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Northern Harrier *Circus cyaneus*

The Northern Harrier, formerly named the Marsh Hawk, breeds throughout much of Canada, the western and northwestern United States, and Kentucky, Virginia, and West Virginia.

Habitat. The nest is placed on vegetation close to or on the ground, usually in a marsh. Three or 4 pale bluish white eggs are incubated 31 to 32 days, and young fledge in 30 to 35 days (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

Northern harriers feed on rodents, small birds, snakes, frogs, and large insects, which they startle or flush as they slowly quarter back and forth a few feet above the vegetation in old fields, pastures, and marshes (Sprunt 1954).

Seasonal Occurrence. In the Big Bend region, Northern Harriers show a definite decrease between May and June and increase again in July and August (Stevenson and Anderson 1994); these birds are termed migrants. Layne and Douglas (1976) reviewed a number of midsummer records of Northern Harriers in the extensive prairie and improved pasture areas in south-central Florida and described them as summer residents or early fall migrants.

Status. The Northern Harrier is an abundant wintering species throughout most of Florida, but a rare summer resident. Howell (1932) reported that it "breeds sporadically in northern Florida" and described 3 nests; 1 on Orange Lake (Marion County) and 1 each at Micanopy and Paynes Prairie (Alachua County) all in the early years of this century.

Layne and Douglas (1976) found no evidence of breeding for this species. Likewise, no records of confirmed breeding were found during the Atlas period. The 4 "possible" and 3 "probable" records in north and central Florida leave unanswered the question, "Are Northern Harriers breeding in Florida"?

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Northern Harrier

