Red-winged Blackbird  

*Agelaius phoeniceus*


**Habitat.** Inland, Red-winged Blackbirds occur around freshwater ponds and marshes in natural, agricultural, and suburban settings. Along the coast and in the Keys, they breed in salt marshes, mangroves, and buttonwoods. Their food consists of the seeds of weeds and grasses, various grains, and insects and other invertebrates.

Red-winged Blackbirds usually nest in loose colonies. Generally, more than 1 female nests in a male's territory (Dolbeer 1976). Frequently, a small marsh supports a rather large number of nests. The nests, constructed of stems of cattails or other marsh plants, are usually built in small shrubs growing in or along the edge of a marsh. However, many nests are woven into cattails or sawgrass. In southern coastal areas, nests may be placed in mangroves, usually within 3 m (10 ft) of the ground. In suburban and urban areas, Red-winged Blackbirds nest in hedges and other shrubs. The eggs, usually 3 or 4 in number, are bluish-green and spotted or mottled with purple and black. The eggs hatch within 10 to 12 days, and the young fledge in 9 to 11 days (Bent 1958).

**Seasonal Occurrence.** Many individuals that breed in northern states withdraw to Florida during the winter months, November through February. For Florida breeders, egg dates range from 6 March through 13 July (Stevenson and Anderson 1994).

**Status.** During the breeding season, Red-winged Blackbirds are found throughout the state, although they are less common in parts of the Panhandle and northern peninsula. They breed throughout the Florida Keys, except on the Dry Tortugas. Because of its abundance, the openness of its preferred breeding habitat, and its conspicuous nests, Red-winged Blackbirds were confirmed breeding in a large number of quadrangles, even those that were only briefly surveyed. Recently fledged young perch on wires and fences next to the marshes in which they hatched, making them easy to locate.

R. David Goodwin

Sponsored by Belinda Perry
Red-winged Blackbird

- Possible: 92 of 1028 (8.9%)
- Probable: 153 of 1028 (14.9%)
- Confirmed: 722 of 1028 (70.2%)

Map showing distribution of Red-winged Blackbirds in Florida with a scale bar indicating 100 miles.