

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.

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Black Skimmer *Rynchops niger*

This handsome, gregarious shorebird, with its strikingly compressed bill, fishes beaches, inlets, and estuaries along the Florida coastline. It is a coastal breeder in California, in Ecuador, and from Massachusetts south to Argentina.

Habitat. Black Skimmers traditionally nested in colonies on bare sandflats just above the high-water mark, often in association with Least Terns. Nesting inland and on rooftops in Florida may reflect a shortage of suitable coastal breeding habitat for the Black Skimmer.

Fish, obtained by skimming along the surface of the water in daylight and at night, comprise its diet (Howell 1932).

Most colonies in Florida consist of between 100 and 200 pairs. The normal clutch is 4 or 5 white eggs, which are heavily blotched with black and brown. Incubation takes 21 to 23 days, and young fledge in 23 to 25 days (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

The longevity record for the species is held by a bird

fledged in Georgia and captured in Duval County, Florida; it was 6 weeks short of being 20 years old (Kale and Loftin 1982).

Seasonal Occurrence. This permanent resident nests May through August in Florida. Individuals from northern states swell the Florida population in the fall (August through October), and south Florida birds move north in the state to breed.

Status. Breeding was confirmed for the Black Skimmer in 44 coastal quadrangles around the state, more than any other member of the *Laridae* family except the Least Tern.

Along with several other beach-nesting species, the Black Skimmer is listed as a Species of Special Concern by the Florida Committee on Rare and Endangered Plants and Animals (Barbour 1978b) and by the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission [editor: now Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission] (Rodgers et al. 1996).

In 1985 Black Skimmers were discovered breeding inland in Palm Beach County (Langridge and Hunter 1986). This colony, containing 15 nests, was located at Duda Farms near Belle Glade and was only the second inland breeding colony in the United States (AOU 1983). The Duda Farms colony persisted with some success up to 1989. Black Skimmers have been observed at other inland locations, especially at the Polk County phosphate mines, but breeding has not been recorded there.

Black Skimmers have also nested on rooftops in Florida. The first record occurred in 1975, when skimmers were found on a roof in Fort Lauderdale (Greene and Kale 1976). However, none of the eggs hatched, apparently because the skimmers scraped the gravel down to the tar. In 1976 3 other rooftop nesting colonies were found in Dade County and 1 in St. Lucie County. None of these attempts were very successful, although 1 of the Dade colonies fledged at least 4 young (Fisk 1978). During the Atlas project Black Skimmers were discovered nesting

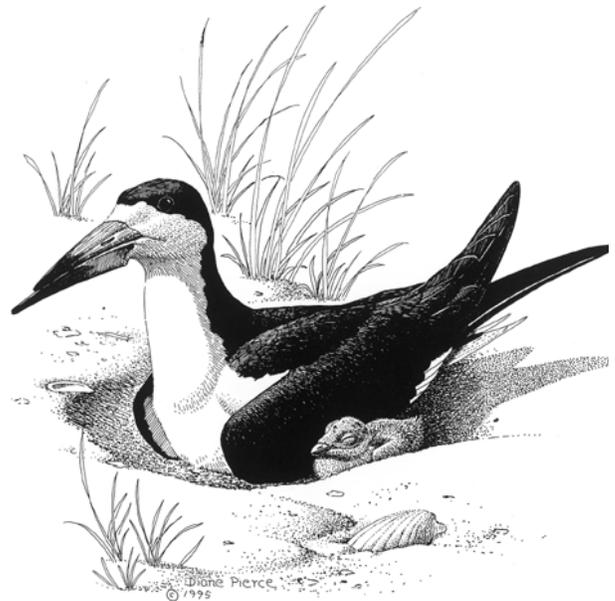


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on rooftops in Pensacola, Ft. Walton Beach, Panama City (Gore 1991), and Largo in Pinellas County (T. Bryan 1987, BBA data).

Robert W. Loftin

Sponsored by Alan W. Steinberg

Black Skimmer

