

A Report to Cedar Keys Audubon

Pre-nesting season Zoom for Nature Coast Shorebird Alliance Partners,

February 20, 2024

The Nature Coast Shorebird Partnership meeting was held virtually on February 20, 2024. Nesting surveys begin March 1 and this was a pre-season meeting to organize collaborations for FWC surveys of the Nature Coast region. This covers the shoreline roughly from Hagens Cove in the north to Hernando Beach in the south. Surveys are conducted by boat, airboat, kayak and land observation.

There were 15 participants including representatives of relevant federal and state agencies. Notable among the attendees were Janell Brush, FWC biologist, who presented for CK Audubon last January and John Stark, LSCKNWRs deputy manager, also a presenter for us last season.

The Nature Coast Shorebird Partnership is part of a statewide FWC (see <https://flshorebirdalliance.org/>) effort to research, monitor and protect shorebird species, especially those that are imperiled. All of Florida's coastline is surveyed each nesting season and the population data is collected into the Shorebird Alliance Database.

Here is a list of key points from that 2 hour meeting:

1. Summary of "Operation Wrackline, 2023"
 - marked a significant increase in FWC patrols meant to diminish human disturbance. **Nature Coast patrols went from 38 in 2020 to 205 in 2023.** (CK Audubon note: One of the FWC officers at our 2/26 presentation does some of these regular off-shore patrols in Cedar Key waters).
 - new system for reporting violations. Direct line is 904-359-6585, option 7. Need to describe the situation in detail. If it seems not to be working, call the Regional Seashore Alliance Biologist.
2. A "nuts and bolts" review of where surveys would be done along the Nature Coast and who was doing it.
3. A report from Janell Brush, FWC biologist, on "The Importance of the Nature Coast to American Oystercatchers" (AMOY).

*Aerial surveys indicate that some AMOY migrate all the way to lower New England.

*Good news! Those aerial surveys show that the AMOY have increased in population by 18% over the past year and 45% since 2003.

*Florida, for the first time, has become home to the largest AMOY population in the US, in 2023. Florida has 26% of the entire population.

*Dixie/Levy/Citrus counties have 21% of the total Florida population, most of them in Levy Co.

Cedar Key is extremely important to wintering oystercatchers for foraging and roosting.

*One photo by Patrick Leary, taken near Cedar Key in 2021, showed 658 AMOY on a single shell rake.

*Critical AMOY habitat, coastal islands, are disappearing due to tidal overwash/more extreme tidal events.

*Gomez Key reclamation project could offer help. (Gomez Key's 100% AMOY chick 2023 & 2023 survival rate suggests the importance of trying to save it).

***Watch for a Cedar Key Town Hall meeting on the Gomez Key restoration soon.**

Respectively submitted,

Boyd Kimball