

Keep a Lookout for...



black skimmer



American oystercatcher



laughing gull



least tern



snowy plover



gull-billed tern



royal tern



Wilson's plover

Photography:

black skimmer by Barry Mansell
American oystercatchers by Patrick Leary
laughing gull, least tern, gull-billed tern, royal tern by Jeff Gore
snowy plover by Jeff Gore and Nancy Douglas
Wilson's plover by Patrick Leary

Cover: royal terns and Caspian terns by Jeff Gore

While enjoying the beach,
remember to be respectful
of wildlife. Their survival
depends on you!



This publication was made possible by a grant from
the Wildlife Foundation of Florida.



Florida Fish and Wildlife
Conservation Commission
620 South Meridian Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1600

Wildlife Alert Hotline 1-888-404-3922

Visit: MyFWC.com

A Matter of Survival

Co-existing With Florida's Beach-nesting Birds

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation
Commission



What Can You Do To Help?

Keep your distance. If birds appear agitated or take flight, you are too close! Some birds (such as terns and skimmers) require a 600 foot comfort zone during the breeding season, while other species are more tolerant of disturbances. A general rule is to stay at least 300 feet (the length of a football field) away from groups of shorebirds. Observe birds from a distance using binoculars to get a closer look.

Keep out of posted areas. During the spring and summer nesting season, signs may be posted in areas that are important for beach-nesting birds. Avoid posted areas and encourage others to do the same.

Never intentionally force birds to fly. If you see birds on a beach, island or sandbar, walk or steer around the birds to avoid disturbing them.

Avoid running your watercraft close to shore. Many mangrove islands, beaches, mud flats and other shallow water and shoreline habitats can be important feeding, resting and nesting areas for birds. Loud noises and vessel wakes can disturb birds.



Keep dogs leashed. An unleashed dog can destroy a colony of beach-nesting birds in minutes. Keep dogs away from all bird colonies and beach-nesting birds.

Spread the word. Many people do not realize their actions may be harmful to wildlife. If you see people intentionally disturbing a bird colony, let them know how their actions may threaten survival of birds.



Protecting the Young

Adult beach-nesting birds are protective of their eggs and young. When you disturb a nesting area, worried adult birds see you as a danger and try to keep you away from their eggs and chicks. Sometimes an adult bird will pretend to have a broken wing to lure you and dangerous predators away from their young. Adult birds also may attempt to drive you away by calling out in protest, dive-bombing and even defecating on you!

If any of these things happen, you are too close to the birds! Please calmly and quietly leave the area. As you walk away, keep your eyes on the beach and watch carefully so you do not step on eggs or chicks.

Disturbance Can Threaten Survival

Frequent disturbances of birds on the beach, especially disturbances that cause birds to take flight, may threaten their survival.

Many species of Florida's water birds, including gulls, terns, skimmers, plovers, willets and oystercatchers, nest on the beach. When these beach-nesting birds are disturbed and flushed off their nests by people or dogs, eggs and chicks in the nests are exposed to temperature extremes and predators like crows, raccoons and dogs.

Several beach-nesting bird species are declining due to habitat loss and disruption of nesting activities. Beaches and islands that were once isolated are now teeming with boats, beach goers and their pets. It is easy for unknowing beach goers to crush the eggs or kill young chicks accidentally. Eggs and chicks of beach-nesting birds blend in with their surroundings and are nearly invisible on the ground.

If birds appear agitated or take flight, you are too close!

Photography:
oystercatcher eggs, above and background bird photo by Jeff Gore
beach sign scene by Ricardo Zambrano
royal terns and chicks, right, by Jeff Gore