

Mark your calendars...

- May 11-14—First Coast Birding & Nature Festival. See www.GetAway4Nature.com for more information. Some field trips may be sold out!
- May 13—teacher workshop on invasive species. St. Johns County Windstorm Building. Pre-registration required. \$50 stipend for participants. Contact Maia at 209-0430 or mpmcg@ufl.edu.
- More on back page!

Spring is hopping!

As usual, things are busy. I hope everyone is getting prepared for our next hurricane season and that nobody actually needs to use their emergency materials this year. Congratulations to Sadler Point Marina in Jacksonville—they are NE Florida's newest Clean Marina and Boatyard. Congratulations also to the Clean Boating Partnership, whose efforts to obtain discounted submerged land leases for designated Clean Marinas have been successful—the policy became effective in January of this year. There are currently 114 Clean Marinas and 21 Clean Boatyards in the state. See www.dep.state.fl.us for more information about the Clean Marina program.

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New resources added to Sea Grant website

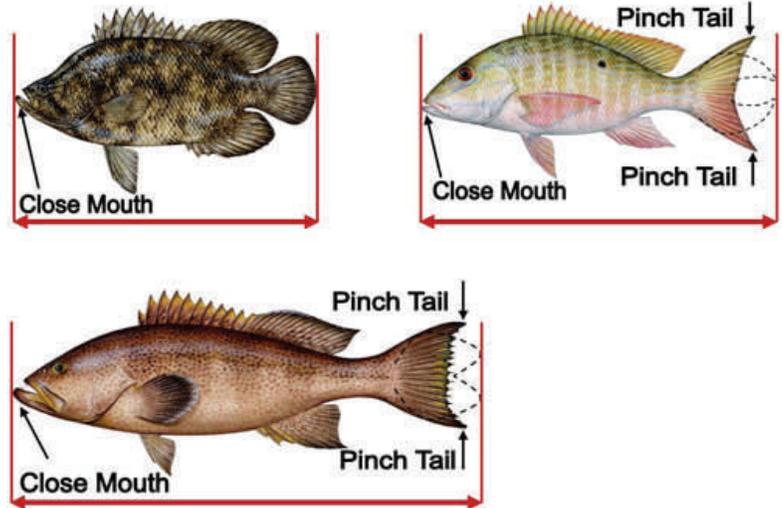
- I have recently added a section to the NE Florida Sea Grant Extension website (<http://stjohns.ifas.ufl.edu/sea/seagrant.htm>) that addresses manatees. This is partly to help St. Johns County with its efforts to educate residents about these marine mammals. Boat-related manatee mortalities seem to be increasing in frequency in the county, so we want boaters and coastal residents to be aware of some things they can do to minimize the risk of manatees being hit by boats. These include not feeding or offering water to manatees, as this trains manatees to approach dock areas, where they are at an increased risk of being hit by a boat.
- There is a new invasives activity in that section of the website.
- I am continually updating the coastal plants field guide (found on the Education section of the website, under "field studies.") This guide contains photos of most of the common coastal hammock, dune and wetland plants (including wildflowers) found in NE Florida. If you would like electronic versions of any of the photos, please e-mail me.

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New fish measurement regulations take effect July 1

If you have looked at Florida's saltwater fishing regulations, you may have noticed that different fish species are measured in different ways—total length (TL), standard length (SL) and fork length (FL). There has been some confusion about how to measure total length—the distance from the tip of the fish's mouth to the tip of the tail—as there has been no stipulation about which jaw should be used when making the measurement, or whether the tail should be relaxed or pinched closed. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission has clarified this. Starting on July 1, 2006, the total length measurement for fish will be replaced by the "total length max." Total Length Max is measured from the most forward point of the head, with the mouth closed, to the farthest tip of the tail with the tail compressed or squeezed (see diagram).



Measuring total length max for a variety of fish species.

FWCC published the recreational saltwater fishing regulations twice a year, in January and July. Look for copies at the extension offices, tax collector's office or wherever fishing gear is sold.

Do you eat shrimp? Your input is requested!

Dr. Lisa House, professor in the University of Florida's Food and Resource Economics Department is asking for input from people who purchase and eat shrimp. She has developed a web survey which should take 5 to 10 minutes to complete. The survey requires that you must:

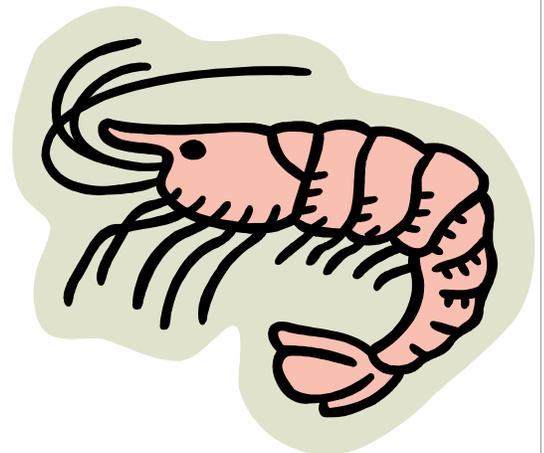
- 1) be at least 18 years of age
- 2) be the primary grocery shopper for your household and
- 3) have consumed shrimp in the last year.

The questionnaire asks some basic questions about your feelings towards shrimp consumption so that her department can develop an in-depth description of the target market for shrimp producers in Florida. If you have any questions, please contact Dr. House at lahouse@ufl.edu.

