



# FRIENDS MATTER



Protected Bird Nesting Area with a Black Skimmer colony in background.  
Photo by Joyce Galardo

## It's Summertime on Tampa Bay Refuges

by *Barbara Howard*

Needless to say, it has been a unique summer on and off the refuges. The Egmont Key and Passage Key refuges have seen record numbers of visitors this spring and summer, presenting some management challenges for USFWS and FPS staff on the islands. Despite high visitation and storms the nesting birds and sea turtles are managing. Intensive monitoring by USFWS and FPS staff along with volunteer bird stewards has kept disturbances to a minimum. We are grateful that Cristobal has been our only named storm so far and hope any others hold off till our nesting is over. Good news at Passage Key NWR. USFWS biologist, Joyce Kleen found about 150 White Ibis nests (with hatched chicks) and around 400 pairs of Laughing Gulls nesting. We have not had significant nesting on Passage for many years so this is wonderful news. Passage continues to be a difficult site for staff to manage for trespass from boaters, so this is good to hear.

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Laughing Gull, Sandwich Tern, and Royal Tern chicks are all over Egmont Key now. The Black Skimmers have re-nested after Cristobal and are on nests with eggs. Chicks should be hatching any day now. The American Oystercatcher chick triplets are doing great as well. The area is roped off and FPS staff has been doing a great job keeping it disturbance free – thank you. A big thank you to our bird stewards who travel to Egmont each weekend and holiday with PPE and social distancing in full force. (Thank you, Joyce Galiardo, for the updates.)

The Osprey nesting on Egmont is a mixed bag this year. The lighthouse couple fledged 2 chicks. One of them likes to people watch and eat on the bench near the lighthouse; much easier than flying all the way to the top. At a second location two Osprey chicks were lost when their nest was blown down. The male Osprey from the fire tower nest died but he female was able to fledge one chick by herself. She should have a new mate next season.

Our first Egmont sea turtle nest has hatched from one of the nests that washed over during Cristobal. Twenty little turtles hatched and made it to the sea! That is a small number considering nests can have an average of 100 eggs, but amazing under the circumstances. That is a success. (Thank you Nancy Whitford for the osprey and turtle hatchling updates.)

The Pinellas refuges again saw successful nesting on Little Bird Key and Jackass Key. Our nesting survey work on these islands was spotty, due to the timing and restrictions associated with COVID-19, but we did manage to do some observations. We had nesting pairs of Great Blue Herons, Reddish Egrets, Black Crowned Night Herons, Little Blue Herons, Snowy Egrets, Double Crested Cormorants, Prairie Warblers and possibly others. The July bird survey found an adult and juvenile Roseate Spoonbill on Jackass that may have nested there as they did in 2019. All in all, not a bad season!

## Birds of the Refuge: Little Blue Heron

(*Egretta caerulea* )

**R**efuge Locations – Little Blue Herons are commonly found on the Pinellas NWR mangrove islands. In past years they have nested on Little Bird, Jackass, Indian and Tarpon Keys.

A small, dark heron feathered in moody blues and purples, this Florida resident can be found stalking both fresh and salt water shallows for their food. Little Blues eat mostly small fish, supplemented by a variety of small amphibians as well as crustaceans, grasshoppers, dragonflies, and other invertebrates.



Thousands of beach grasses planted on Egmont in 2020

Photo by Patrick Mundus

Little Blue Herons nest in multi-species colonies alongside egrets, ibises, herons, and pelicans. They generally nest in low shrubs and small trees, in protected areas below the canopy. The nesting pair will have a clutch of 3-4 eggs that they will incubate for about 2 weeks. After hatching, the young will fledge after about 28 days. Juveniles are nearly full white feathered, slowly molting into their trademark 'blue' color during their first two years. Look closely, as they can easily be mistaken for Snowy or Great Egrets.



