

WINTER SHOREBIRD SURVEY

February 5 – 11, 2016



OVERVIEW

The Winter Shorebird Survey (*a.k.a., the First Friday in February Survey*) is a week-long, statewide survey of shorebirds and seabirds in Florida. Experienced birders who can identify multiple species of wintering shorebirds and seabirds are invited to participate in this survey. Those who would like to gain experience can ask their [Survey Coordinator](#) (contact information on next page) to be paired with a mentor.

OBJECTIVE

The primary objective of the Winter Shorebird Survey is to better understand the winter distribution of shorebirds and seabirds in Florida. This annual survey will allow us to recognize long-term trends or changes in winter population sizes and distribution. It will also help us identify key wintering sites- information that is much needed to guide future conservation efforts.

BACKGROUND

The Winter Shorebird Survey was initiated in Northeast Florida in 2008 as an extension of the statewide survey in Georgia and the International Piping Plover Census. In 2009, partners within the Florida Shorebird Alliance (FSA) expanded the scope of the survey to include the rest of Florida. In 2014, we modified the survey for consistency with Florida's *Monitoring Protocol for Non-Breeding Shorebirds and Seabirds*.

DATE AND TIME

Surveys need to be performed **between Friday, February 5th and Thursday, February 11th**. Choose the tide that gives you the best opportunity to count birds.

PROTOCOL

The Winter Shorebird Survey involves counting birds along a stretch of beach or marsh. It is preferable to walk your survey routes, since areas can be checked more closely on foot. Shorebirds resting on the beach or within the wrack line can be difficult to observe and may get overlooked. However, long stretches of beach may require the use of a vehicle, and driving between flocks while scanning is acceptable as long as you strictly adhere to the [Beach Driving Guidelines](#).

For safety purposes, please survey with a partner (i.e., someone willing to lug the scope and tripod). Equipment list should include:

- 1) Binoculars and/or spotting scope;
- 2) Field guide (even the experts get stumped);
- 3) Data sheets;
- 4) Writing utensil;
- 5) Sun protection;
- 6) Clothing layers (rain and wind can be unpredictable along the coast).

BANDED BIRDS

It is important to carefully record information on any color-banded birds that you observe during your survey. Many shorebird species have colored bands and/or flags on their legs. On the data sheet, please note the exact position of each band on the leg. If the birds have bands or flags with alpha-numeric codes, please note the codes as well. For full instructions, see the [Resighting Protocol for Banded Birds](#) and the FSA website: <http://flshorebirdalliance.org/resources/banded-birds.aspx>.

Please contact Bill Brooks with questions: (904) 731-3136 or billy_brooks@fws.gov.

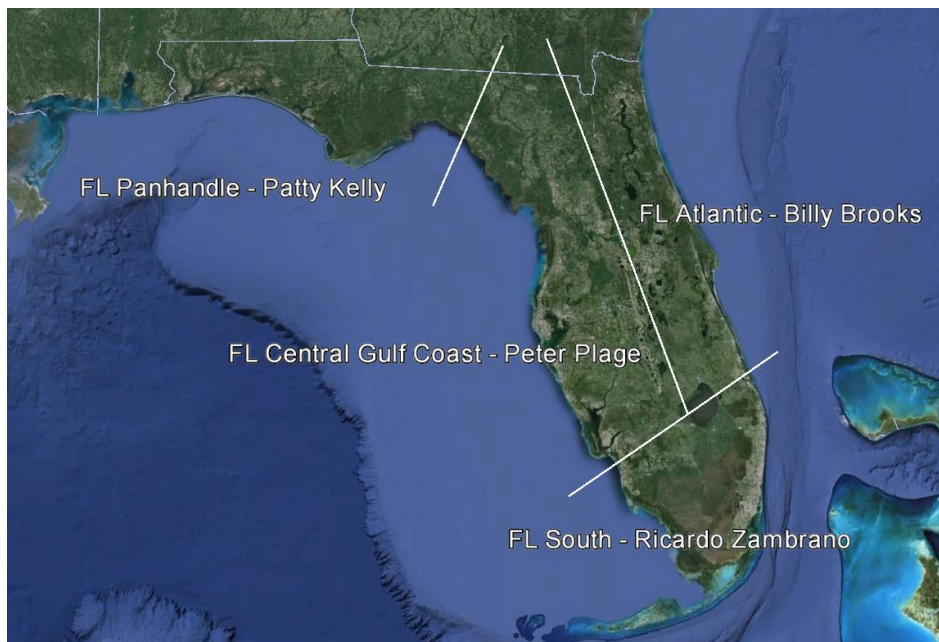


Survey Coordinators (where to send your data sheets?)

