

The Nature Coast Shorebird Partnership meeting was held virtually on October 24<sup>th</sup>. This was, in part, a post-season presentation of FWC nesting surveys for the Nature Coast region covering roughly the shoreline from Steinhatchee to the Barge Canal/Spoil Islands. There were 14 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 are some key points from that meeting:

\*The Nature Coast has 21% of Florida's American oystercatchers (AMOY) nesting population and 2% of Wilson's plovers.

\*The Spoil Islands (south of Cedar Key) this season had 24 nesting pairs of AMOY with 3 fledglings. There were also 9 breeding pairs of Wilson's plovers and 2 colonies of least terns.

\*Cedar Key area, based on observations, had 9 pairs of AMOY with 4 chicks surviving up to 60 days. The 5 pairs that had AMOY chicks were all on Gomez Key. Here's a breakdown of the status of other area nesting sites:

Corrigan's Reef – 2 AMOY breeding pairs – no chicks + 1 pair Wilson's plovers. Erosion a problem.

Airport – 1 AMOY pair. Site suffering from overwash.

Cedar Point – 1 Wilson's plover & 1 least tern pair

McClammory Key – 1 AMOY pair, 2 Wilson's plover pair – 2 nesting attempts

Rattlesnake Key – a large waterbird nesting site. 1 AMOY pair. A broken egg shell found.

\*Overwash and predation (crows and rats observed) the main threats.

\*Next – Florida Winter Shorebird Survey, February 2-8, 2024

\*Regular patrolling of sensitive areas is being done by FWC law enforcement. This is especially important since our local LSCK Refuge is has almost no enforcement staff.

\*Hurricane Idalia only exacerbated what was already the major threat of habitat loss. One possible way to address that might be enhanced oyster reefs like one proposed for Corrigan's Reef.

To repeat a note I made at a similar meeting I attended in 2020, the Nature Coast Shorebird Partnership is an important collaboration for CK Audubon to be part of. Our geographical location puts us at the center of shorebird/seabird activity in the Big Bend area, and Cedar Key is a nexus for research/conservation efforts. I hope that we can continue to seek ways of supporting the FWC Shorebird Alliance.

Respectfully submitted,  
Boyd Kimball