Photo by Tom Bell

Little Blue Heron populations have declined significantly between 1966 and 2015, and continue to trend downward today. In Florida the birds are designated a Threatened species. Key threats to Florida's Little Blues include, the loss of suitable foraging and breeding areas due to development, elevated populations of native and exotic predators that cause nest failure, and the degradation of breeding and foraging habitat. Closing wading-bird colonies to human disturbance during the breeding season is important to helping Little Blue Herons. Our refuge mangrove islands are important to Little Blue Herons

*\*information courtesy of Cornell Lab of Ornithology, All About Birds; and Florida Audubon Species Action Plan for Six Imperiled Wading Birds: Little Blue Heron (Egretta caerulea) Reddish Egret (Egretta rufescens) Roseate Spoonbill (Platalea ajaja) Snowy Egret (Egretta thula) Tricolored Heron (Egretta tricolor) White Ibis (Eudocimus albus) Final Draft November 1, 2013*

## Protect Our Pelicans: *The Brown Pelican, a Gulf Coast Icon* from Jeanette Edwards, Friends of Pelicans

While the Florida state bird is the Northern Mockingbird, our most iconic Gulf Coast bird is no doubt the Brown Pelican. You can not spend a day on or near the our Tampa Bay refuges without seeing these unique characters. Almost everyone who sees them thrills at the sight as they glide effortlessly across the water or plunge dive headfirst straight into the water. It's a wonderful sight that residents and tourists alike love to see and enjoy.

Brown Pelicans are survivors, on the Gulf coast they have fought their way back from the brink,...twice! In the 1890's their populations were decimated, along with other



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wading birds, by hunting both for their feathers and eggs. The first national wildlife refuge in the nation, Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge on the east coast of Florida, was created in 1903 by President Theodore Roosevelt. After WWII pelican populations were once again decimated, this time



pesticides such as DDT were the culprit. By the 1960's pelican populations along the Gulf coast were nearly gone. The brown pelican was placed on the United States Endangered Species Act in 1970. In 1972, the United States Environmental Protection Agency banned DDT usage in the United States. Our Florida populations slowly recovered and in 1989 the species was removed from the endangered species list. This is considered one of the great successes of the Endangered Species Act.

While this recovery was an achievement, our work is not done. USFWS, Audubon Florida, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), and many other groups work hard every season to ensure that Brown Pelicans and other nesting birds have a successful breeding season. Brown Pelicans nest on the Egmont Key National Wildlife Refuge, the Pinellas National Wildlife Refuge, and other protected mangrove islands in Tampa Bay. However, even after all of this time and effort to protect them, the majority of Brown Pelicans will die their very first year. While estimates vary, it is generally thought that 70% of Brown Pelicans will not survive their first year.

One of the leading causes of Brown Pelican death, that could be avoided, is fishing line entanglement.

Entanglement in fishing line is quite common and will most likely result in death, unless the birds are caught and untangled. Pelicans need fish to survive, and are attracted to good fishing spots, particularly the shadows under fishing piers which tend to have many bait fish. Our recreational fishing piers are the number one location where Brown Pelicans become entangled. Fishing piers are often crowded with fishermen casting off of the pier creating an obstacle course of fishing line for flying birds. Depending on the height of the fishing pier, rescuing birds can be difficult. If an entangled line is cut, the bird will then fly off with hook, line, and sinker, to become caught in the mangroves and die a slow death. For first year pelicans the survival learning curve is very tough. In Tampa Bay the Sunshine Skyway fishing piers and the Fort de Soto Gulf Pier are the most dangerous sites for Brown Pelicans. The non-profit, Friends of the Pelicans has volunteers working every weekend at these three piers to rescue entangled birds, as well as patrolling nearby nesting and roosting sites. In 2019 this small group of volunteers, working on weekends, rescued over 350 pelicans in Tampa Bay, likely only a fraction of entangled birds. Virtually every day pelicans are hooked and entangled at the Skyway and Fort de Soto piers. Some of these birds are coming directly off of nesting colonies at our Tampa Bay national wildlife refuges.

