

OSPREY

Pandion haliaetus

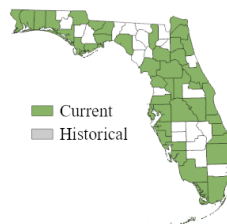
Order: Accipitriformes

Family: Pandionidae

FNAI Ranks: G5/S3S4

U.S. Status: none

FL Status: none



Description: A large, soaring bird with wings bent at the wrist in flight. Back is dark brown; head and undersides are largely white. A dark brown streak extends through eye and expands towards back of head; small streaks on top of head and across breast. Feathers on top of head can form a low, irregular crest. Females are slightly larger than males. Immature birds have orangish eyes, while those of adults are more yellow.

Similar Species: Bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*; see species account) is dark on the underside (completely black in adults and mottled in juveniles). Bend in the wrist of the wing is also diagnostic of ospreys, since bald eagle generally holds wings flat when soaring. The osprey also tends to flap more frequently than eagles and other large soaring birds.

Habitat: Found on or near large lakes, rivers, and coastal areas where suitable nesting sites can be found. Water bodies must be large, fairly open, and clear for osprey to locate prey. Nesting sites are large living or dead trees and man-made structures; osprey numbers appear to be limited by presence of adequate nesting sites. Nesting sites often stand above surrounding vegetation or in more open fields and sparsely timbered forests, but low nesting sites are common, particularly in mangrove swamps. Nesting may seem colonial in some coastal areas or surrounding large inland lakes. Lake Istokpoga in Highlands County supported 229 active nests in 2000.

Seasonal Occurrence: May be found throughout Florida in all seasons, but winter records are less common, particularly in north Florida. Numbers generally increase in north Florida beginning with spring migration in February; fall migration appears to commence in September. Large numbers may occasionally be seen moving south in fall.

Florida Distribution: Found throughout Florida, but may be rare in some areas. The interior of the Panhandle has very few nesting birds, and winter records are even less common. Population may be increasing, however, and sightings may become more regular at some inland lakes and rivers in the Panhandle.

Range-wide Distribution: Cosmopolitan. Found throughout much of North America and in many parts of Asia, Australia, Africa, Europe, and South America. Found throughout Gulf of Mexico, Bahamas, Caribbean, and the Antilles.

Conservation Status: Listing as a Species of Special Concern seems to stem from threats posed to nesting sites in Monroe County, particularly by boat traffic. Population declines documented in the latter half of the 1900s probably stemmed from eggshell thinning (caused by organophosphate pesticides), which was documented at some Florida breeding sites. Another potential cause for declines observed in south Florida is lowered food availability.

Protection and Management: Populations can be expanded in some areas through construction of nesting platforms.

References: McMillian 2001, Robertson and Woolfenden 1992, Rodgers et al. (eds.) 1996, Stevenson and Anderson 1994.