Please contact the Survey Coordinator for your region (see map below) to let them know which route you will be surveying.

Then email your data sheets (pg. 4-7) to your Coordinator or enter [online](#) (preferred) by **3/15/2016**.

- **Florida Panhandle** (Escambia to Jefferson Counties): Patricia_Kelly@fws.gov
- **Atlantic Coast** (Nassau to Martin Counties): Billy_Brooks@fws.gov
- **Central Gulf Coast** (Taylor to Lee Counties): Peter_Plage@fws.gov
- **South Florida** (St. Lucie to Monroe County, Collier County): Ricardo.Zambrano@myfwc.com



Winter Shorebird Survey- Instructions

STEP 1 – Coordinate your survey(s) with other local efforts to ensure all important areas are covered. Contact the [Survey Coordinator](#) for your region (see previous page) to let them know which area you will survey or find out where help is needed.

STEP 2 – Once you have selected an area, divide it into manageable survey routes. A route should be a transect you can survey in one outing. You will need to fill out data sheets for **each survey route**. For example, Honeymoon Island State Park (photo right) could be divided into a north and south route, with the parking lot as a convenient midpoint. On [Data Sheet 1](#), fill in the top information (e.g., route name/description: *Honeymoon Island State Park- North Route, from parking lots to north tip of island; surveys conducted on both Gulf and Intercoastal shorelines*).

STEP 3 – With a GPS unit or a mobile device, determine the latitude and longitude of the starting point and end point of your survey route(s). The end point is the point furthest away from where you started. Mark those points on [Data Sheet 1](#). Please report all GPS points in Decimal Degrees.

During your survey, you will also need GPS points for the following:

- 1) **Focal species:** Observations of American Oystercatchers, Piping Plovers, Red Knots, Snowy Plovers, and Wilson's Plovers.
- 2) **Banded birds:** Individual birds that have color leg band or flags.
- 3) **Large groups (50 or more birds):** Observations of large groups of shorebirds and/or seabirds, regardless of species, within ~50 feet of each other – be sure to note the species and number of birds.

Each time you see a focal species, banded birds, or a large group (50+ birds), assign the observation a unique Group or Point number and note that number in the first column of [Data Sheet 1](#). The first observation will be Group/Point #1, the next observation will be Group/Point #2, and so on. Feel free to use additional lines for multiple species encountered in a group (see example of Group/Point #3 on [Data Sheet 1](#)). An additional form ([Data Sheet 1 – continued](#)) is available in case you need more room.

Be sure to only count birds that are on the ground, not those flying overhead. Take care not to flush the birds. If birds move, note where they go so that you do not double-count them. Report birds where you initially saw them.

GPS locations are **not** needed for individuals or small groups (fewer than 50 birds) of *non-focal species*, but please report your running totals of these birds on [Data Sheet 2](#) (see next step), along with the focal species, banded birds, and birds in large groups that you reported on [Data Sheet 1](#).

Dead birds should be reported to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission:
<http://legacy.myfwc.com/bird/default.asp>.

STEP 4 – Report the total number of birds counted for each species on [Data Sheet 2](#). The running totals should include all birds that were reported on [Data Sheet 1](#), as well as those for which a GPS location was not required (i.e., individuals or small groups of non-focal species or unbanded birds). For example, if 22 Royal Terns were encountered in a group of more than 50 birds, and another Royal Tern was observed later in the survey, the group of 22 terns would be reported on [Data Sheet 1](#) and the Survey Total for Royal Terns on [Data Sheet 2](#) would be 23 (see examples on Data Sheets).

STEP 5 – Enter your observations of banded birds in [Data Sheet 3](#). Make sure your Group/Point numbers correspond with those on [Data Sheet 1](#).

STEP 6 – Submit your data by mail, email, or enter online (see [previous page](#) for details).



2016 Winter Shorebird Survey- Data Sheet 2

Date: _____ Lead observer: _____ Route name: _____

Please keep a running tally of all the seabirds and shorebirds that you see during your route survey, then add up the total in the Survey Total column.