## 5 Ways We Can Help Brown Pelicans:

1. The first thing is to know what do do if you or someone you are with hooks a bird. Most importantly, DON'T CUT THE LINE! Cutting the line is a death sentence as they will return to their mangrove rookery, become tangled in the mangroves and die. Instead, carefully reel the bird in as you would a trophy fish, lift the pelican gently into the boat with the use of a net or simply grab it's beak and lift it in (they only weigh 4-6 pounds) then after putting a towel or shirt over it's head to keep it calm, carefully remove the hook by pushing the hook through it's skin until you can see the barb. Simply cut off the barb and then you can back the hook out. Be sure to remove all the line and then release the bird. Pelicans are fairly docile and will not put up too much fuss once their eyes are covered.
2. If you are out and about and find a pelican please remove the hook and line but don't release it. More often than not these birds are very weak and dehydrated, or have injuries from the line cutting into them and will need to be taken to a wildlife rehab center if possible. Seaside Seabird Sanctuary will generally take injured pelicans for rehabilitation, and the Friends of the Pelicans can often arrange transportation of the bird. This rescue can interrupt your day but the reward is great.
3. Don't ever feed pelicans – feeding causes them to approach fishermen where they are more likely to become hooked. Never give them a filleted fish as the sharp bones tear their pouch, become lodged in their throats causing starvation, or puncture their internal organs causing death. They are meant to eat small bait fish with very tiny bones that are covered by skin and slide easily down their throats. It is against the law to feed pelicans. It is simple DO NOT FEED WILDLIFE.
4. Help educate the general public – have a friendly conversation, we can talk to each other!
5. Volunteer or donate - if you would like more information, or would like to help, contact Friends of the Pelicans ([friendsofthepelicans.org](http://friendsofthepelicans.org) or on Facebook) and /or Seaside Seabird Sanctuary ([seasideseabirdsanctuary.org](http://seasideseabirdsanctuary.org)).

## A History of Conservation: *Early Conservation in Florida*

*From information presented by Florida Audubon History of Conservation and the Tampa Bay History Center*

Florida Audubon Society was formed March 2, 1900 in response to reports about the hunting of birds in Florida. Chapters were created to help protect birds, wildlife, and their habitats. Early members included Teddy Roosevelt, FL Governor W.D Bloxham, American Museum of Natural History's Frank Chapman, and President Grover Cleveland, and Maria Audubon, the granddaughter of John James Audubon.

In 1900 Congress passed the Lacey Act, the first federal wildlife protection law. Florida Audubon Chapters pushed for the passage of the law. The Lacey Act made it a federal offense to transport wildlife across state borders if they had been taken in violation of state law.

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In 1901 the Florida Legislature passed the Model Law. This made it illegal to hunt non-game birds, collect eggs, and destroy nests of any species other than the English Sparrow. This law was meant to protect Egrets from the plume trade.

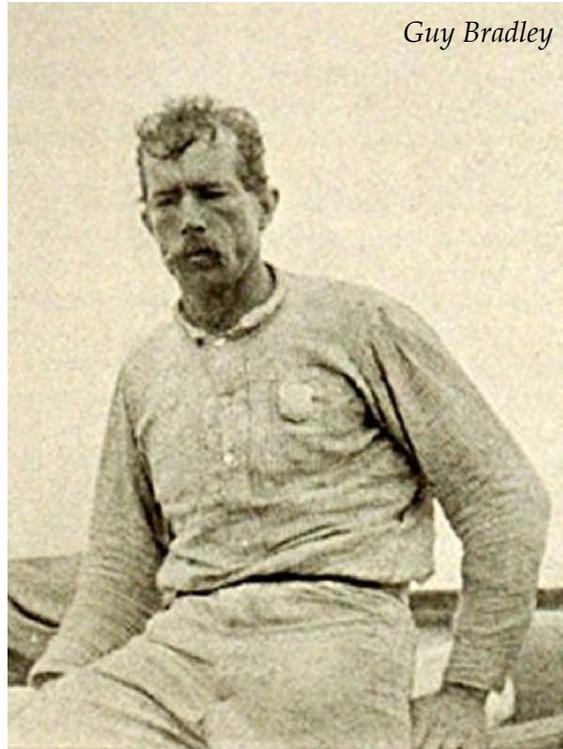
Guy Bradley and his brother were plume hunters and hunting guides in south Florida. In 1902, after the Model Law was put into effect in 1901, he was appointed as a game warden by Monroe County to protect the Florida Keys, Everglades, Big Cypress Swamp and Ten Thousand Islands. He started with educating hunters about the new law and arrested folks who ignored it. He arrested his 16 year old neighbor, Tom Smith, for plume hunting twice before Tom's father, Civil War Veteran Capt. Walter Smith, threatened to kill Bradley if he arrested his sons again. Bradley arrested Tom and his brother Dan as they were killing birds in Florida Bay. 35-year-old Bradley was murdered shortly after. Smith was found not guilty.

