

Storm Birds

Unexpected Flamboyances of Flamingos Following Hurricane Idalia, 2023

On August 30, 2023, Hurricane Idalia made landfall as a Category 3 storm in the Big Bend region of Florida, the third-strongest hurricane in history to affect the area. Amidst the destruction in its wake, surprised residents discovered groups of flamingos, aptly named flamboyances, as far north as Wisconsin and as far west as Kansas. Their appearance delighted birdwatchers and made news across the country.

"Ah! reader, could you but know the emotions that then agitated my breast!"

Naturalist John James Audubon
on first seeing flamingos in the Florida Keys
in 1832

"This is huge.

This is unbelievable."

Birdwatcher Jim Edelhuber
on participating in Wisconsin's first-ever flamingo sighting
in 2023

Hurricane Idalia

A tropical depression formed in the Yucatan Channel and made landfall in Cozumel before strengthening into a tropical storm on August 27th. The storm intensified in the Gulf; it passed 180 nautical miles west of Key West and 100 nautical miles west of Tampa, briefly becoming a Category 4 storm. Following landfall, the storm passed through Georgia and South Carolina, with the wind field (shown here in yellow) extending into North Carolina.

\$3.6 billion

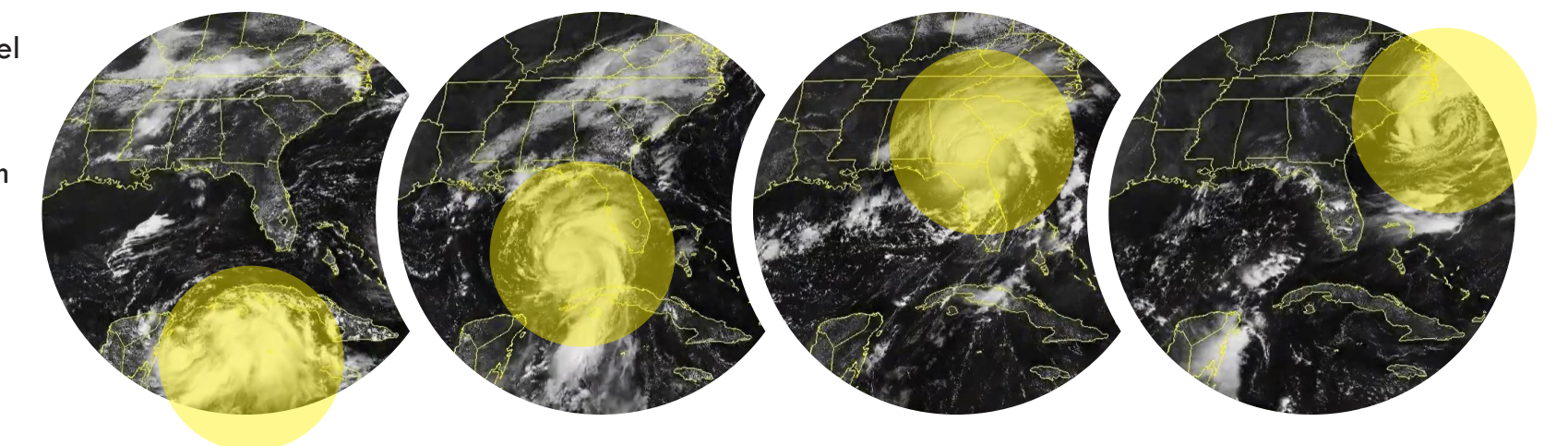
estimated damages
in the U.S.

12

fatalities

4

maximum category
reached in the
Gulf



Far-Flung Flamboyances

The storm's avian impacts extended hundreds of miles from its path, with unexpected flashes of pink popping up across the southeast, mid-Atlantic and Midwest. Their visit was brief but eventful with enthusiasts scrambling to have an opportunity to see the large, gorgeous birds.

Ría Lagartos Biosphere Reserve

likely primary source of
Idalia's flamingos

30

delighted communities
across the U.S.

13

surprised
states

~200

storm-tossed
birds

- American flamingos are found throughout the Caribbean, with breeding populations in the Bahamas, the British Virgin Islands, Bonaire, Cuba, Mexico and Venezuela. Additional populations and potential breeding sites are found in the Galápagos Islands, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Curaçao and the Turks and Caicos Islands.
- The species is native to Florida protected under the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act.
- Flocks of flamingos once nested in Florida in large numbers.
- The filter feeders' bright pink feathers are due to the carotenoids found in the algae and brine shrimp in their diets.
- This distinctive plumage made the birds a target for hunters, who decimated the population in Florida by the turn of the 20th century.
- Small colonies have established in South Florida in the last century. There are signs that the population is recovering and hopes that flamingos, like Idalia's, will establish breeding populations in the state.

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