

# WINTER SHOREBIRD SURVEY

Feb. 6-12, 2026



## OVERVIEW

The Winter Shorebird 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. Observers have the option to conduct a survey for only the focal species (American Oystercatcher, Piping Plover, Red Knot, Snowy Plover, Wilson's Plover, and Black Skimmer). We encourage new participants to communicate with regional coordinators and local partners.

## 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, particularly for our state or federally listed focal species.

## 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. Read more about the history of the survey in the [February 2025 Wrack Line Newsletter](#).

## DATE AND TIME

Surveys need to be performed **between Friday, February 6<sup>th</sup> and Thursday, February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2026**. Choose the tide that gives you the best opportunity to count birds. Consider coordinating surveys with people surveying adjacent survey transects to minimize double counting birds.

## PROTOCOL

The Winter Shorebird Survey involves counting birds along a stretch of beach or marsh. It is preferable to walk your survey transect, 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.*

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) GPS or mobile device with GPS capabilities;
- 6) Sun protection;
- 7) Clothing layers (rain and wind can be unpredictable along the coast).

## SICK or DEAD BIRDS

- ⇒ Visit [www.myFWC.com/AvianInfluenza](http://www.myFWC.com/AvianInfluenza) for updated information about Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI).
- ⇒ Observations of sick or dead birds can be reported to FWC's Avian Mortality [webpage](#).
- ⇒ To prevent the spread of HPAI, members of the public should **avoid handling sick or dead birds**.
- ⇒ Partners can check with their local wildlife rehab facility for current information on their intake protocols.



## BANDED BIRDS

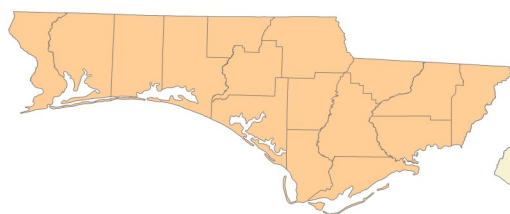
It is important to carefully record information on any color-banded birds that you observe during your survey. Many shorebird species have colored bands and/or flags on their legs. On the data sheet, please note the exact position of each band on the leg. If the birds have bands or flags with alpha-numeric codes, please note the codes as well. [Read here](#) for instructions on resighting and reporting banded birds.

## SURVEY COORDINATORS AND HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR DATA

Please sign up for an existing transect or add a new one on the [Survey Transect List](#). Contact your regional coordinator if you have any questions. [Enter your data online](#) by **3/1/2026**. If you are unable to enter the data online, please submit the data to your regional coordinator:

- **Panhandle** (Escambia to Jefferson Counties): [Raya.Pruner@myfwc.com](mailto:Raya.Pruner@myfwc.com)
- **Central Gulf Coast** (Taylor to Hernando Counties): [Janell.Brush@myfwc.com](mailto:Janell.Brush@myfwc.com)
- **Central Gulf Coast** (Pasco to Lee Counties): [kara.durda@audubon.org](mailto:kara.durda@audubon.org)
- **Atlantic Coast** (Nassau to Indian River Counties): [Hailey.Dedmon@myfwc.com](mailto:Hailey.Dedmon@myfwc.com) [Taylor.Bell@MyFWC.com](mailto:Taylor.Bell@MyFWC.com)
- **South Florida** (St. Lucie to Monroe Counties, Collier County): [Ricardo.Zambrano@myfwc.com](mailto:Ricardo.Zambrano@myfwc.com)

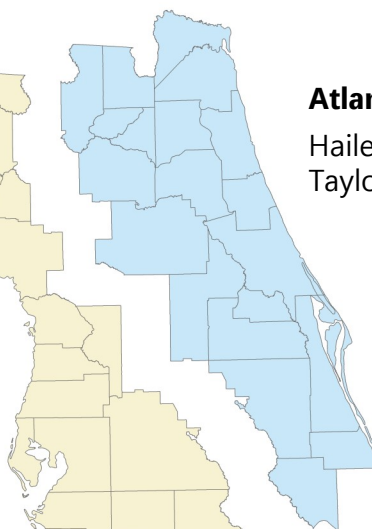
**Florida Panhandle:** Raya Pruner



### **Central Gulf Coast:**

Taylor-Hernando counties: Janell Brush

Pasco-Lee counties: Kara Durda



### **Atlantic Coast:**

Hailey Dedmon  
Taylor Bell



**South Florida:** Ricardo Zambrano

# Winter Shorebird Survey- Instructions

**STEP 1** - Please visit the 2026 [Survey Transect List](#) to sign up for the transect you would like to survey. Select or add a survey transect. The list includes transect names associated with past winter surveys. If someone has already selected your transect, please coordinate with that individual or the regional coordinator to see how you can work together to cover the area. If you would like to add a survey transect not included on the list please contact your regional coordinator first then you can add it to the bottom of the list and provide survey start and end points for the transect.

