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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.

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White-crowned Pigeon *Columba leucocephala*

This tropical pigeon breeds on the Florida Keys, the Bahamas, and in the Antilles, the Cayman Islands, and islands of the western Caribbean Sea (Stevenson and Anderson 1994).

Habitat. The White-crowned Pigeon typically nests on mangrove keys from southern Biscayne Bay south through the Marquesas Keys. This pigeon requires two distinctively different habitats to produce young successfully (Strong et al. 1991; Bancroft 1996). Nesting requires isolated mangrove islands that are free of predators. It feeds in hardwood forests that bear fleshy fruit. Nesting and feeding habitats typically are separated by several miles of water. The limited extent of suitable feeding habitat defines where nesting occurs. Breeding adults in Florida Bay fly 5 to 40 km (3 to 25 mi) on feeding trips to the mainline keys or to the southern mainland (G. T. Bancroft, unpubl. data).

The birds build a stick nest placed anywhere from ground level to high in the canopy (Wiley and Wiley 1979; G. T. Bancroft, unpubl. data). Two white eggs are laid, and both parents share in incubation and brooding duties and feeding the young. Incubation takes 13 to 14 days. Young birds leave the nest when they are 16 to 20 days old but, generally do not leave the nesting keys until 25 to 40 days old (G. T. Bancroft, unpubl. data).

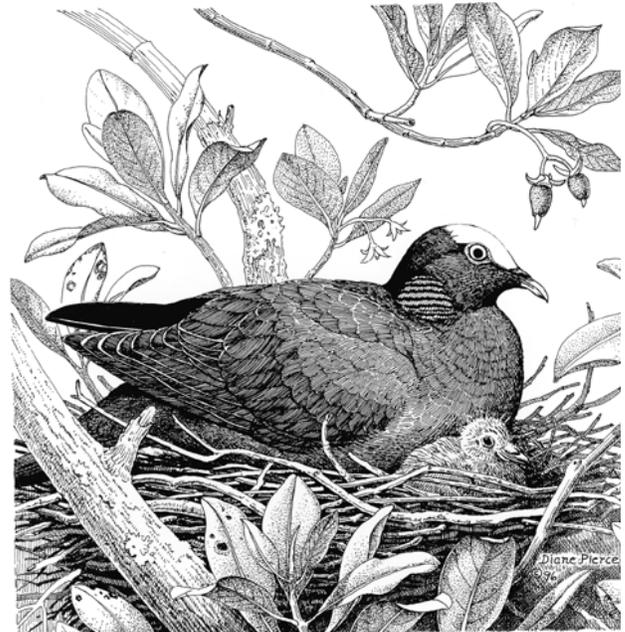


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White-crowned Pigeons feed almost exclusively on the fruit of tropical hardwood trees. Poisonwood, bolly, shor leaf fig, and strangler fig are extremely important, especially during the breeding season. After the breeding season, fruiting trees such as strongbark, snowberry, mastic, pigeon plum, and sea grape are also important.

Seasonal Occurrence. In Florida Bay, White-crowned Pigeons nest from early May through September. Generally, 2 major periods of nesting occur one in late May to early June and a second, larger peak in late July early August.

The White-crowned Pigeon is a locally abundant resident of the Florida Keys and the southern mainland tip from April to September. During the remainder of the year, populations decrease to only a fraction of summer numbers. Most White-crowned Pigeons in Florida migrate to the Bahamas, Cuba, and the Greater Antilles during the fall.

Status. Major nesting concentrations occur in Florida Bay (Strong et al. 1991; G. T. Bancroft, unpubl. data) on mangrove islands in the lower Keys. A few birds have been found nesting on the human-inhabited keys and on the mainland. On 22 June 1991, the northeastern breeding record was established when a nest with eggs was found along a canal near Chapman Field Park in Dade County by Ginni Hokanson. The northwestern edge of the breeding range was determined by Curtis Kruer, who observed fledged young near Shark Point in Monroe County in 1990. It is suspected that small numbers of White-crowned Pigeons breed along the west coast of Everglades National Park, possibly as far north as Cape Romano, but the inaccessibility of this area makes confirmation difficult. Nests are relatively easy to find because adults flush in a characteristic manner when a person passes within about 9 m (30 ft) of the nest. Presence of cooing birds is not a reliable indicator of nesting, because birds coo while on feeding grounds.

The species is threatened in Florida as well as throughout much of its Caribbean distribution (Arendt et al. 1974; Bancroft 1996). Over hunting has reduced its numbers in the Caribbean. In Florida, its decline is due to habitat destruction; and it is listed as a threatened species by the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission [editor: now Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission] (Wood 1991).

Protection of the remaining fragments of tropical hardwood forest in the Florida Keys and of wintering grounds in the Bahamas and the Greater Antilles is critical for the preservation of this species in Florida (Bancroft 1996).

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Sponsored by Stella Elkins Reeves

White-crowned Pigeon