Remember to note GPS locations of **Focal Species (listed below in bold)**, banded birds, and large groups of birds (50+) on [Data Sheet 1](#).

SHOREBIRDS

Species	Running tally	Survey Total
Amer. Oystercatcher		
American Avocet		
Black-bellied Plover		
Dunlin		
Greater Yellowlegs*		
Killdeer		
Least Sandpiper		
Lesser Yellowlegs*		
Long-billed Curlew		
Long-billed Dowitcher*		
Marbled Godwit		
Piping Plover		
Red Knot		
Ruddy Turnstone		
Sanderling		
Semi-palmated Plover		
Semi-palmated Sandpiper*		
Short-billed Dowitcher*		
Snowy Plover		
Spotted Sandpiper		
Western Sandpiper*		
Whimbrel		
Willet		
Wilson's Plover		
Wilson's Snipe		

SEABIRDS

Species	Running tally	Survey Total
<i>e.g., Royal Tern</i>	### ### ### ### III	23
Black Skimmer		
Bonaparte's Gull		
Brown Booby		
Brown Pelican		
Caspian Tern		
Common Tern		
Double-crested Corm.		
Forster's Tern		
Franklin's Gull		
Glaucous Gull		
Great Black-backed Gull		
Herring Gull		
Laughing Gull		
Lesser Black-backed Gull		
Ring-billed Gull		
Royal Tern		
Sandwich Tern		
Vega Gull		
White Pelican		

*UNKNOWN SPECIES

If you are uncertain about the identification of difficult species (e.g. Lesser Yellowlegs vs. Greater Yellowlegs), record the bird with the general species group below (e.g. Yellowlegs sp.).

Species	Running tally	Survey Total
<i>Dowitcher sp.(unknown)*</i>		
<i>Sandpiper sp. (unknown)*</i>		
<i>Yellowlegs sp. (unknown)*</i>		

2016 Winter Shorebird Survey- Data Sheet 3

Date: _____ Lead observer: _____ Route name: _____

When recording a band combination, note the position and color of each band. If you see bands or flags with alpha-numeric codes, please record codes. Bands can fade or fall off, so indicate if you are unsure or cannot see both legs clearly. For full instructions, see supplemental *Resighting Protocol for Banded Birds*.

Group or Point #	Species	Band/Flag Code	Band/Flag Color	Orientation Code	Upper Left	Lower Left	Upper Right	Lower Right	Confirmed	Comments
1	SNPL	-	-	-	S	Y/Y	-	B/R	Y	Photo available

- **Group or Point #:** Use the unique group or point number corresponding to the banded bird's location on [Data Sheet 1](#).
- **Species:** Enter the species of the banded bird. Possible species include (but not limited to) American Oystercatcher (**AMOY**), Piping Plover (**PIPL**), Red Knot (**REKN**), Ruddy Turnstone (**RUTU**), Sanderling (**SAND**), Semi-palmated Plover (**SEPL**), Semi-palmated Sandpiper (**SESA**), Snowy Plover (**SNPL**), Whimbrel (**WHIM**), Willet (**WILL**), and Wilson's Plover (**WIPL**).
- **Band/Flag Code:** If there's an alpha-numeric code on a band or flag, record it. If there is no code, draw a line through the box.
- **Band/Flag Color:** Enter the color of the band or flag with the alpha-numeric code. If shorebirds have a colored flag, write an "F" before the color code. Common colors are (**K**)Black, (**B**)Blue, (**A**)Gray, (**G**)Green, (**Lb**)Light blue, (**Lg**)Light Green, (**S**) Metal, (**O**)range, (**P**)ink, (**R**)ed, (**W**)hite, (**Y**)ellow.
- **Code Orientation (AMOY only):** Direction of the code on the band or flag- Vertical (stack), Horizontal (side by side), or Triangular (read counter-clockwise).
- **Recording band codes:** Enter band color located on each leg position: *Upper Left Leg, Lower Left Leg, Upper Right Leg, Lower Right Leg*. If two bands are on the same section of the leg (*e.g., upper left*), write top color/bottom color, for example R/W. If the band is bicolored or tricolored (2-3 colors on one "split" band), write the color codes without a backslash (/). For example, a split-color band (black/pink/white) over red in one leg position should be recorded as KPW/R.
- **Confirmed:** Enter Yes (**Y**) if the band was confirmed by reading it more than once. Otherwise, enter No (**N**).
- **Comments:** Include notes about split bands, faded bands, injuries, etc.

