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 a
Fresh Water Fish Commission, Tallahassee, Florida.

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Little Blue Heron *Egretta caerulea*

Although the Little Blue Heron is closely related to the Snowy Egret, it lacks most of the highly adorning aigrettes that caused the other waders to be much sought after by millinery hunters a century ago. This heron breeds from southern California across to the southeastern states and as far north as coastal Maine. It also nests south to Peru, Brazil, and Uruguay. Birds breeding in the United States winter in the southern states and the Caribbean Basin.

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Habitat. The Little Blue Heron shows a definite preference for freshwater habitats; however, it is not rare in coastal areas.

Its diet is more varied than that of other herons and includes insects, shrimp, amphibians, and fish. Little Blue Herons often feed alone, walking along the edges of canals, streams, rivers, and lakes, or on the top of floating vegetation.

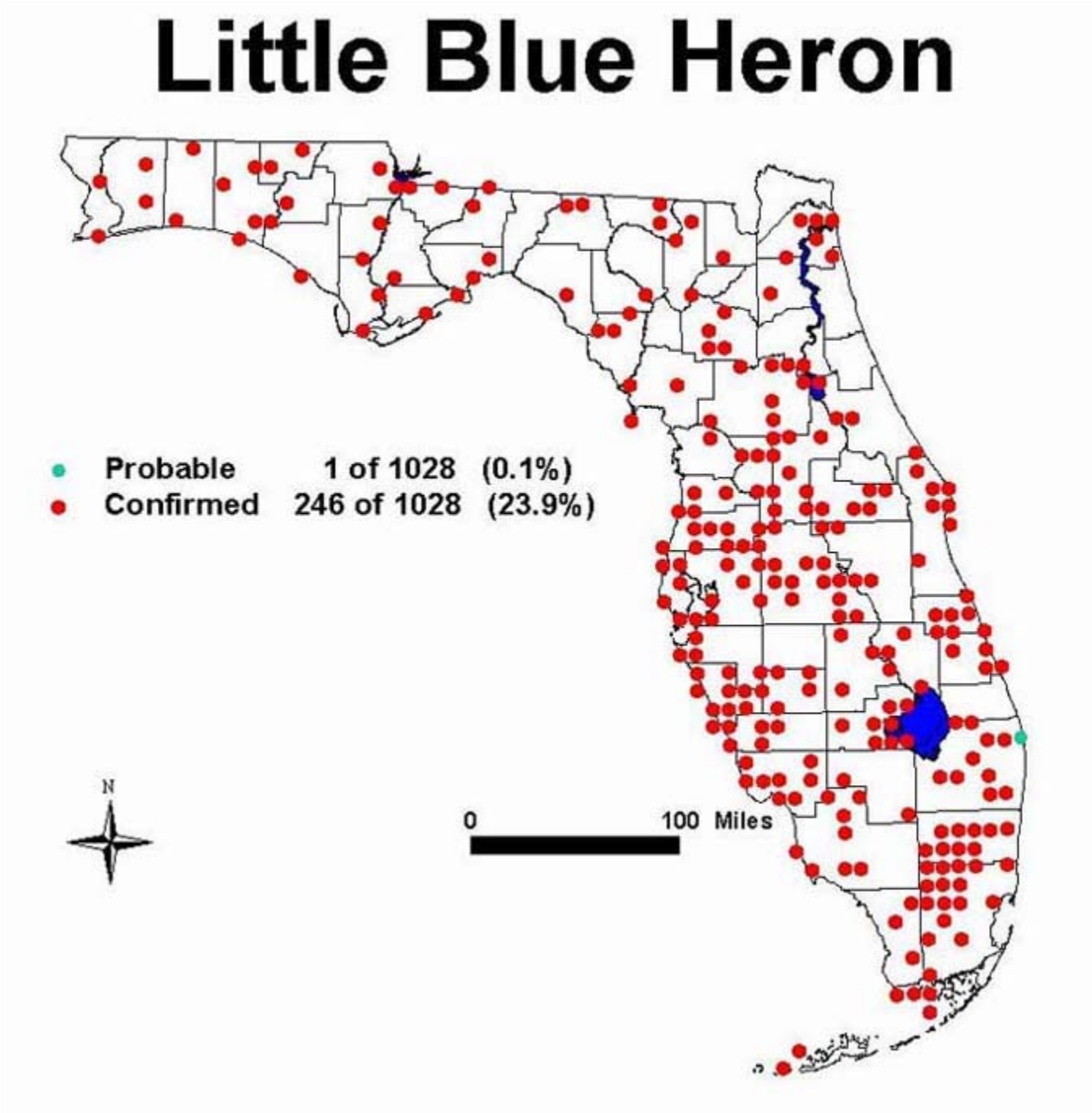
The Little Blue Heron nests in colonies, often with other species of long-legged waders. Nests of sticks are placed in trees and shrubs on islands, in thickets near water, or in emergent vegetation over water. Three 5 blue-green eggs hatch in 20 to 24 days, and the white-plumaged young fledge in about 28 days. Although some authors speculate that the white yearlings breed, no official documentation substantiates this. Rodgers (1980b) has recorded breeding activities in this heron at 10 to 13 months of age, when dark feathers begin to replace white feathers in the so-called calico plumage.

Seasonal Occurrence. Breeding occurs from April through September in Florida; and Little Blue Herons appea to breed somewhat later than Tricolored Herons or Snowy Egrets. Stevenson and Anderson (1994) report that, the Panhandle, it is not unusual to see migrating flocks of Little Blue Herons in the spring, generally in Februar and March. There is little documentation of fall migration for this species, but like other herons, adults and you of the year disperse widely in a northerly direction following breeding.

Status. Because of its dark plumage and tendency to nest in small, isolated colonies, the Little Blue Heron is n as reliably censused as the white-plumaged waders, especially during aerial surveys. Hence, population trends are difficult to determine.

The Little Blue Heron is more widely distributed throughout the state than the Tricolored Heron or the Snowy Egret. Colonies have been reported from the Keys to Duval and Escambia counties. However, like the Snowy Egret, it breeds in greater abundance in the central and southern peninsula, with colonies more widely scattere throughout north Florida and the Panhandle.

The Little Blue Heron is listed as a Species of Special Concern by the state because of its dependence on wetlands (Wood 1991). Comparing statewide surveys from 1976-78 and 1986-89, Little Blue Herons apparentl declined from more than 20,000 pairs to fewer than 17,000 pairs (Runde et al. 1991). Stevenson and Anderso (1994) cite evidence of dramatic declines in breeding numbers on Florida's Gulf coast from 90,000 birds in the mid-1930s to 7,500 birds in the mid-1960s.

Bruce H. Anderson

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