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Short-tailed Hawk *Buteo brachyurus*

Despite their wide range over tropical and subtropical parts of the Neotropics, Short-tailed Hawks have gained their fame among birders as a Florida specialty. Here, in the northernmost part of their range, they have challenged birders and scientists alike since the first nest was found in the state near Tarpon Springs in 1889 (Scott 1889).

Habitat. Ogden (1974a) described the habitat of this species as mixed woodland-savannah. Most nests are located in or adjacent to forested wetlands, such as large cypress strand swamps, mature slash pines on the fringes of swamps, wet flatwoods, and loblolly bay swamps. Most foraging occurs from high-altitude soaring over adjacent open to scrubby dry prairies, oak scrub, marsh, and mangrove savannah. Surprisingly for a *Buteo*, prey are mainly small birds such as *Eastern Meadowlarks* and Red-Winged Blackbirds, which are captured at the end of long, falcon-like vertical stoops (Ogden 1974a).

Clutches range from 1 to 3 (typically 2) white or bluish-white eggs, occasionally marked with brown. Incubation lasts approximately 34 days (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). The fledging period and number of broods raised per season are not known (Ehrlich et al. 1988).



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Seasonal Occurrence. Short-tailed Hawks begin nest construction in February or March and lay eggs from mid-March to mid-April or early May (Ogden 1988). Ogden (1974a) reports an intrapeninsular migration into south Florida, with virtually all birds north of Lake Okeechobee leaving the nesting areas.

Status. Although Short-tailed Hawks are fairly easy to find in winter around Flamingo and Cape Sable, they become much more difficult to locate in their breeding territories. In fact, only about 35 nesting localities have been found in Florida (Millsap et al. 1989). The species is undoubtedly somewhat more common than the paucity of known nesting areas suggests; its stratospheric style of flight, secretive nature about the nest, and penchant for remote areas can be blamed in part for the poor showing. Even with this in mind, however, Ogden (1978c) was probably correct with his statement that there were possibly no more than "several hundred" Short-tailed Hawks in Florida.

Atlas fieldwork suggests that Short-tailed Hawks are generally sparse but widespread breeders in the peninsula from Dade and Monroe counties north to Dixie and Putnam counties. A lone record from Jackson County is not far out of range as it might at first seem historically, Short-tailed Hawks bred at St. Marks in Wakulla County (where they are still occasionally seen). And Ogden (1978c) described the summer range as "westward in coastal portions of the Panhandle to the lower Apalachicola River and vicinity."

Apparent concentrations of breeding Short-tailed Hawks were found in 2 areas, where the species was searched for extensively: near Palmdale in Glades County (Ogden 1974a) and in southeastern Polk County (Millsap et al. 1989). It is probable that other areas exist where Short-tailed Hawks are just as numerous, but they have not been searched with equal intensity.

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Short-tailed Hawk

