

This resource is based on the following source:

Kale, H. W., II, B. Pranty, B. M. Stith, and C. W. Biggs. 1992. The atlas of the breeding birds of Florida. Final Report. Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Tallahassee, Florida.

This resource can be cited as:

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. 2003, January 6. Florida's breeding bird atlas: A collaborative study of Florida's birdlife. <http://www.myfwc.com/bba/> (Date accessed mm/dd/yyyy).

Black-crowned Night-Heron

Nycticorax nycticorax

Typically solitary when foraging, the Black-crowned Night-Heron is most often observed at dawn, dusk, and on cloudy days. Black-crowned Night-Herons have distinct immature plumages and attain full breeding plumage in their third year. Virtually worldwide in distribution, it breeds from the northern United States and southern Canada south to Hawaii, Peru, and Argentina.

Habitat. This cryptic species is inconspicuous at roost and when seeking food, even though it forages during the day while feeding young. Outside the breeding season, the Black-crowned Night-Heron forages mostly at night, usually wading in shallow water, and feeding on fish, crustaceans, small amphibians, reptiles, nestling birds, and mammals, as well as other aquatic organisms.

This species nests in homogeneous colonies, in colonies of other waders, and, rarely, singly. Nests are formed of dead surrounding vegetation in a marsh or built of sticks in trees or bushes near or over water. Three to 5 blue-green eggs hatch in 24 to 26 days, and the young fledge at about 42 days of age.



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Seasonal Occurrence. Breeding has been reported from January through August, but the presence of young birds in south Florida in December indicates that breeding may occur year-round there. In summer, Black-crowned Night-Herons are absent from most of the Panhandle. Migratory individuals appear in March and April, sometimes as late as May. Fall migrants have been reported in September. Florida populations increase considerably in winter with the influx of northern migrants. Florida is probably the southernmost wintering ground for Black-crowned Night Herons from the eastern United States.

Status. Because it is a wetlands-dependent species, it is considered a Species of Special Concern by the Florida Committee on Rare and Endangered Plants and Animals (Rodgers et al 1996).

The statewide breeding distribution of the Black-crowned Night Heron follows the availability of wetland habitat. Most nesting colonies are located in central and southern Florida, with scattered colonies in north Florida. Howe (1932) mentions breeding in Pensacola, but no records west of Wakulla County were obtained during the Atlas project. No trends are currently measurable for this ubiquitous species.

Bruce H. Anderson

Sponsored by Bob Brown

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