Early wardens were at risk for their lives as plume hunters weren't taking the to the new laws quietly. Bradley's death led to the passing of State & Federal laws protecting native birds and eventually to the creation of Everglades National Park.

Paul Kroegel, an avid protector of the birds at Pelican Island on the Indian River Lagoon, took it upon himself to protect the island with his boat and 10 gauge shotgun. He incorporated the help of Frank Chapman and Florida Audubon to advocate for the Lacey Act. In 1903 when President Roosevelt designated Pelican Island as the first national wildlife refuge, Kroegel was hired as the first refuge manager. His salary of \$1 a month was paid by the Audubon Society. He was manager from 1903 till 1926.

President Theodore Roosevelt created the Antiquities Act of 1906 allowing presidents who followed him to set aside "historic landmarks, historic or prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest" into federal ownership. This was instrumental in creating many of our protected lands for future generations.

Passage Key was Tampa Bay's First Federal Bird Reservation. The plume trade devastated Passage Key as it did all of Florida in the late 1800's. When Passage Key was designated as a federal bird reservation by President Roosevelt in 1905, it was a 60-acre island with a freshwater lake and lush vegetation. Asa Nettleton Pillsbury and his family homesteaded on Passage Key in 1908. In 1910 he was hired by the Audubon Society as the part-time warden of the key, a post that he held until 1921. Pillsbury and his wife reported 102 species of birds on the island in 1910.



*Guy Bradley*

*Cherish these natural wonders,  
cherish the natural resources,  
cherish the history and romance as*

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Sadly, even now, U.S. Fish & Wildlife does not receive enough federal funding to properly protect the 568 National Wildlife Refuges. Over 200 independent “Friends” groups, like ours, volunteer their time and funds providing bird stewards, education, and habitat conservation to try to bridge the gap.

## Living Responsibly *from our friends at the Ocean Conservancy*

**C**onsider the land-sea connection.

What we do on land directly affects the ocean. Runoff from lawns, farms, streets, parking lots, and construction sites is a major source of ocean pollution. In the bays and estuaries around nearly every populated area, chemicals and fertilizer from lawns, gardens, and farm fields are creating “dead zones” where nothing can live. Runoff - silt, nitrogen, and phosphorous - rob ocean waters of light and oxygen, and are especially harmful to coral reef ecosystems. You can control the polluted runoff from your neighborhood by taking the following actions.

- If you live right on the water, plant a buffer zone of trees, tall grasses, and shrubs to filter runoff and to provide shelter and habitat for turtles, shorebirds, and other animals.
- Use less fertilizer. Instead, mulch grass clippings to enrich your lawn and create a compost pile that will provide natural nutrients for your garden.
- Wash your car on the grass, not the driveway. That way, harmful chemicals will be filtered by grass and soil before they reach local waterways, where they can harm delicate aquatic life.
- Make sure that construction sites in your neighborhood use silt fences. Storm wattles, and other means of keeping sediment and other harmful runoff out of storm drains.
- Plant trees. Trees contribute to clean water; they are the ocean’s best filters.



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