

Limpkin

Aramus guarauna



(Photo by FWC)

Taxonomic Classification

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Gruiformes

Family: Aramidae

Genus/Species: *Aramus guarauna*

Common Name: Limpkin

Listing Status

Federal Status: Not Listed

FL Status: State Species of Special Concern

FNAI Ranks: G5/S3 (Globally: Demonstrably Secure/State: Rare)

IUCN Status: LC (Least Concern)

Physical Description

The limpkin is a long-legged species of waterbird that has dark brown feathers with streaks of white on the head and neck and absent on the rest of the body. Limpkins can grow up to 28

inches (71.1 centimeters) long, with a 42 inch (106.7 centimeters) wingspan, and weigh up to 46 ounces (1,304 grams) (The Cornell Lab of Ornithology 2011). White blotches and triangular marks can be found on the neck and upper body. The key physical feature of the limpkin is their down-curved bill, which is used to feed on their primary prey, apple snails. Limpkins are also known for their resounding calls, which are characterized as a high pitched “Kree-ow, Kra-ow” sound.

Life History

Limpkins feed primarily on apple snails, but they will also eat insects, worms, and mussels. Limpkins will walk in shallow waters searching for apple snails and utilize their down-curved bills to get the snail out of its shell.

The limpkin nests in a variety of areas including vegetation in marshes and freshwater, and in bushes or tree limbs that are up to 40 feet high (12.2 meters) (The Cornell Lab of Ornithology 2011). The limpkin courtship ritual includes the male feeding the female, imitating an adult feeding a juvenile. Nesting occurs between the months of February and June. The female will lay between four to eight eggs in one nesting season and incubate the eggs for approximately 27 days (The Cornell Lab of Ornithology 2011).

Habitat & Distribution

The limpkin inhabits shallows along rivers, streams, lakes, and in marshes, swamps and sloughs in Florida. In the U.S., the Limpkin is found only in the Florida. Limpkins are fairly widespread in peninsular Florida, but rarer in the Panhandle and Keys. Outside of the U.S., they are found in the Caribbean, Central America, and most of South America east of the Andes Mountains.



Threats

Historically, the limpkin was almost extirpated from Florida due to overhunting. New laws and conservation efforts prevented this from happening and the population recovered. There are still major threats to the limpkin population that include the decline of their primary prey, apple snails. Due to habitat destruction and wetland drainage, heavy accumulations of non-native vegetation (mainly hyacinths and cattails) in foraging areas prevents the limpkin from being able to locate food. Other threats include pollution and an overabundance of nutrition in wetlands (Crozier and Gawlik, 2002; Bryan 2002).

Conservation & Management

Limpkins are protected by the U.S. Migratory Bird Treaty Act and as a State Species of Special Concern by [Florida's Endangered and Threatened Species Rule](#).

[-Biological Status Review \(BSR\)](#)

[-Supplemental Information to the BSR](#)

Other Informative Links

[Animal Diversity Web](#)

[Birds of North America](#)

[Encyclopedia of Life](#)

[FWC Species Profile](#)

[FWC - Florida's Breeding Bird Atlas](#)

[Florida Natural Areas Inventory](#)

[International Union of Conservation of Nature](#)

[The Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#)

References

Bryan, D.C. 2002. Limpkin (*Aramus guarauna*), The Birds of North America Online (A. Poole, Ed.). Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology; Retrieved from the Birds of North America Online: <http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna/species/627> (Accessed 03/10/2011).

Crozier, G.E. and D.E. Gawlik. 2002. Avian response to nutrient enrichment in an oligotrophic wetland, the Florida Everglades. *The Condor* 104(3): 631 - 642.

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology. (2011). *Limpkin*. Retrieved March 11, 2011, from All About Birds: <http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Limpkin/id>