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American Crow *Corvus brachyrhynchos*

The American Crow's overstated fondness for farm crops and the eggs of gamebirds has made it an enemy of farmers and sportsmen. Despite this long-standing persecution, the American Crow is a common permanent resident in much of the state. It is the larger of our 2 crows and is entirely black, with a large heavy bill. Although flocks of several thousand birds are not uncommon in northern states, American Crows in Florida are more typically seen in family groups of 5 to 10 birds (Kilham 1989). Two subspecies breed in the state: *C. b. brachyrhynchos* of the Panhandle and *C. b. pascuus* of the peninsula (Stevenson 1976).

The American Crow breeds in Canada and throughout the United States, except in parts of the West. It winters from southern Canada throughout the breeding range and to the Florida Keys (Stevenson and Anderson 1994).

Habitat. Most often found in and around wooded uplands, American Crows are also frequently found near prairies, pastures, and agricultural lands provided suitable roost and nest sites are within flying distance. Human-altered habitats provide year-round feeding grounds for crows; however, the American Crow's diet is predominantly nonagricultural and consists of a variety of arthropods, amphibians, reptiles, eggs, young birds, and small mammals. Its consumption of many agricultural pests make it an economically valuable species rather than a pest itself.



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The nest of the American Crow is usually built within a wooded area, but it may sometimes nest in an isolated tree. Occasionally it will use an abandoned raptor nest. Its large, well-built nest of twigs and branches is lined with plant fibers, mosses, leaves, or human-made materials. Clutch size averages 4 eggs. The eggs are bluish-green to olive green, with brown and gray mottling. Incubation lasts 18 days and may be performed by both sexes. The young fledge at 28 to 35 days of age (Ehrlich et al. 1988). In Florida the American Crow is known to breed cooperatively, with yearlings assisting their parents (Kilham 1989).

Seasonal Occurrence. American Crows are permanent residents in Florida. Their numbers apparently increase in the fall with the influx of northern birds and decrease in March and April with their departure. Stevenson and Anderson (1994) report, however, that evidence of this crow's migration in Florida is almost entirely inferential.

Eggs are laid from mid-February to mid-April.

Status. The American Crow is found throughout Florida, except in the Keys. However, it seems conspicuously absent from several counties on the Atlantic coast. The Atlas map suggests that American Crows are excluded from Brevard, Palm Beach, and Broward counties on the basis of political boundaries. There are, however, physiographic explanations for these absences. Along most of the lower east coast, the absence of American Crows is the result of urbanization. The western portions of Palm Beach and Broward Counties seem to be poor crow habitat for either species. Western Palm Beach is largely monocultures of sugarcane and sod farms, and western Broward is the northernmost part of the existing Everglades, with few tree islands, although large stands of Bald Cypress, good American Crow habitat, occur just west of the Broward County line. The loss of suitable wooded areas may exclude the American Crow from other regions. Extensive phosphate mining may explain th

absence of breeding American Crows in southwestern Polk County, and urbanization has eliminated the species from most of Pinellas County.

Reed Bowman

American Crow

