



BEACH-NESTING BIRDS *Reference Guide*



Seabirds

Nest in colonies varying in size from a few individuals to several hundred pairs. Colonies are typically conspicuous since seabirds nest on more open beach, and adults are very defensive around the nest. Nests are shallow scrapes in the sand and eggs/nestlings are sand-colored with dark speckling. Colonies are very sensitive to disturbance.

LEAST TERN. *Sternula antillarum*

21-23 cm

State Listed- Threatened in South Carolina. Smallest tern and only tern with a yellow, black-tipped bill. **Common**- most often on remote sandy beaches. Nests April-August. Photos: (left) adult on nest, (right) adult in breeding plumage (loses cap towards the end of the breeding season).



BLACK SKIMMER. *Rynchops niger*

40-50 cm

Distinctive, boldly patterned with lower bill much longer than upper bill. **Fairly common** - can be seen foraging close to the water's surface on many beachfronts and even tidal creeks, colonies are usually restricted to more undisturbed beaches. Nests May-August. Photos: (left) adult in breeding plumage, (right) adult close-up.



ROYAL TERN. *Thalasseus maxima*

45-50 cm

Large tern with orange bill. **Common**- however, nests in large colonies that are few and very localized. Nests April-August. Photos: (left) adult with chick, (right) adult close-up (acquires full black cap early in the breeding season).



SANDWICH TERN. *Thalasseus sandvicensis*

34-45 cm

Medium-sized tern and only tern with a black yellow-tipped bill. **Fairly common**- often nests with Royal Terns in large colonies that are few and very localized. Nests April-August. Photos: (left) adult with chick, (right) adult close-up (note: adults have a full black cap early in the breeding season).



Shorebirds

Non-colonial species, usually nesting in solitary pairs or potentially in loose groups along beachfront, especially near inlets. Shorebirds nest on open beach and within dune vegetation. Nests are typically simple shallow scrapes lined with shell fragments and other debris, and are easily overlooked as shorebirds rely on concealment as a primary defense. Eggs are extremely well camouflaged, often featuring varying mottled patterns of speckles and scrawls. Care should be taken daily to avoid nests, as pairs may begin laying the same day a scrape is completed.

AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER. *Haematopus palliatus*

40-44 cm

State Listed- Species of Special Concern. Large shorebird with distinctive color pattern and stout red bill. **Fairly common** - nests in wrack line and dune vegetation. Chicks are highly mobile and will hide in depressions or wrack to escape predators or humans, especially in response to parents' alarm call. Nests April-August. Photos: (right) adult.



WILSON'S PLOVER. *Charadrius wilsonia*

16-20 cm

State Listed- Threatened in South Carolina. A small plover with a single neck band and thick dark bill. **Uncommon**- statewide, may be locally abundant in undisturbed areas. Nests within dune vegetation. Chicks are able to leave nest within a few hours of hatching. Parents exhibit a broken wing behavior to distract predators, indicating the presence of chicks. Nests March-August. Photos: (left) adult (right) broken wing display.



WILLET. *Tringa semipalmata*

33-41 cm

Large shorebird with long bill and grayish legs. **Fairly common**- nests within marsh and dune vegetation. Adults rely on camouflage to protect nest, giving little indication of its presence. Nests April-August. Photos: (left) adult close-up in breeding plumage, (right) adult in breeding plumage.



Royal Tern nesting colony.

Photo credits: Jack Rogers (Least Tern-R, Black Skimmer- Both, Royal Tern- Both, American Oystercatcher- Both, Willet- Both, Sandwich Tern- Both) Alex Kropp (Least Tern- L) Michael Foster (Royal Tern Colony) Phillip Jones (Wilson's Plovers) This brochure was designed for the Florida Shorebird Alliance by Chris Burney, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. SC DNR thanks this regional conservation partner for their assistance with this publication.



BEACH-NESTING BIRDS *Conservation & What you can do*



Species in Trouble

Many of South Carolina's beach-nesting shorebirds and seabirds have experienced declines as a result of habitat loss and excessive disturbance at nests and colonies. In Response, South Carolina DNR and a growing network of partners and volunteers are working to improve protection and management of important nesting locations throughout the state, and the following are ways you can help our effort.

1 MINIMIZE NEST DISTURBANCE



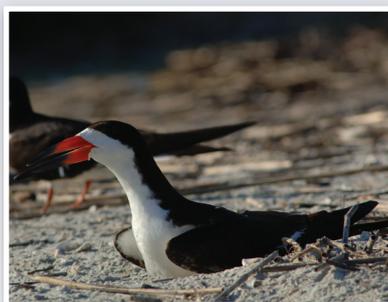
- ▶ Please respect posted areas for beach nesting birds and set an example for beachgoers around you.
- ▶ Many shorebird nests are not posted. When in potential nesting habitat, please pay careful attention where you step in order to avoid stepping on a nest. Agitated adults are an indication a nest may be near.
- ▶ Operate vehicles as close to the water as safely possible. Nests can be located anywhere on the upper beach, and the hard-to-see eggs can easily get run over. But remember during the breeding season active chicks may be dispersed across the beach, including waterline.
- ▶ **Report acts of vandalism at posted sites to Shorebirds@dnr.sc.gov.**

2 WATCH OUT FOR CHICKS



- ▶ Operate vehicles at a low rate of speed, slow enough for the driver to recognize and avoid chicks in the vehicle's path. Young birds often feed near the water's edge and will hunker down or seek shelter in tire ruts or wrack lines when approached, making detection nearly impossible.
- ▶ Avoid walking or driving in or near the wrack line or areas with dense seaweed and debris since these areas are frequently used by chicks as foraging habitat and shelter.
- ▶ Chicks can be mobile within a day of hatching, and can be found well outside posted areas, especially when attempting to avoid danger. As with nests, agitated adults may signify a chick is nearby (e.g. dive bombing, broken-wing displays, alert calls)
- ▶ If you find a chick without an adult nearby, do not assume it has been abandoned and try to pick it up-chicks are fairly independent.

3 REPORT YOUR OBSERVATIONS



- ▶ You can contribute to our expanding knowledge of shorebirds and seabirds in the state. Similar to the data collected on sea turtle nests, we are trying to gain a better understanding of where, when, and how well shorebirds and seabirds are nesting in South Carolina. Report your observations of nests and/or chicks to Shorebirds@dnr.sc.gov
- ▶ When submitting an observation please include the date and time, likely species, and approximate location and description of the site, and whether the site is posted. Remember to be ecologically minded and leave the area as soon as possible to avoid prolonged disturbance to birds and especially chicks.
- ▶ In addition to nest/chick observations, please notify SCDNR at the same email if an posted site needs maintenance.

Photo credits: Laura Barnhill (Huntington State Park), Michael Foster (Beach Buildings, Biologist, Bird with Orange Beak), Felicia Sanders (Sign, Least Tern, Skimmer Chicks, Surveyors, Huntington State Park), Phillip Jones (Eggs, Photographers) SCDNR Staff (Remaining Photos)

We appreciate your assistance, if you have any questions, contact us at Shorebirds@dnr.sc.gov

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Printed on recycled paper. 11-7795