

**With your help, beach-nesting birds will be here for future generations to enjoy.**

- Keep away from posted areas
- Learn to recognize birds and habitat
- Be aware of birds calling loudly nearby, which indicates you are too close to nests or chicks
- Avoid remote stretches of beach or walk below the high tide line
- Keep your dog on a leash
- Do not feed gulls
- Take your trash with you
- Teach others to appreciate North Carolina's birds

To learn more go to:  
<http://www.ncaudubon.org>  
<http://www.ncwildlife.org>  
<http://www.nps.gov/caha>  
<http://nc-es.fws.gov>

To report violations  
of posted areas call:  
1-800-662-7137



Eggs & chicks are perfectly camouflaged to match their sandy environment.



## SHARING THE SHORE WITH NORTH CAROLINA'S BEACH-NESTING BIRDS



**You can help preserve our coastal birds  
for future generations**

**TAKE A WALK ALONG A VAST STRETCH OF SANDY BEACH DOTTED WITH SHELLS AND SMALL, SCATTERED DUNES, AND SAND HOT ENOUGH TO SCORCH YOUR BARE FEET. IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE THIS AS NESTING HABITAT FOR BIRDS. BUT IT IS! AND FOR SEVEN SPECIES OF COASTAL BIRDS, IT IS CRITICAL TO THEIR SURVIVAL.**

Each year, from April through August, beach-nesting birds congregate on the shore along North Carolina's barrier islands to breed. These include terns and skimmers that nest in groups called colonies, and shorebirds that nest singly. They nest

above the high tide line on bare sand with little or no vegetation, and lay their eggs in nests that are little more than scrapes in the sand, sometimes lined with bits of shell and debris.

**North Carolina's Beach-nesting Birds**

- Black Skimmer
- Gull-billed Tern
- Common Tern
- Least Tern
- American Oystercatcher
- Wilson's Plover
- Piping Plover

The eggs and chicks are camouflaged perfectly to match their sandy environment. Downy chicks, that look like tiny fluff balls, leave their nests soon after hatching, but hang out on the beach for several weeks with their parents until they are old enough to fly and fend for themselves.

Beach-nesting birds are uniquely adapted to the dynamic nature of barrier islands. The habitat they need is created by powerful storms that periodically strike the coastline. During such storms, tides wash over portions of the beach and push sand back towards the sound, creating nesting habitat in the form of open, sandy areas. While nesting habitat includes washover sites on ocean facing beaches, the areas at the ends of the barrier



*Wilson's Plover*



*Common Tern*

islands are particularly important as they are also directly impacted by the adjacent and ever changing inlets. The natural movement of the inlets creates bare sandy spits and sand flats that provide ideal nesting habitat.



*Black Skimmer*

**POPULATIONS OF OUR BEACH-NESTING BIRDS ARE DECLINING AND THEY NEED YOUR HELP.**

Several species of North Carolina's beach-nesting birds have shown alarming population declines in recent years. Common terns, for example, once abundant as their name would imply, have declined nearly 80% since coast-wide waterbird surveys began in the late 1970s. Nesting on the beach can be a challenge under the best of



*Gull-billed Tern*

circumstances. Weather can be harsh and nests can be flooded by storms or extreme tides. Add to this the human induced changes of coastal development and beach stabilization, and the birds are having a tough time indeed.

Beach-nesters are extremely sensitive to human disturbance. Eggs and chicks are camouflaged to resemble the sand and can be easily stepped on and crushed. They are also impossible to see from vehicles. Furthermore, these birds perceive humans and their pets as predators. When people wander too close to nesting areas, adult birds will leave their eggs and chicks, exposing them to extreme temperatures and to predators such as gulls and crows. Finally, with an increase in human population comes an increase in predators that benefit from our garbage. Foxes, raccoons and feral cats, once absent or uncommon on barrier islands, are now abundant. Predatory birds, such as gulls, have also increased in number.



*Least Tern*

**WITH A LITTLE HELP, BEACH-NESTING BIRDS CAN SURVIVE AND COEXIST WITH PEOPLE. HERE'S HOW YOU CAN HELP THESE BIRDS HAVE A SUCCESSFUL NESTING SEASON.**

- Keep out of posted nesting and feeding areas. Some nesting and feeding sites are posted during the breeding season. Entering these areas can result in the loss of eggs or chicks, and can lead to civil or criminal penalties.
- Learn to recognize potential nesting habitat. Be aware that not all nesting sites are posted. Since birds typically nest on the upper portion of inlet and remote/undeveloped beaches, avoiding these areas during the nesting season



*Piping Plover*

will allow birds to tend to their eggs and chicks without disturbance. You will know you are too close to a nest or chick if terns begin to dive bomb you in defense of their nests or if birds are calling loudly or feigning a broken wing nearby. Walk below the high tide line and quickly leave the area.

- Keep your dog on a leash. Dogs will chase and harass young and adult birds and can destroy nests and kill chicks if not kept on a leash.
- Avoid flying kites, throwing balls and exploding fireworks near nesting and feeding areas. These activities can cause birds to leave their nest or chicks unprotected.



*American Oystercatcher*

- Do not feed gulls on the beach. This seemingly harmless activity can attract gulls near nesting areas where they prey on the eggs and chicks of beach-nesting birds.
- Take your trash with you when you leave the beach. Garbage, including bait and scraps from cleaned fish, attracts predators to nesting areas. Fishing line that is left on the beach entangles and kills birds.
- Teach others to appreciate North Carolina's beach-nesting birds. Beach-nesting birds are an important part of the barrier island ecosystem and a sign of a wild and healthy beach. We are fortunate to be able to share our beaches with this valuable natural resource.