RESIGHTING PROTOCOL FOR BANDED BIRDS

Recording bands and flags

Band re-sighting information is very useful to researchers. Delegate one person to read the code/combinations and record data on the datasheets. It is important that the **entire code or color band combination** is recorded and band position on the leg is noted. When possible, every combination should be read twice, either by the same observer or a second observer, in order to ensure accuracy; colors can be misread due to lighting, faded color bands or grime on the band.

Most banded birds will have a single band or flag on a section of their leg with a silver USFWS band on a different leg. However, it is not unusual to encounter a bird that is missing a USFWS band; sometimes a bird may never have been fit with one or the band may have fallen off. Red Knots can have two bands with unique color combinations on the lower section of the leg. Plovers may have two color bands on either the upper or lower section of the leg. Recently, some Piping Plovers have been marked with an alpha-numeric yellow flag. Many American Oystercatchers have a combination of an alpha-numeric flag and band.

Bands and flags that may be encountered in the field

Unique codes on Bands or Flags

American Oystercatchers, Red Knots, Ruddy Turnstones, Sanderlings and Semi-palmated Sandpipers are commonly banded with a colored flag or band displaying a unique combination of printed numbers and letters (2 or 3 per flag or band). The color of the coded band/flag is just as important as the codes and must be recorded. The coded flag or band is typically located on the upper portion of a shorebird's leg and a metal USFWS band is placed below, just above the foot.

Occasionally, you will see a non-coded colored band on the opposite leg. American Oystercatchers have horizontal, vertical (stacked), or triangular (read counter-clockwise) codes:

AMOU Band Code Orientations		
Horizontal	CX	15
Vertical	0	m
	8	∞
Triangular	C	Recorded:
	EU	CEU

Possible colors for bands and flags (indicated by an "F" before the color code) with unique alpha-numeric codes and color abbreviation used on the field sheet:

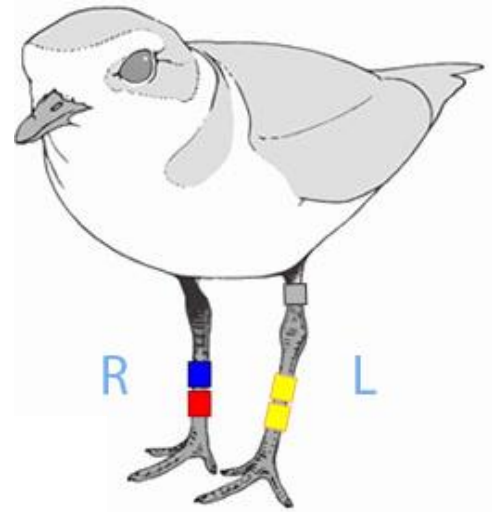
Color Bands	Color Flags
Black (K)	Light Green/Lime (FLg)
Blue (B)	Green (FG)
Green (G)	Red (FR)
Orange (O)	Orange (FO)
Red (R)	
Yellow (Y)	

Solid colored bands

Snowy Plovers are commonly banded with a combination of color bands and a metal USFWS band.

Possible solid color bands and abbreviations for banded Snowy Plover and Piping Plover:

Solid Color Band Codes		
Black (K)	Light Blue (Lb)	Pink (P)
Blue (B)	Light Green (Lg)	Red (R)
Green (G)	Orange (O)	White (W)
Gray (A)	Metal/USFWS (S)	Yellow (Y)



The band combination for the bird above is:
Upper left: S, Lower left: Y/Y, Upper right: - ,
Lower right: B/R

Combination of colored flag and colored bands

Piping Plovers can be banded with a combination of a colored flag, colored bands and a metal USFWS band. Sometimes a single plastic band will include up to three different colors. These are called split color bands and are primarily used on Piping Plovers. To see the full list of split band color combinations, see the Florida Shorebird Alliance website:

<http://flshorebirdalliance.org/resources/banded-birds.aspx>.

Possible Piping Plover colored flags (indicated by an "F" before the color code) without unique flag codes:

Flag Colors (Piping Plover)	
Black (FK)	Red (FR)
Green (FG)	White (FW)
Light Blue (FLb)	Yellow (FY)
Orange (FO)	