You can reach the survey at the following link:

www.agsurveys.org/shrimp

Thanks for your help!



It's Shorebird Nesting Time

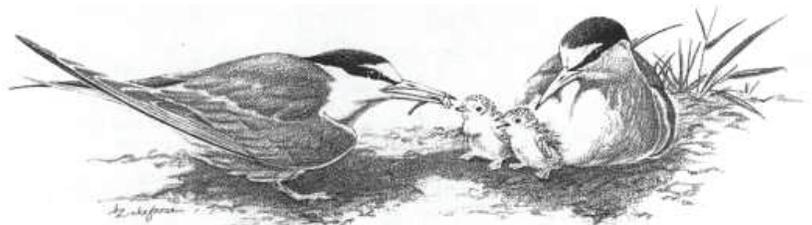
Florida's beaches are popular with many of the state's visitors, including birds. While many species of shorebirds come to the state to spend the winter months, there are several species that nest here, primarily between March and May. These include several varieties of tern, plovers, American oystercatchers, willets, and black skimmers. Laughing gulls also nest in Florida. At least five shorebirds that nest in Florida are protected species.

Most of us are accustomed to looking for birds' nests in trees. However, a shorebird's nest is typically simply a small hollow scraped in the sand in the upper region of the beach (above the high tide mark, but before the dune). Some of these birds are quite small, and most are extremely difficult to see when they are sitting on their nests. The eggs and chicks are typically camouflaged to blend in with the sand. Most nests contain from one to three eggs, and incubation time is usually around three weeks. It may be another 3-4 weeks before the hatchlings can fledge.

During the couple of months that shorebirds are nesting, there are many dangers that the adults, eggs and chicks can face. Natural hazards include storms, beach erosion (loss of nesting habitat) and predators such as crows and raccoons. Unfortunately, human disturbance can also impact nesting shorebirds. In some areas, feral cats are significant threats to nesting shorebirds as well as to protected beach mice. On beaches where dogs are allowed, it is important that the dogs not be allowed to run through the upper areas of the beach, especially if those areas are marked with signs indicating that nesting shorebirds are present. People should also not enter these areas. Please note that birds cannot read signs, and that additional nests may be laid outside these markers, so it is wise to give the areas a wide berth. Adult birds may perceive dogs to be a threat even if the dog is not in the immediate vicinity of the nest, and the birds may leave the nest to try and lead the dog away from their eggs or hatchlings. Sometimes the adult birds will pretend to have a broken wing, and some species will dive bomb people or pets that get too close to their nests. On hot days, if adult birds are away from their nests for even 20 minutes, this is long enough for the sun to kill chicks or overheat eggs. Additionally, when adult birds are off the nest, the eggs or chicks are vulnerable to predators. If you notice birds that appear to be distressed (running around, calling, etc.), please move away calmly and quietly, and please watch where you step to make sure there is not a nest below your feet.

Most of Florida's nesting shorebirds do so in colonies, however some species are solitary nesters. The least tern (a threatened species) is a colonial nester. According to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, many recorded nesting locations for this species in Florida are on flat, gravel-topped roofs. The adaptation of these birds to nest on gravel rooftops may have allowed their population to stabilize, or even increase in recent decades. However, there is a concern among shorebird biologists that gravel roofs will gradually be replaced over time and that this will result in a sharp decline in the nesting success of this species. Several other shorebird species may nest on rooftops, including black skimmers, Wilson's plovers, oystercatchers, and royal terns.

If you would like to learn more about Florida's shorebirds, FWC has a breeding bird atlas online at <http://wld.fwc.state.fl.us/bba/>. If you select "Species Account," you will be able to select individual species of birds. The birds are arranged by Order; the shorebirds are all under the Order Charadriiformes. FWC recently produced a brochure entitled, "A Matter of Survival—Co-existing with Florida's Beach-Nesting Birds." This brochure can be requested online at http://myfwc.com/epubs/pub_query.asp?q_category=REC. Additionally, the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service has produced a brochure entitled "Fragile Coastal Wildlife." This is available online at www.nbbd.com/godo/minwr/pdf/ploverbroch.pdf. Both brochures contain photographs of common nesting shorebirds as well as information about our potential impacts on these birds.





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coastal Florida*

More “Mark your calendars”

- May 26-28—Look for the Extension display at the Florida Folk Festival (Stephen Foster State Park)—see <http://www.floridastateparks.org/folkfest/default.htm> for more information.
- June 5-9; 10-2 each day—St. Johns County 4-H Coastal Camp at GTM NERR Environmental Education Center (Guana). \$50.00. Open to 4-H youth ages 8-12. Call 904-209-0430 for more information.
- June 12-16; 9-3 each day—Nassau County 4-H environmental camp. Open to 4-H youth ages 8-12. Call 904-879-1019.
- June 14-16; 9-3 each day—St. Johns County 4-H Eco Camp for youth ages 13-18. \$30.00. Call 904-209-0430 to register.
- July 10-14; 9-noon each day—“Our Natural World” 4-H day camp at GTM NERR Environmental Education Center (Guana). \$50.00. Open to 4-H youth ages 8-12. Call 904-387-8850 to register.
- July 16-22—National Marine Educators Association conference, New York. See www.nysmea.org/con06 for details.

Please check the calendars at <http://calendar.ifas.ufl.edu> and www.enviroedjax.org for other environmental education programs around the state.

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