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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.

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Blue-gray Gnatcatcher *Polioptila caerulea*

The wheezy call of the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher is often the first indication of its presence. This charming little bird is usually seen moving actively through the trees, cocking its long tail as it searches for insects.

The Blue-gray Gnatcatcher breeds from southern Oregon east to southern Ontario and south throughout the United States and Mexico to western Guatemala and the Bahamas. It winters across the extreme southern United States to Honduras and the western Caribbean. In Florida it is a fairly common breeder throughout the mainland.

Habitat. In Florida, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers are found in a wide variety of habitats, including hardwood swamps, pine flatwoods, mesic forests, sandhills, and suburban areas. In Duval County they have been reported to prefer pines for nesting (Howell 1932), in extreme western Florida they nest in scrub oaks growing in open pine woods (Bent 1949), and in east-central Florida they occur in areas with moss-hung oaks.

The nest, built by both adults, is a compact cup woven of grass, leaves, and spider silk and is covered with lichens. It usually straddles a horizontal twig located from 0.6 to 7.6 m (2 to 25 ft) above the ground. The usual clutch size in Florida is 4, and the bluish eggs with fine brown dots are incubated for 13 days. The young fledge 10 to 12 days after hatching (Stevenson and Anderson 1994).

Insects and spiders, obtained by gleaning, hovering, and hawking, comprise most of the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher diet (Root 1967, Ellison 1992).

Seasonal Occurrence. Blue-gray Gnatcatchers are found all year long in Florida, although they are more abundant in south Florida in the winter and in north Florida in the summer.

Eggs are laid from March to July, but are most often reported in April or May (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). Most pairs are single brooded. Only 1 of 22 females attempted a second brood in the Tallahassee region (Fehor 1955).

Status. During the Atlas project, breeding evidence was found in every county in the state, but the bird is scarce in much of the southeast mainland, and it is completely absent from the Keys as a breeder. Historically, the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher had been recorded breeding only as far south as Collier County (Howell 1932). By the time of Sprunt's (1954) revision, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers occurred to the south loop of the Tamiami Trail, where adults were seen feeding young during the Atlas project (Paul 1988). On 14 June 1991, 1 bird was found in the Sandy Key quadrangle in Florida Bay (G. Meyer).

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Sponsored by Margaret A. Carey



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