

## Protected Animal Species Common to Florida's Freshwater Marshes

There are a variety of ecosystems in the FDOT District IV region that have characteristics desirable to certain species. This fact sheet covers species found in what is known as freshwater marsh habitat. Sawgrass marshes, wet prairies, and sloughs are considered to be freshwater marshes. These types of ecosystems can occur in all of FDOT District IV, but are more common in the southern counties. Some of the wildlife that inhabits these areas is protected under Federal and State laws (i.e., "listed species"). It is important to always consider the area that could be impacted by construction and the habitat it might provide for listed species. Freshwater marsh habitat is one of the ecosystems that provide shelter, food and nesting areas for some listed species. Construction or maintenance projects that will occur in areas typically inhabited by these species are reviewed during design to ensure that impacts to listed species will be minimized. This sometimes results in special construction requirements to avoid potential harm to the listed species. These measures typically can be found in the notes and/or permits issued by agencies such as the South Florida and St. John's River Water Management District (SFWMD and SJRWMD), the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). Provided construction occurs according to the notes and permit conditions, it is not likely that direct impacts to protected wildlife will occur. However, if you believe a protected species is on your site and could potentially be impacted by construction activities, cease construction impacts in the immediate area and contact FDOT. *Do not try to catch, remove or scare away protected species.* Actions such as these may be ineffective as the animals may return shortly thereafter, and in addition may be in violation of State and Federal laws. FDOT will instead work to have the animal relocated or provide other means to avoid impacts. This will help to avoid potential liability, and keep construction activities on schedule. If you believe a protected animal has been injured or killed by construction activity, cease activities in the area and contact FDOT. Reporting in this manner minimizes liability and the appearance of wrongdoing. The following is information about the most commonly encountered listed species when working in or near a Freshwater Marsh Habitat. For more information on identifying these species, consult the FWC website: [http://www.myfwc.com/WILDLIFEHABITATS/imperiledSpp\\_index.htm](http://www.myfwc.com/WILDLIFEHABITATS/imperiledSpp_index.htm).



Freshwater marsh habitats are found throughout Florida, though are more prevalent in the south-central part of the state. The vegetation consists of herbaceous plants such as water lily, cattail, maidencane, pickerelweed, and sawgrass, which dominates the Everglades. In all marshes, water levels rise and fall with the seasons. Soils vary between deep-water marshes and marshes that contain marl or sandy soils that experience seasonal drying. Below is a table listing the species commonly found in freshwater marsh habitats and the FDOT District IV counties in which they are usually found. Following the table is a brief description of each animal.

Type	Species	Latin Name	County
Birds	Wood Stork	<i>Mycteria americana</i>	Broward, Palm Beach, Martin, St. Lucie, Indian River
	Florida Sandhill Crane	<i>Grus canadensis pratensis</i>	Broward, Palm Beach, Martin, St. Lucie, Indian River
	Little Blue Heron	<i>Egretta caerulea</i>	Broward, Palm Beach, Martin, St. Lucie, Indian River
	Snail Kite	<i>Rostrhamus sociabilis plumbeus</i>	Broward, Palm Beach, Martin, St. Lucie, Indian River
	Snowy Egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>	Broward, Palm Beach, Martin, St. Lucie, Indian River
	Tricolored Heron	<i>Egretta tricolor</i>	Broward, Palm Beach, Martin, St. Lucie, Indian River
	White Ibis	<i>Eudocimus albus</i>	Broward, Palm Beach, Martin, St. Lucie, Indian River
Reptiles	American Alligator	<i>Alligator mississippiensis</i>	Broward, Palm Beach, Martin, St. Lucie, Indian River



### Wood Stork (*Mycteria americana*)

This is a very large, white wading bird with black on the wings and a short black tail. Wood storks nest in mangroves, marshes, cypress stands and hardwood swamps. The Wood stork is listed as Endangered Federally and in Florida.



**Florida Sandhill Crane** (*Grus canadensis pratensis*)

The Sandhill crane is a tall, long-legged, long-necked bird with a clump of feathers that droop over the tail. The adult is gray overall, with a red crown on top of its head. Sandhill cranes will frequent agricultural fields and pastures, but nest in shallow water or on marshy ground. They are generally non-migratory and are listed as a Threatened species in Florida.

**Little Blue Heron** (*Egretta caerulea*)

This medium-sized heron has a purplish head with a slate-blue body and legs. Immature birds are mostly white with slate-gray tips on the wings. They feed in shallow freshwater, brackish and saltwater habitats. The Little blue heron is listed as a Species of Special Concern in Florida and generally lives in the state year-round.

**Snail Kite** (*Rostrhamus sociabilis plumbeus*)

Snail Kites are medium sized hawks commonly found in South Florida. They have broad, rounded wings with up to a 4-foot wing span and a tail appearing to be squared-off. The Snail kite is known for the hook-shaped beak that allows it to easily extract snails and freshwater crab from their shells. The lack of available apple snails has contributed to the decline of the snail kite population. This species is listed as Endangered Federally and in Florida.

**Snowy Egret** (*Egretta thula*)

This egret is a medium-sized, white wading bird. The bill is black with a bright-yellow, fleshy base and the legs are black, ending in bright yellow feet. These birds are sometimes confused with juvenile Little blue herons. Snowy egrets nest in willows and mangroves, especially on islands that are separated by large bodies of water. They are present during all of the seasons in Florida, but are generally less common in the winter. The Snowy egret is listed as a Species of Special Concern in Florida.

**Tricolored Heron** (*Egretta tricolor*)

This medium-sized heron has a slender neck and a body that appears two-toned. The upper part is dark slate which contrasts with the white rump, breast and undertail. They mostly nest in mangrove islands and feed in marshes, swamps, creeks, and along the edges of rivers and lakes. Tricolored herons are permanent residents in Florida and are listed as a Species of Special Concern by the State.

**White Ibis** (*Eudocimus albus*)

This ibis has a distinctive long, curving bill. Adults are white with black tips on the wings, and juveniles are dark brown with white patches on the back and breast. They are found in a variety of habitats including freshwater wetlands, marshes, salt flats and forested wetlands. The White ibis is listed as a Species of Special Concern in Florida.

**American Alligator** (*Alligator mississippiensis*)

The alligator is mostly black with a large, rounded snout. Juveniles have yellow bands across the back and tail. Unlike the crocodile, there are no prominently visible lower teeth when the mouth is closed. Alligators live in most freshwater areas, and will occasionally wander into brackish water. Due to the fact that the alligator closely resembles the crocodile, it remains listed as Threatened Federally and as a Species of Special Concern in Florida.

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*Other protected species Fact Sheets also available include: Pine Flatwoods and Dry Prairie, Scrub and High Pine, Swamps and Coastal Areas.*

