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Bridled Tern *Sterna anaethetus*

This rare summer visitor to Florida's Atlantic coast is highly pelagic when not breeding. In North America it breeds off the coast of Costa Rica and possibly off Panama and from the Bahamas through the Antilles to islands off Venezuela (Stevenson and Anderson 1994).

Habitat. Compared to the detailed studies of the Sooty Tern, the life history of the Bridled Tern is little known. The incubation period is not known, nor is the age at which the young fledge. The life span of the species is also unknown. The Bridled Tern lays a single egg, like the Sooty Tern, so its breeding biology may be similar. The egg is cream-colored, with brown and black speckling. The eggs are often taken by humans for food in the Caribbean region.

Seasonal Occurrence. In the Bahamas eggs are laid from mid-April to late June.

Status. This highly tropical tern usually stays well offshore when it visits Florida. Therefore, it was one of the greatest surprises of the Atlas project when the species was found breeding in the state in 1987. One adult and a downy chick were discovered in the Roseate Tern colony at Pelican Shoals off Boca Chica Key (Sprunt and Hoffman 1988). This was the first breeding record for North America and was followed by 2 nests in 1990 (Pau 1991) and 3 in 1991 (Langridge 1991).

Perhaps it is still too early to determine, but the species seems to be establishing a breeding population in the Florida Keys. Breeding on Pelican Shoals began with 1 pair and has increased to 3 pairs. Further developments are eagerly awaited.

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Bridled Tern

