

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).

---

## Magnificent Frigatebird *Fregata magnificens*

The Magnificent Frigatebird is a large, lightly built seabird that occurs regularly along Florida's coasts (severe storms may drive it inland). It breeds on islands and along the coast from Baja California south to the Equator and from the Bahamas and Marquesas to Brazil.

Magnificent Frigatebirds are typically oceanic birds, spending much of their lives on the wing. In Florida they are found on both coasts, particularly in the summer, usually roosting on islands as far north as Cedar Key.

**Habitat.** All nesting in Florida has been in clumps or islands of red mangroves, where the Magnificent Frigatebirds build crude platforms of sticks.

They feed on the wing by picking prey (usually squid or flying fish) from the sea surface. Magnificent Frigatebirds also pursue other seabirds in the air to force them to disgorge food (Clapp et al. 1982).

The reproductive cycle of Magnificent Frigatebirds is extremely protracted. They lay only a single white egg, and the incubation period is believed to be about 50 days. The young bird fledges at 5 to 7 months of age, but it may be fed at the nest by the female for an additional 5 to 6 months.

**Seasonal Occurrence.** The Magnificent Frigatebird is common in summer and rare to uncommon in winter along the peninsular coasts and in the Keys. Most of the birds found in the state in summer presumably originate from breeding colonies in the Caribbean region (Robertson 1978a; Clapp et al. 1982).

**Status.** Because they are often very numerous in summer and frequently roost on mangrove islands where other water birds are nesting, many unsubstantiated reports of nesting frigatebirds exist for Florida, from Audubon's time to the present. However, Magnificent Frigatebird nesting in Florida was not confirmed until 1969, when a colony of approximately 100 pairs was located at the Marquesas Keys west of Key West (Ogden 1969). Roberts (1978), Clapp et al. (1982), and T. Wilmers (pers. commun.) reviewed the later history of this colony. In 1978 the Magnificent Frigatebird was designated a Threatened Species by the Florida Committee on Rare and Endangered Plants and Animals (Robertson 1978) because this colony was the only one, not only in Florida but the United States, and subject to disturbance. Nesting on the Marquesas prospered through the 1970s, with estimates as high as 250 nesting pairs. By the mid-1980s, numbers had declined to about 50 pairs, probably due to greatly increased disturbance by recreational boaters and fishermen. In 1988, the last productive year at the Marquesas, the colony had 36 nests on 19 May (T. Wilmers, pers. commun.). The colony probably moved west to the Dry Tortugas, because about 40 pairs nested there for the first time in 1988, and this colony built up to about 75 pairs as of 1991.

William B. Robertson, Jr.

Sponsored by Winship A. Todd

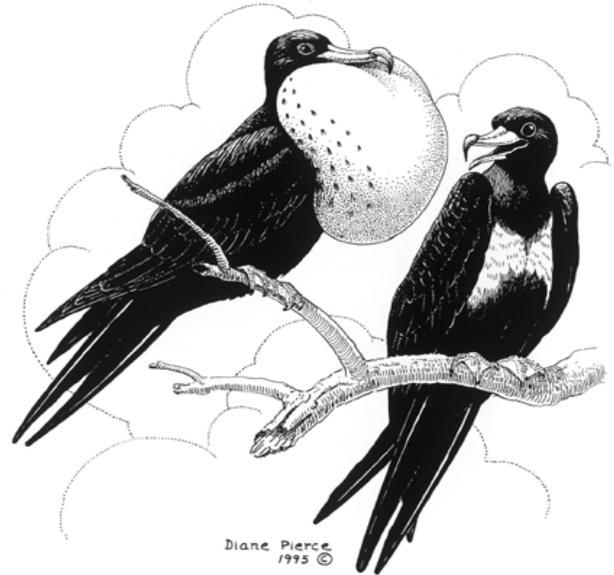


Illustration © 1995 Diane Pierce, All Rights Reserved.

# Magnificent Frigatebird

