

AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER

Haematopus palliatus

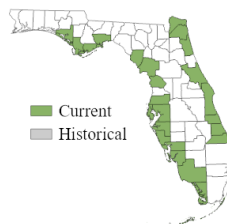
Order: Charadriiformes

Family: Haematopodidae

FNAI Ranks: G5/S2

U.S. Status: none

FL Status: Threatened



Description: A large, heavy shorebird with bright red bill and pink legs. Black on back, head, and chest, and largely white below. Back grades from black to brown towards tail. In flight, a conspicuous diagonal white stripe extends along length of each wing and forms a V pattern with white at the base of the tail.

Similar Species: No other shorebird has a black head and bright red bill. Some terns have a black-capped head and red bill, but backs are generally light-colored. Black skimmer (*Rynchops niger*; see species account) also has red bill and black back, and at a distance might be mistaken for an oystercatcher. However, skimmer is a very weak walker and has short legs.

Habitat: Oystercatchers require large areas of beach, sandbar, mud flat, and shellfish beds for foraging. They use sparsely vegetated, sandy areas for nesting, but also will use beach wrack and marsh grass. Again, large expanses of suitable nesting areas generally are needed.

Seasonal Occurrence: Resident along coastal Florida.

Florida Distribution: Restricted to coastal areas; becoming less common in south Florida and accidental on the Florida Keys. More common along Gulf coast but becoming rare in Panhandle west of St. Vincent Island. Along Atlantic coast, breeding occurs north of Palm Beach County with heaviest concentrations in the Indian River Lagoon system. One inland record associated with a tropical storm.

Range-wide Distribution: Found along tropical and temperate coastlines throughout much of North and South America.

Conservation Status: The little information that exists suggests numbers have been stable for the past decade, but habitat trend is probably downward. Rampant

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development of coastal habitats has eliminated many nesting areas, and disturbance and harassment from pedestrians, dogs, boats, and various recreational activities has lowered the quality of natural habitats that remain.

Protection and Management: Manage existing nesting areas in parks, wildlife management areas, and other public lands to minimize disturbance during the nesting season. Artificial nest platforms have been used successfully in Virginia in areas that have little disturbance but lack beaches; they also present a potential management option in areas where high tides result in repeated nest loss.

References: Poole and Gill (eds.) 1994, Robertson and Woolfenden 1992, Rodgers et. al. (eds.) 1996, Stevenson and Anderson 1994, Toland 1999b.



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