**STEP 2** - Coordinate your survey(s) with other local efforts to ensure all important areas are covered. Visit the [Survey Transect List](#) for your region to determine where help may be needed.

**STEP 3** - If you are surveying a new transect use a GPS unit, mobile device, or using google maps, determine the latitude and longitude of the starting point and end point of your survey transect(s).

The start and end point should mark the furthest distances covered and may not reflect where you entered and exited the transect (see figure). Put this information at the bottom of the [Winter Bird Transect](#) list. **Please report all GPS points in Decimal Degrees!**

\*Tip to use Google Maps—right click on your location and select 'what's here'. Google Maps will give you an accurate location in decimal degrees. During your survey, you will also need **GPS locations (in decimal degrees)** for the following:

- 1) **Focal species:** Observations of American Oystercatchers, Piping Plovers, Red Knots, Snowy Plovers, Wilson's Plovers, and Black Skimmers.
- 2) **Banded birds:** Individual birds that have color leg band or flags.

**Note:**

**GPS locations are only required for focal species.** Observers also have the option to conduct a survey for only focal species (American Oystercatcher, Piping Plover, Red Knot, Snowy Plover, Wilson's Plover, and Black Skimmer), however we encourage complete surveys where possible. If time allows, also record GPS locations for groups of 50 or more shorebirds.

**Do not count birds that are 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.

**STEP 4** – Enter your data using the Google Data entry file [Winter Birds 2026](#).

**Descriptions of tabs in the Data Entry File:**

[All Species](#) - Enter the total counts of all species seen along your transect. Each transect has a dedicated row.

[Focal Observations](#) - Each transect has a dedicated row. Enter the latitude, longitude, and the number of individuals and any associated bands. There is room to enter up to 19 points associated with each transect. If your transect has >19 points then you can use the additional sheet [For transects with >19 points](#) tab to enter data using one row per lat long recorded.



## Survey Information & GPS Locations

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Observer(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Lead observer's phone number: (       )       -       Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Transect name/description: \_\_\_\_\_ County: \_\_\_\_\_

\*If surveying a newly created transect, contact your [Regional Survey Coordinator](#) and document start and end points below

Choose one: ☐ Complete survey ☐ Focal species only survey

Start time:     :     End time:     :     Weather condition: \_\_\_\_\_

**GPS Locations (in decimal degrees):** Use a GPS unit or other tools (e.g., your cell phone may have a GPS feature) to determine latitude and longitude for the following:

- 1) **Focal species** (individuals or groups): American Oystercatcher (AMOI), Piping Plover (PIPL), Red Knot (REKN), Snowy Plovers (SNPL), Wilson's Plover (WIPL), and Black Skimmer (BLSK).
- 2) **Banded birds** (individual birds with leg bands or flags).

\*New Transect Start Point (Decimal Degrees)

\*New Transect End Point (Decimal Degrees) \_\_\_\_\_

examples

### GPS Locations

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Lead observer: \_\_\_\_\_ Transect name: \_\_\_\_\_

[illegible]

## 2026 Winter Shorebird Survey-Data Sheet 2

*Species List & Count*

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Lead observer: \_\_\_\_\_ Transect name: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

### SHOREBIRDS

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

### SEABIRDS

Species	Running tally	Total
<i>e.g., Royal Tern</i>	### ### ### ### III	23
<b>Black Skimmer</b>		
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		
Northern Gannet		
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	Total
<i>Dowitcher sp.(unknown)*</i>		
<i>Sandpiper sp. (unknown)*</i>		
<i>Yellowlegs sp. (unknown)*</i>		

## 2026 Winter Shorebird Survey-Data Sheet 3

Band Resights

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Lead observer: \_\_\_\_\_ Transect 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 the [Florida Resighting Guidance for Banded Birds](#)

Group or Point #	Species	Band/Flag Code	Band/Flag Color	Code Orientation	Upper Left	Lower Left	Upper Right	Lower Right	Confirmed	Comments
1	SNPL	-	-	-	S	YY	-	BR	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, (**b**)Light blue, (**g**)Light Green, (**S**) Metal, (**O**)range, (**P**)ink, (**R**)ed, (**W**)hite, (**Y**)ellow.
- **Code Orientation (AMOY, WIPL only):** Direction of the code on the band or flag- **V**ertical (stacked), **H**orizontal (side by side), or **T**riangular (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 over bottom color, for example RW. If the band is bicolored or tricolored (2-3 colors on one "split" band), write the color codes with a backslash (/). For example, a split-color band (black/pink/white) over red in one leg position should be recorded as K/P/WR.
- **Confirmed:** Enter Yes (**Y**) if the band was confirmed by reading it more than once. Otherwise, enter No (**N**).