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Northern Cardinal *Cardinalis cardinalis*

The Northern Cardinal is a common to abundant resident throughout Florida. It is the common redbird of backyards and parks and is one of the most easily recognized species in the state. The Cardinal is a resident in the eastern half of the United States, including southern Canada, and is also found from Central America north to southeastern California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas.

Two subspecies breed in Florida: *C. s. cardinalis* west of the Apalachicola River and *C. s. floridanus* throughout the remainder of the state (Stevenson 1976).

Habitat. The Northern Cardinal is found in a wide variety of habitats, as long as thickets or bushes are present. It is as common in towns and cities as it is in dense hardwood hammocks. Cardinals mostly feed on plant matter, such as the seeds of weeds and grasses, fruits, and grains, but insects and other invertebrates compose about one-third of its diet (Howell 1932).

Nests are usually found within 1 to 4 m (3 to 12 ft) of the ground in bushes, tangles of vines, or small trees and are loosely constructed out of twigs, bark, vines, and leaves and lined with grasses and hair. The heavily brown-spotted eggs are usually bluish-white in color. Most often the clutch numbers 3. Eggs hatch in 12 to 13 days, and the young fledge at about 10 days of age.

Seasonal Occurrence. The Northern Cardinal is found year-round throughout Florida. Migratory movements peak in March and April and again in October. Higher frequencies in the interior of northwest Florida during winter counts "may indicate an appreciable influx of Cardinals there in winter" (Stevenson and Anderson 1994)

The Northern Cardinal normally raises 2 to 3 broods each nesting season.

Status. Cardinals were found in more than 1,000 quadrangles, among the most of any species. It is absent on from a few quadrangles in the Keys, Florida Bay, and possibly the agricultural areas of Palm Beach County.

R. David Goodwin

Sponsored by Elizabeth A. Cardinal



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Northern Cardinal

