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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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Gray Catbird *Dumetella carolinensis*

The secretive Gray Catbird, with its distinctive cat-like mewing note, is a common winter resident in Florida. Many pass through the state during migration.

Gray Catbirds breed from southern Canada to central New Mexico and the Gulf states and in Bermuda. In the winter most Gray Catbirds migrate to the southeastern United States, Panama, and the West Indies, but some winter north to Minnesota and southeastern Canada.

Habitat. The Gray Catbird prefers low dense vegetation or vine tangles often at the edges of forests, marshes, and streams but does not occur in forest interiors. It finds hedges and garden shrubs to its liking.

Gray Catbirds eat spiders and large insects and consume grapes and berries in season.

Their ragged nest, built of twigs and grasses and lined with finer materials, is situated in dense shrubs or low trees. The eggs are glossy, dark-blue and usually unspotted. Clutch size is usually 3 or 4 (2 to 6), incubation lasts 12 to 15 days, and young leave the nest after 10 to 15 days of age (Terres 1980, Ehrlich et al. 1988).



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Seasonal Occurrence. The greatest waves of migratory Gray Catbirds occur in mid-April to mid-May and again in the fall from mid-September to late October.

Gray Catbirds are often double-brooded and usually eject Brown-headed Cowbird eggs from their nests (Terres 1980).

Status. According to Stevenson and Anderson (1994), the Gray Catbird is a rare and local breeder across north Florida. Stevenson and Menk (1978) reviewed the status of Gray Catbird breeding and nonbreeding summer records in Florida through 1977; and they concluded that this species "nested in northern and central Florida prior to 1932, later withdrew from that part of its range, and in now beginning to reoccupy it." The Atlas map reveals that it now nests fairly regularly across the northern tier of counties especially in the northeast. Scatter nests occurred as far south as Sarasota and Highlands counties. Many or all of the "possible" or "probable" records in the central and southern peninsula probably represent late migrants or nonbreeding summering birds.

Fred E. Lohrer

Sponsored by Robert B. Winkler

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