

Laughing Gull colonies in extreme southern Florida. — Laughing Gulls (*Larus atricilla*) are common year-round residents in Florida (Howell 1932, Florida bird life, Tallahassee, Florida Dept. Game Fresh Water Fish). Although they have long been known to nest on keys in Florida Bay, little effort has been made to determine the locations and sizes of their colonies. During a 1976 survey of colonial seabirds in southern Florida, we paid particular attention to Laughing Gull colonies. Complete aerial surveys of Florida Bay were flown on 23 May and 23 June 1976. More restricted aerial surveys were flown on 3 May, 27 May and 21 July. Ground censuses were made on all but one colony site.

We found 1,395 Laughing Gull nests at 15 sites in extreme southern Florida during the summer of 1976: 13 in upper Florida Bay; 2 in lower Florida Bay (Table 1, Figure 1). All colonies were in the interior of islands on open marl flats or among low herbaceous plants (*Batis maritima*, *Sesuvium portulacastrum*). This tabulation includes the largest number of nests counted at each site, but as the birds were usually not very synchronous in nesting, these numbers are probably slightly low. The largest colony was on the Horseshoe Keys in lower Florida Bay, where we counted 529 nests. Two fairly large colonies in upper Florida Bay, East Key and Nest Key, together contained about 430 nests. These 3 largest colonies contained 69 percent of all nests. In all, a minimum of about 2800 Laughing Gulls nested in extreme southern Florida in 1976.

Table 1
Sites and Number of Laughing Gulls Nesting in Extreme Southern Florida in May-June, 1976

Colony Site ¹	Maximum Number of Nests Counted	Type of Census ²
Upper Florida Bay		
1. Key S. of Buoy Key	30	G
2. Curlew Key	35	G
3. Pelican Key	75	G
4. Key E. of Pelican Key	20	A
5. Man of War Key	60	G
6. Cluett Key	30	A
7. Nest Key	250	G
8. East Key	183	G
9. Rabbit Key	30	A
10. Barnes Key	60	G
11. Buchanan Key	1	G
12. Upper Arsnicker Key	2	G
13. Lower Arsnicker Key	30	A
Lower Florida Bay		
14. Teatable Key	60	A
15. Horseshoe Key	529	G

¹Numbers indicate location of colony site in Figure 1.

²G=Ground, A=Aerial count of maximum number of nests.

We were unable to determine nesting success at all sites, but success may have been low because many relatively low nest sites were flooded by summer rains. The events on Horseshoe Key may be indicative of the pattern. On 27 May 1976 we flew over the colony and many of the estimated 175 nests contained small chicks. The nesting area was dry and many nests were located on the ground. On 10 June during a complete ground census, we found that the colony had increased to nearly 530 nests, ranging from those containing nearly fledged young to others still under construction. However up to 10 cm of water stood over much of the nesting area and most of the old ground nests were submerged. The flooding had apparently occurred after most nests had hatched, but other nests had drowned out and the newest nests were built higher than early nests and placed on top of the herbaceous plants. By 21 July 300 adults and fledged young

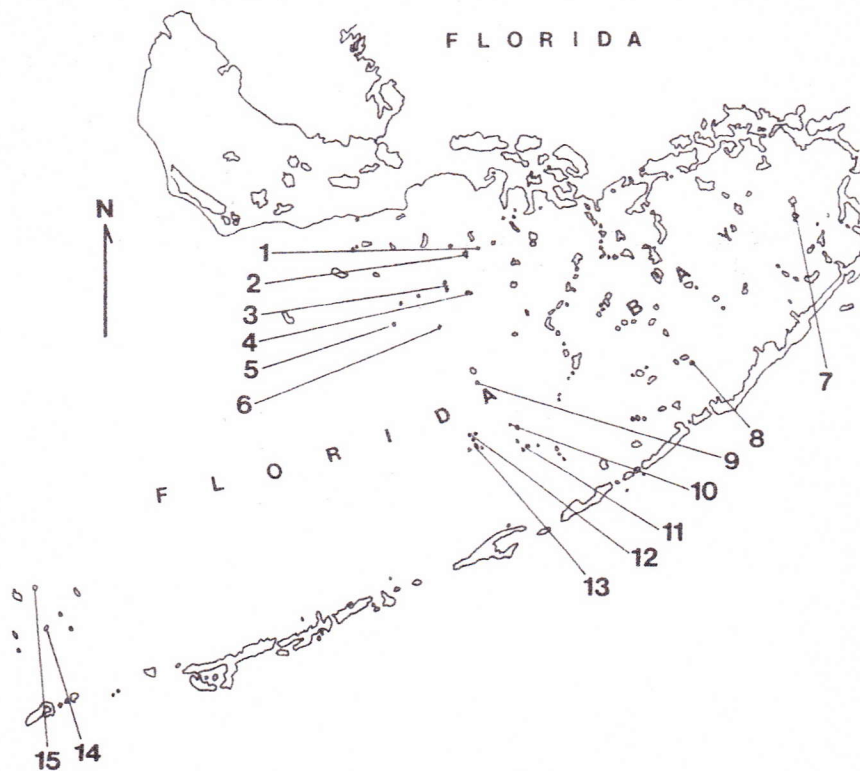


Figure 1. Location of Laughing Gull colonies in extreme southern Florida in 1976.

remained on the island but few nestlings and no new nests were seen. While this information is insufficient to determine overall success, it suggests that late-nesting birds may have been stressed by summer rainfall. Most of the colonies were subject to similar flooding, but none were found on the many high ground sites and spoil islands along the Florida Keys.

The survey was supported by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, and the U.S. National Park Service. Gary E. Davis, R. Bland Lawson and Marilyn S. Kushlan participated in the survey. We thank William B. Robertson, Ralph W. Schreiber and Frances Hames for comments. — James A. Kushlan and Deborah A. White, *U.S. National Park Service, Everglades National Park, Homestead, Florida 33030. Present address of White: U.S. Peace Corps, Nairobi, Kenya.*