

This resource is based on the following source:

Kale, H. W., II, B. Pranty, B. M. Stith, and C. W. Biggs. 1992. The atlas of the breeding birds of Florida. Final Report. Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Tallahassee, Florida.

This resource can be cited as:

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. 2003, January 6. Florida's breeding bird atlas: A collaborative study of Florida's birdlife. <http://www.myfwc.com/bba/> (Date accessed mm/dd/yyyy).

Purple Gallinule *Porphyryula martinica*

This spectacular rail shares habitat and habits with its plainer relative, the *Common Moorhen*. It is often seen foraging by climbing or walking on lily pads and other freshwater vegetation, using its long toes for support. It breeds at low elevations from Tennessee and Ohio east to Maryland and south to the Antilles, Mexico, and Central America, as well as Chile and northern Argentina.

Habitat. Unlike the *Common Moorhen*, which nests in a wide variety of wetland habitats, the Purple Gallinule prefers swamps or marshes with pickerelweed and lily pads (Terres 1980).

The nest is concealed in vegetation and consists of a bulky cup of dead or green plant material built up above the water level. The nest can be up to 20 cm (8 in) thick and 25 cm (10 in) across, with a cup 8 cm (3 in) deep. Usually 6 to 8 eggs, but sometimes as many as 10 are laid. Eggs are pinkish-buff and spotted with brown. Incubation takes 22 to 25 days, and the young fledge at about 63 days of age (Ehrlich et al. 1988). The species lives in family groups, usually of 4 or 5 individuals, but occasionally up to 14 birds. The nonbreeders help to feed the young and to defend the territory. Soon after hatching, the adults and young may move to a second nest to brood, usually within 9 m (30 ft) of the original nest (Ehrlich et al. 1988). Adults have been seen in Florida carrying their young by the nape while flying as much as 76 m (250 ft), then walking for another 46 m (150 ft) (Olson 1974).

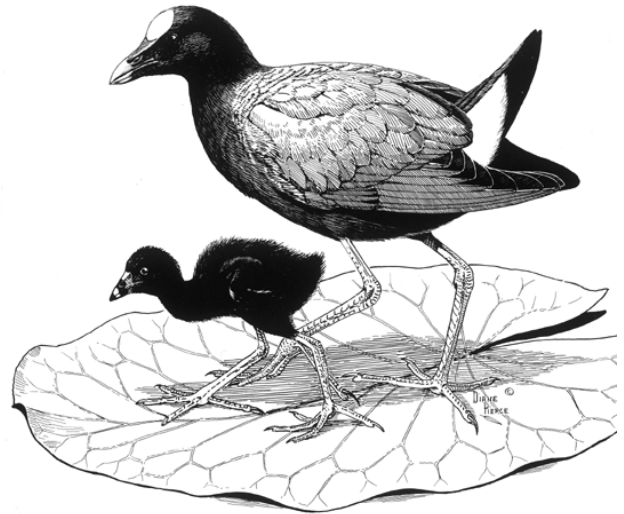


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The diet of the Purple Gallinule consists of aquatic plants, seeds, fruit, insects and other invertebrates, and small frogs (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

Seasonal Occurrence. Egg dates range from 20 March through 28 September. During spring migration, this bird has been documented from March through May, and again in October and November.

Status. This beautiful bird nests throughout Florida but is locally distributed. If one overlays the Atlas maps of the Purple Gallinule onto that of the *Common Moorhen*, overall distribution appears quite similar except for the lower number of quadrangles and blocks containing Purple Gallinules. The confirmed breeding records in the lower Keys are interesting, but not unexpected. Some of the birds represented as possible breeders on the barrier islands in the Panhandle could represent late spring migrants.

Robert W. Loftin

Purple Gallinule

