



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

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MEDIA CONTACT:

Randy Smith

South Florida Water Management District

Office: (561) 682-2800 or Cellular: (561) 389-3386

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SFWMD Reports Average 2015 Wading Bird Nesting Season
Wading birds are an important “indicator species” of overall environmental health



*The Everglades ecosystem is home to a vast array of birds, including, from the left, the great blue heron, roseate spoonbill and tricolored heron.
(Click [here to view](#) the 2015 South Florida Wading Bird report.)*

West Palm Beach, FL — South Florida’s wading bird populations had a relatively average nesting success in 2015, according to the latest South Florida Wading Bird Report released by the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD).

While the 2015 nesting was average as compared to the mean of the past 10 years, it was a moderate improvement over recent years. The improvement was largely attributed to increased nesting by the white ibis, the most numerous wading birds in South Florida.

The white ibis produced 28,139 nests, or about 11,000 (64 percent) more nests than the 5-year average, and 32 percent more than the 10-year average.

“Our collaborative work with scientists at noted institutions produces this annual, comprehensive look at the health of important species in the Everglades,” said SFWMD

Governing Board member Sandy Batchelor. “Continued progress with restoration projects is critical to improve essential habitat that will help wading birds flourish.”

An estimated 43,896 wading bird nests were documented during the nesting season throughout South Florida in 2015 (December 2014 to June 2015). This represents 25 percent above the average for the past five years. Highlights of the report include:

- Tricolored heron nesting efforts increased (1,148 nests) relative to recent years, with improvement attributed to increased nesting in Florida Bay.
- Roseate spoonbill nesting improved (365 nests), which is nearly three times more than last year, although it is low when compared to the 30-year mean.
- Great egret nesting (8,213 nests) was within 3 percent of both the 10-and 5-year average.
- Wood stork nesting (1,469 nests) was down 36 percent from the 10-year average and down 32 percent from the 5-year average.

Short-Term Conclusions

Hydrology drives wading bird nesting because of its influence on the availability of aquatic prey.

The 2015 breeding season was preceded by drier-than-average conditions, keeping water levels lower for extended periods of time across large areas. The dry conditions were conducive to the production of slough crayfish, a primary food of the white ibis, which may account for its increase in nesting.

In contrast, the dry conditions limited the production of small fish, which likely led to the decrease in nesting effort by the wood stork.

Long-Term Trends

Large fluctuations in nesting efforts each year are a natural feature of Everglades ecology.

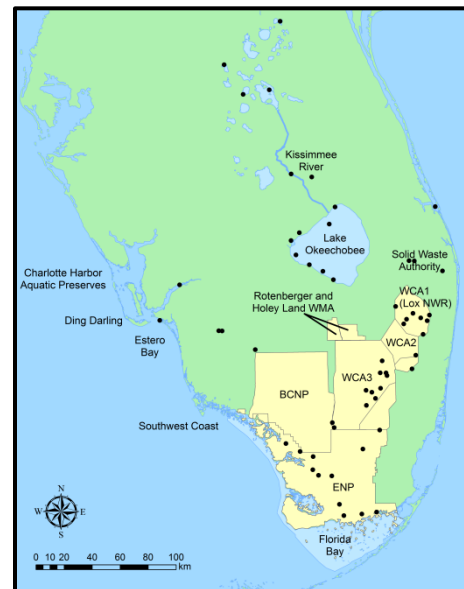
Longer-term data reveal that several nesting responses have improved during the past 20 years, while others have shown no change or are declining. Nesting efforts of white ibis, wood storks and great egrets have generally increased over the past 15 years and appear to be regularly meeting restoration targets.

Snowy egret, tricolored herons and little blue herons nesting numbers are declining sharply. The causes of these declines have not yet been identified..

Other findings in the report include:

- An estimated 33,140 nests were documented in Everglades National Park and the Water Conservation Areas.

Locations of wading bird colonies with ≥ 50 nests in South Florida



(Click on the map for larger version.)

- Lake Okeechobee produced an estimated 3,852 nests, which is slightly more than the previous year but below the 10-year average.
- Small herons have experienced sharp and consistent declines in nest numbers during the past decade.
- Snowy egret nesting efforts continued to decline in 2015.
- Wood storks again failed to breed in the Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary.

Partners in the wading report include: the SFWMD; the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Estero Bay Aquatic Preserve; Everglades National Park; the University of Florida, Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary; Audubon of Florida's Everglades Science Center; J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge; Charlotte Harbor Aquatic Preserves and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, J.W. Corbett Wildlife Management Area.

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The South Florida Water Management District is a regional governmental agency that manages the water resources in the southern part of the state. It is the oldest and largest of the state's five water management districts.

Our mission is to manage and protect water resources of the region by balancing and improving flood control, water supply, water quality and natural systems.