

IMPORTANT BIRD AREA

FLORIDA KEYS AND DRY TORTUGAS

BIRDSCAPE: MARINE
BCR: 31 **STATE:** FL
AREA: >2.8 MILLION ACRES OF
 LAND AND WATER

WATCHLIST SPECIES
RED: 7
YELLOW: 33



Birds: Several WatchList species breed, including the Magnificent Frigatebird, Masked Booby, Reddish Egret, Wilson’s Plover; Roseate, Least, and Bridled Terns; White-crowned Pigeon, Mangrove Cuckoo, Antillean Nighthawk, and local mangrove subspecies of both the Prairie Warbler and Clapper Rail. During winter and migration, additional WatchList species include Greater, Sooty, and Audubon’s Shearwaters; Band-rumped Storm-Petrel, Black Rail; American Golden-, Snowy, and Piping Plovers; Red Knot, Sanderling; Semipalmated, Western, White-rumped, and Stilt Sandpipers; and Black Skimmer. Many neotropical migratory songbirds pass through during spring and fall. Large colonies of Sooty Terns and Brown Noddies nest at Bush Key in the Dry Tortugas. The localized “Great White Heron” is also found here.

Threats: Much of the mangrove forests and hardwood hammocks in the keys have been replaced by development. Garbage has increased the raccoon population, increasing the risk of nest predation for breeding birds. Inadequate waste and storm water infrastructure degrades near-shore water

The Florida Keys stretch west from the tip of Florida 128 miles by road to Key West, and an additional 70 miles further west by boat to the Dry Tortugas. Habitats include pine forests, hardwood hammocks, scrub, mangroves, beaches, mudflats, sea-grass beds, coral reefs, and warm pelagic waters.



Red mangroves provide nesting and feeding habitat for birds, while fish breed among the submerged roots and nearby eelgrass beds.

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The Reddish Egret actively stalks its prey, running, side-stepping and arching its wings over shallow water in a fascinating “dance”.

PHOTO: ROBERT ROYSE

quality. Feral cats and collisions with vehicles kill migrant songbirds. Invasive plants are also a problem (especially the Australian pine). The Dry Tortugas are threatened by growth in visitation, introduced rats, and rising numbers of predatory gulls. Severe weather events can damage or destroy small ephemeral islands.

- Control invasive species; remove feral cats.
- Restrict visitation to the Dry Tortugas by sport-fishing, commercial, and private boats to sustainable levels.
- Reintroduce the Key West Quail-Dove.

Conservation: Protected areas include Crocodile Lake, Great White Heron, Key Deer, and Key West NWRs; John Pennekamp Coral Reef, Long Key, Curry Hammock, and Bahía Honda SPs; the large Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, and Dry Tortugas NP. The National Park Service works to replace invasive plants with native species. TNC acquires and protects habitat, as well as conducting prescribed burns in pine forests.

Actions:

- Protect, and restore mangrove forest and hardwood hammocks.



The male Magnificent Frigatebird inflates its red throat like a balloon to attract a mate.

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