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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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Crested Caracara *Caracara cheriway*

The Crested Caracara is one of Florida's most spectacular avian specialties. Caracaras are a small, aberrant group in the family *Falconidae*, with a largely Neotropical distribution. The Crested Caracara is the only species found in North America. It has a continuous distribution through South and Middle America into Texas and disjunct populations in peninsular Florida and the Caribbean (Cuba and the Isle of Pines).

Habitat. In Florida, Crested Caracaras are found in open grassland habitats formerly native prairie but currently mainly improved rangeland. The diet includes both carrion and live prey. Many kinds of insects and other invertebrates, as well as fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals are consumed. Foraging methods include capturing live prey on the ground or by aerial pursuit, patrolling highways for roadkills, and pursuing Turkey Vultures to force them to disgorge their crop contents.

The bulky nest of slender vines and sticks is usually constructed in a cabbage palm. The usual clutch is 2 or 3 eggs, with a range of from 1 to 4. The eggs are white to buffy and heavily blotched with brown. The incubation period is about 32 to 33 days, and the young remain in the nest for approximately 8 weeks. Sexual maturity is reached at 3 to 4 years of age.

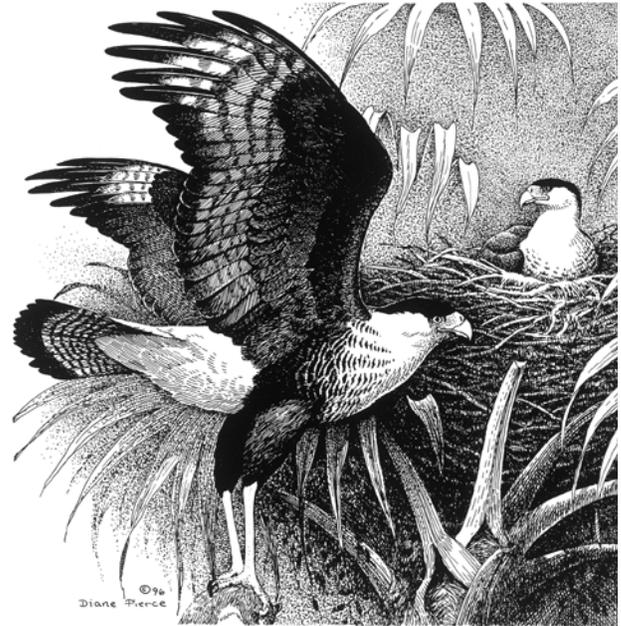


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Seasonal Occurrence. The height of breeding is from January to March, but eggs have been recorded from September through April.

Status. Adult caracaras are territorial, form persistent pair bonds, and exhibit strong site fidelity. Thus the presence of adult individuals in an area can usually be assumed to indicate the existence of a breeding territory. The Atlas records are concentrated in the south-central part of the peninsula in a region mainly to the west and north of Lake Okeechobee from southern Orange County to Hendry County.

Outlying records suspect as breeding localities occur in Hernando, Sarasota, and Palm Beach counties. The Atlas map agrees closely with that of Layne (1996) and indicates no major change in the breeding range of the Crested Caracara in Florida from that shown by Howell (1932). If each Atlas block record represents an established pair the population can be estimated at approximately 400 adults. This estimate is probably lower than the actual number, because any inflation of the estimate from counting some solitary adults as members of breeding pair is probably well outweighed by cases in which more than a single territory occurred in a given block. Layne (1995, 1996) gave an estimate of a minimum of 300 adults in the Florida population based on data from 1972-1991. Estimates of the total number, during the period from the early 1950s to the late 1970s, range from few than 100 adults to 500 (Chandler in Sprunt 1954; Heinzman 1970; Layne 1978, 1982, 1985).

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