
January 1992

Trends in Wading Bird Nesting Populations in Florida, 1976-1978 and 1986-1989: Final Performance Report

Florida Field Naturalist

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/ffn>

Recommended Citation

Florida Field Naturalist (1992) "Trends in Wading Bird Nesting Populations in Florida, 1976-1978 and 1986-1989: Final Performance Report," *Florida Field Naturalist*. Vol. 20 : Iss. 3 , Article 8.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/ffn/vol20/iss3/8>

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. It has been accepted for inclusion in Florida Field Naturalist by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usf.edu.

Fla. Field Nat. 20(3):80, 1992.

Trends in wading bird nesting populations in Florida, 1976-1978 and 1986-1989: Final performance report.—D. E. Runde, 1991. Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Nongame Wildlife Program Technical Report Series, 99 p. \$3.50.—This report analyzes in detail the results of a statewide survey of active wading bird (Ciconiiformes) colonies in Florida, which took place from 1986 through 1989, and compares the results to an earlier survey series in 1976-1979 (Nesbitt, S. A., J. C. Ogden, H. W. Kale, II, B. W. Patty and L. A. Rouse. 1982. U.S. Fish Wildl. Serv., OBS-81/49). The locations and sizes of individual colonies are listed by county in a separate atlas, also published by the Nongame Wildlife Program. The goal of this immense survey effort was to document changes in the distribution and abundance of breeding wading birds statewide.

The comparison is unquestionably the most complete and ambitious study of wading bird population change anywhere in the United States; its scale and comparative power finally gives managers an appropriate tool to evaluate population trends of these highly mobile, dispersed, and often nomadic nesters. While the presentation is terse and low-key, the uniqueness and value of this publication should not be underestimated by those who are ready to yawn at another agency report. If continued in ensuing years, this series is guaranteed to become a classic.

This short report is written in dense scientific style, and is extremely data-rich (8 tables, 61 figures, 10 appendices). While not exactly bedside reading, the report summarizes the findings in an initial abstract and in each section, in a style easily understood by lay readers.

Runde's publication has sections on methods, changes in county distributions by species, species abundance, estimates of population sizes and trends by species, and a final section on recommendations. The 1980's surveys were the most comprehensive and systematic to date. But, with numerous different observers, 5-km spacing between survey lines, and surveys that were spread over a 5-month period, numerous pitfalls for interpretation exist. Runde does a good job of pointing out the limitations, however, and his analyses tend to be robust enough to override most criticisms that stem from survey methodology.

Despite the limitations of the data, the report shows dramatic declines in numbers of nesting birds between the two surveys, as well as a general trend toward smaller colonies. For instance, numbers of breeding Snowy Egrets are estimated to have declined by as much as 72% in the ten years between surveys, White Ibises by 63%, and Tricolored Herons by 54%. This news is quite disturbing, since the more recent surveys were more intensive and comprehensive than those in the 1970s.

The report can be faulted on a few points. The locations of transects are never stated or portrayed on a map, and Runde neglects to mention that, in many cases, adjacent transects were flown in different years. This information is crucial to understanding the actual coverage and accuracy of the survey. Given that the statewide reductions in several once-abundant waders is an ecological warning signal for the entire state, Runde might also be faulted for weak recommendations, calling only for more specific colony and species monitoring programs, and further research. The report demonstrates clearly a regional population crash in progress, and stronger conservation measures are surely warranted, such as further safeguards against degradation of wetland quantity and quality.

This report is the first comprehensive look at statewide wading bird breeding populations, and shows robust results. The data are well presented, responsibly interpreted, and frequently summarized in an appropriate manner. Runde's report is a must for every public-access library in Florida, and every conservation agency in the southeastern United States, and will be an important reference for students of avian population dynamics.—**Peter C. Frederick**, Dept. Wildlife and Range Sciences, 118 Newins-Ziegler Hall, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611.