Prairie Falcon (*Falco mexicanus*) in eastern Sarasota County, Florida, along the unpaved road leading to the Longino Ranch, 1.1 km south of State Highway 72 and 6.0 km west of the DeSoto County line (Sec 9, T38S, R22E). The bird, judged to be a female on the basis of size, was perched conspicuously in the top of a large dead pine in an area of extensive open pasture with scattered clumps of brush and cabbage palm (*Sabal palmetto*) and live oak (*Quercus virginiana*) hammocks. I studied it from the open window of my vehicle for about 10 min at a distance of approximately 60 m with 7×35 binoculars and a 20-45× spotting scope. The bird paid no attention to the vehicle or my movements inside. In response to high air temperature at the time (1615 hr), the falcon perched with plumage tightly compressed and the wings held slightly away from the body.

When I first saw the bird, I assumed it was an unusually light-colored Peregrine (*F. peregrinus*). However, on closer inspection it agreed with the Prairie Falcon in all details in addition to its overall pale coloration. The upperparts were relatively light brown and the venter was creamy-white with rich brown streaks. It had prominent narrow malar stripes bordered behind by pale cheeks, broad eye stripes, whitish forehead and upper nape, and brownish crown. The eye stripes were more pronounced and the white forehead extended farther back, resulting in a more restricted crown patch than in most photographs and paintings of the species. The cere, orbital skin, and feet and legs were gray rather than yellow, indicating that the bird was an immature (Brown and Amadon 1968, Eagles, hawks and falcons of the world, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co.). As the bird remained perched during the time I watched it, I did not have an opportunity to check for the dark axillary areas characteristic of the Prairie Falcon.

Although I have observed Prairie Falcons in the West (Layne 1946, Illinois Aud. Soc. Bull. 57: 9-11) and am confident of the identification, I did consider the possibility that the specimen might have been some species of exotic pallid falcon, such as the Lagger (*F. jugger*) or Saker (*F. cherrug*), that had escaped from captivity. However, comparison with the descriptions and illustrations of other pale-colored falcon species in Brown and Amadon (1968) and Cade (1982, The falcons of the world, Ithaca, New York: Cornell Univ. Press) further confirmed the identification as a Prairie Falcon.

This appears to be the first record of the Prairie Falcon in Florida, although accidental occurrences, perhaps representing escaped individuals, have been reported previously from Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina (Amer. Ornithologists' Union 1983, Check-list of North American birds, 6th ed.). While there seems to be no doubt as to the identification, the lack of a voucher specimen, satisfactory photograph, or corroboration by other observers might require that the record be considered hypothetical. As is the case with any unusual raptor appearing in an area, there is a question of whether the falcon was an escapee or wild individual. I carefully examined the bird for some indication that it might have escaped from a zoo or a falconer. The cere was undamaged, the body plumage was bright and unworn, and the tips of the rectrices and primaries were not frayed or broken, suggesting that the bird had not previously been caged. There also was no indication that the bird had been used in falconry, as there were no bands or jesses on the legs or evidence,

such as an antenna wire protruding from the tarsus or tail, that it was carrying a radio transmitter. The fact that the falcon was an immature and appeared during the fall migration season also adds to the probability that it was a wild individual. Beebe (1974, Occas. Pap. British Columbia Provincial Mus. 17: 1-163) noted that some Prairie Falcons, "especially first-year birds, appear to be wanderers and to roam widely."

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**Roof nesting by Royal Terns in Vero Beach, Florida.**—In recent years, suitable nesting habitat for many species of Florida's Charadriiformes have been seriously reduced, both in quantity and in quality, due to human encroachment in the form of beach development and recreation (Nisbet 1973, Fisk 1975, Altman and Gano 1984). The consequence for many species of shorebirds and terns has been significant population declines in some areas and extirpation in others (Nisbet 1973, Fisk 1975, 1978a; Kale, pers. comm.). This trend has been somewhat neutralized where man-made alterations have created new nesting habitats (e.g. dredged spoil sites, parking lots, streets, building roof-tops) that certain opportunistic species have adapted to using (Downing 1973, Fisk 1975, 1978a). Roof nesting has been reported for at least 22 avian species world-wide (Fisk 1978b) including Least Tern (*Sterna antillarum*), Roseate Tern (*S. dougallii*), Black Skimmer (*Rynchops nigra*), Wilson's Plover (*Charadrius wilsonia*), and Killdeer (*C. vociferus*) in Florida (Fisk 1975, Greene and Kale 1976, Fisk 1978a,b).

We monitored a colony of 15 pairs of roof-nesting Least Terns on the Paine Webber building in Vero Beach from April through July 1986. The one story building is immediately adjacent to a canal leading to the Indian River Lagoon. The flat roof is composed of tar covered by riverstone and limerock gravel (range 0.5-1.5 cm diameter). The roof has edges 25 cm high and several air vents that young least terns utilized for shade. During our observations of the Least Tern colony in June, we occasionally saw one or two Royal Terns (*Sterna maximus*) foraging nearby. On 3 and 4 July, Toland watched 4 adult Royal Terns foraging along the 200 m canal and over the Indian River, accompanied by as many as 30 Least Terns. During 3 h of observations the Royal Terns landed on the roof 8 times and participated in ritualized courtship "fish flights."

On 14 July we climbed to the roof and discovered two Royal Tern nest scrapes with one egg each, approximately 7 m apart (Fig. 1). About two dozen Least Tern nests were evenly distributed in the immediate vicinity of the Royal Tern nests. On the morning of 17 July a single adult Royal Tern landed on the roof amidst at least 20 Least Terns, including food-begging immatures and attending adults. During the next eight days Toland made ground-based observations of Royal Tern activity in and around the Least Tern colony. However, intermittent monitoring from 27 to 30 July could produce no additional sightings of the Royal Terns. On 31 July we again climbed to the tern colony, but no Royal Terns were seen. Both Royal Tern nests and eggs were present, but hairline cracks exuding yolk were detected in each egg. No Royal Terns were observed in the area after our last visit. Successful nesting Least Terns remained in the immediate vicinity well into August.

As far as we can ascertain, this is the first record of Royal Terns nesting on a roof, as well as the first report of this species nesting in Indian River County or southeast Florida (Kale, pers. comm.). Royal Terns, while abundant along Florida's coasts outside of the nesting season, presently are known to nest only at Bird Island in Nassau Sound, Merritt