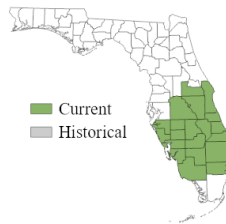


## CRESTED CARACARA

*Caracara plancus*



**Order:** Falconiformes

**Family:** Falconidae

**FNAI Ranks:** G5/S2

**U.S. Status:** Threatened

**FL Status:** Threatened

**Description:** Large, distinctive raptor; large head with black cap and crest. Long neck, hooked bill, long legs, and long, rounded wings bent back at the wrist. Mainly black-brown with white throat and neck and bare, red facial skin. Upper back, breast, and tail buffy white with barring, and a broad, dark band at end of tail. White patches at ends of dark wings are conspicuous in flight; steady, shallow wing-beats with minimal soaring. Often seen with vultures because of its scavenging nature. Juveniles have pale edging on brown feathers of upper side and are streaked below. Facial color changes from grayish-pink (juveniles) to yellow (second year) to bright yellow-orange or reddish (adults); also changes depending on blood flow to area.

**Similar Species:** In flight, may be confused with larger bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*; see species account) at a distance. *Caracara*'s smaller size and the white panels in wings help distinguish the two; *caracaras* seldom soar and generally fly low above ground.

**Habitat:** Open country, including dry prairie and pasture lands with cabbage palm, cabbage palm/live oak hammocks, and shallow ponds and sloughs. Preferred nest trees are cabbage palms, followed by live oaks.

**Seasonal Occurrence:** Nonmigratory. Generally monogamous; adult pairs stay year-round on territory, which may be maintained for years.

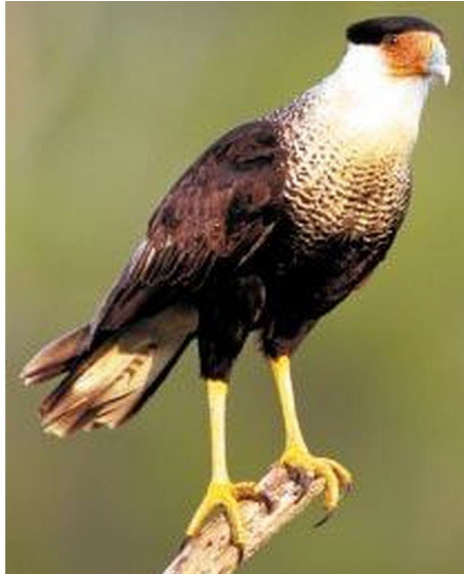
**Florida Distribution:** Based on 1987 - 1991 data, most abundant in south central Florida in Osceola, Highlands, Okeechobee, De Soto, Glades, and Hendry counties; fewer records (1 - 6) from surrounding counties. Occasional reports outside known breeding range, north to Nassau County, west to Bay County, and south to the Keys, are attributed to escapees or wandering individuals.

**Range-wide Distribution:** South-central Florida, southeastern Texas and southern Arizona south throughout parts of Mexico, Central and South America to northern and central Peru and northern Brazil. Rare and local in Cuba, Isle of Pines, and southwestern Louisiana.

**Conservation Status:** Florida population thought to be relatively stable over a 20-year span (1972 - 1991). Estimate of 400 - 500 individuals, although not all suitable habitat was accessible to surveyors. Overall, range has contracted and become more fragmented. Currently, habitat threatened most by residential development and conversion to more intensive (e.g., citrus) agricultural uses. Three Lakes Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Avon Park Air Force Range, and South Florida Water Management District lands along the Kissimmee River offer limited protected area. Recent state acquisitions of Kissimmee Prairie State Preserve (1997), Fisheating Creek WMA (2000), and the Fisheating Creek Conservation Easement (2000) have helped protect additional significant habitat.

**Protection and Management:** Continue habitat restoration.

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



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