



Shorebird FAQs

What is a shorebird? A shorebird is a small bird typically found feeding or resting along the shorelines of oceans, lakes, ponds, rivers and creeks. These birds travel far distances between their breeding grounds and their wintering grounds (nonbreeding grounds). For example, the Red knot breeds in the arctic tundra of Canada and winters on the tip of South America, which adds up to almost 20,000 miles round trip! These birds depend on habitat in our state for a portion of their annual life cycle (breeding, migrating, or wintering).

When are shorebirds here? Shorebirds can be found in South Carolina year round. Some species nest here in the summer, some only stop here on their way to their breeding grounds in the spring or wintering grounds in the fall, and some stay here over the winter.

Why are shorebirds declining? Shorebirds face many threats and one of the major factors is habitat loss. Shorebirds depend on shorelines and wetlands along the coast and along interior waterways throughout the western hemisphere to complete their annual life cycle. Modification of coastlines and wetlands coupled with development has significantly reduced nesting, migration, and winter habitat. Remaining habitats are often altered and/or subject to human recreational uses that are disruptive to shorebirds.

What is disturbance? Disturbance is a disruption in a shorebird's normal behavior caused by human presence or interaction.

Why is disturbance a problem? Disturbance can be functionally equivalent to habitat loss if shorebirds are not able to adequately rest and feed. If the birds have to focus time and energy reacting to constant disturbance, then they have less time to rest and focus on finding food. Disturbance affects birds differently depending on where they are in their annual life cycle. Nesting birds that are disturbed are not able stay on their nests, which prevents eggs from being exposed to predators and lethal temperatures during the heat of the summer. Migrating birds that are disturbed are not able to rest and build up energy reserves for the next leg of their flight. This could result in birds dying during migration or cause birds to arrive in poor body condition affecting their ability to find a mate or lay eggs. Wintering birds that are

disturbed are not able to consume enough food to maintain their body temperature during harsh winter conditions, which can lessen their chances of survival.

How do dogs disturb birds more than people? Many studies have shown that dogs on or off leash are more likely to cause birds to fly (flush) than people, and birds react to dogs from farther distances than people. Dogs running, whether chasing birds or not, are perceived by shorebirds to be a threat and will cause the birds to continuously flush while the dogs are present. During the summer nesting months, dogs can destroy nests, keep birds off their nest as well as catch and kill chicks that are not yet able to fly. During the migration and winter months, dogs can repeatedly flush birds causing them to expend valuable time and energy, which can lessen the birds' chances of survival.

Why are areas on the beach roped off? In order to minimize disturbance to nesting birds and destruction of nests, areas that contain suitable nesting habitat are roped off during the nesting season. These signed areas help educate people about the presence of nesting birds and protect nests from accidentally being stepped on. Shorebird nests are very hard to see because the eggs are laid on top of the sand in a shallow depression and are well camouflaged. In order to minimize disturbance to shorebirds during the nonbreeding season, areas important for roosting (resting) are roped off to provide a buffer for flocks of roosting migratory and wintering shorebirds.

Why do the birds need areas outside the roped off areas too? Shorebirds feed in the intertidal zone (area between low tide and high tide) when they are not sitting on the nest. Also, once the chicks have hatched the parents take them down to the intertidal zone to find food. Also, migratory and wintering shorebirds feed in the intertidal zone when they are not roosting around high tide.

How can I help shorebirds? Do not walk into roped off areas. Do not intentionally walk, run, or ride your bike through flocks of shorebirds. Keep your dog on a leash at all times in sensitive habitats. Give flocks of birds plenty of space when walking around them with or without your dog. Take your trash with you to avoid attracting predators. Pay attention to birds that are repeatedly vocalizing or flushing, they are telling you that you are too close. Help educate others. Thanks for your support!!

