

LIMPKIN

Aramus guarauna

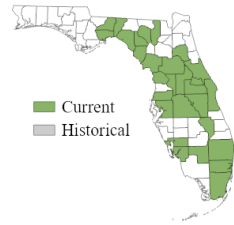
Order: Gruiformes

Family: Aramidae

FNAI Ranks: G5/S3

U.S. Status: none

FL Status: none



Description: Large, long-billed, long-legged wader of swamps and marshes. Sports a deep brown color with white spotting and streaking. Bill is heavy and slightly decurved, allowing easy access to its preferred food, the apple snail (*Pomacea paludosa*). Call is an unmistakable loud, wild scream or wail.

Similar Species: Long neck and bill of the limpkin help distinguish it from the slightly smaller, but similarly colored, immature night-herons (*Nycticorax* spp.). The immature white ibis (*Eudocimus albus*; see species account) has a long, decurved bill and long legs but is not brown all over with white flecking.

Habitat: Inhabits mangroves, freshwater marshes, swamps, springs and spring runs, and pond and river margins. Also lake margins in peninsular Florida and swales, strand swamps, sloughs, and impoundments in south Florida. May also forage in ruderal areas such as sugarcane fields and banks of irrigation canals. Wide range of nesting sites, including mounds of aquatic vegetation and marsh grasses, among cypress knees, and high in trees.

Seasonal Occurrence: Males generally appear to be resident where they breed, although there is some evidence of movement, possibly related to food availability. A partial migration was documented with color-banded birds from Wakulla Springs (Wakulla County) and Alexander Springs (Lake County); most females left their breeding territories, for parts unknown, in mid-summer and returned in mid-winter. Observations of large concentrations of limpkins are usually attributed to regional drought conditions. Nesting generally occurs late February - May in north Florida and late January - March in central Florida, and possibly earlier in south Florida.

Florida Distribution: Scattered sites in the Panhandle and northern Florida, but

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generally widespread in central and southern Florida.

Range-wide Distribution: Resident in southeastern Georgia, Florida, Greater Antilles (rare or extirpated in Puerto Rico), and from southern Mexico to central Argentina.

Conservation Status: Occur on numerous lands owned by federal, state, and private entities, although this is no insurance against threats. A large and presumably stable population at Wakulla Springs State Park (Wakulla County) has experienced recent declines, possibly because of deteriorating water quality. Pollution, hydrological disruptions, and an increase in invasive plants threaten the health of the apple snail population and hence the limpkin.

Protection and Management: Maintain natural hydrological regimes and protect suitable habitat from pollution, development activities, and proliferation of exotic plants. Institute regular surveys and monitoring programs for both limpkins and apple snails.

References: Robertson and Woolfenden 1992, Rodgers et al. (eds.) 1996, Stevenson and Anderson 1994.



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