

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).

Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*

The Caspian Tern is the largest and most cosmopolitan of all terns, a widespread but local breeder along the coastlines of North America and inland in the western United States. It also occurs across much of Canada to North Dakota and the Great Lakes region.

Habitat. In other parts of the world, Caspian Terns breed on fresh water, but the few colonies in Florida have all been located on human-made islands off the coast. They feed exclusively on fish (Howell 1932).

The nest of the Caspian Tern is a simple scrape in the bare sand and is sparsely lined with grasses. The 2 pinkish-buff eggs, spotted with brown, are incubated for 20 to 22 days. The young are capable of flight at 30 to 40 days of age (Harrison 1978). Adults continue to feed their young for 5 to 7 months after fledging (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

Seasonal Occurrence. Eggs have been found in June and July for this permanent, though rare, Florida resident.

Status. The Caspian Tern is a rare breeder in Florida and is considered a Species of Special Concern (Schreiber 1978a). It was first discovered nesting in the state in 1962 (Woolfenden and Meyerriecks 1963). It is now a regular breeder in Tampa Bay, where 65 pairs nested in 1988 on a dredged-material island on the Hillsborough County side of the bay. In the past, the species has bred in Franklin, Brevard, Pinellas, and Charlotte counties, but these colonies no longer exist (Stevenson 1979a).

In 1991 fledglings capable of sustained flight were observed being fed by adults at Mashes Island on the border of Franklin and Wakulla counties (fide R. Christen). However, because the young could fly, the breeding location could not be determined. Nevertheless, this sighting suggests that Caspian Terns are recolonizing the eastern Panhandle coast.

In Florida the Caspian Tern almost always nests in close association with Laughing Gulls. The adults resemble Royal Terns, therefore, a pioneering pair of Caspian Terns could have been overlooked in a large colony of other terns, Laughing Gulls, and Black Skimmers.

Robert W. Loftin

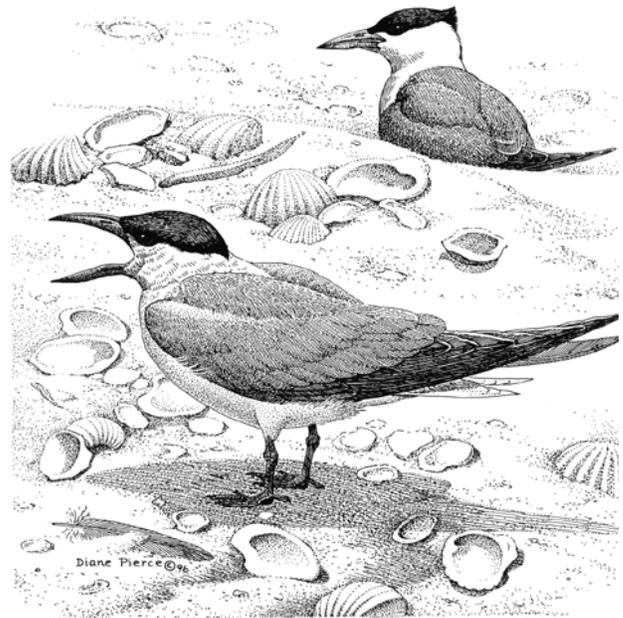


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Caspian Tern

