



Tom Grey

Black-necked Stilt • L 14" • Uncommon • Slender shorebird with long reddish-pink legs, black upperparts, white underparts, and long, thin, black bill • Nests on vegetation clumps in shallow water, often in impoundments • Stands or wades slowly through

Willet • L 15" • Priority conservation species in SC • Large, drab, gray-brown shorebird with long bill and legs – in flight shows distinctive black and white wing stripe • Solitary ground nester amid marsh or beach grasses • Forages on beaches and tidal flats



Greg Lavaty



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Laughing Gull • L 16" • Abundant, increasing • Breeding adult has black hood, reddish-black bill, and dark gray back with white underparts – juveniles are varying shades of brown • Colonially nests in grasses surrounding other species' colonies • Opportunistic feeder; will take eggs and young of other birds

Common Tern • L 12" • Uncommon nesting in SC, declining • Blood red bill with black tip, black cap • Nests on sandy or shelly ground with other terns or Black Skimmers • Aggressively defends nest



Felicia Sanders



Greg Lavaty

Gull-billed Tern • L 14" • Priority conservation species in SC • Mid-sized tern – breeding adults have black cap, short, sturdy, black bill, pale gray upperparts • Nests in small colonies or often with Black Skimmers on bare to sparsely vegetated ground • Forages over the marsh eating insects and fiddler crabs

Royal Tern • L 20" • Priority conservation species in SC • Large tern with orange bill and a black cap, non-breeders partial cap • Nests in colonies usually with Sandwich Terns on bare to sparsely vegetated ground • Plunge-dives to catch fish, also eats crabs and shrimp



Gary Smyle



Chuck Tague

Sandwich Tern • L 15" • Priority conservation species in SC • Mid-sized tern with shaggy black cap, slender, black bill with yellow tip • Nests in groups, usually with Royal Terns, on sandy or shelly ground with little vegetation • Dives to catch fish near water's surface – also eats

Forster's Tern • L 13" • Uncommon nesting in SC, priority conservation species • Mid-sized tern with black cap, orange bill with black tip, and orange legs • Nests on the ground in smaller colonies amid marsh and grasses • Plunge-dives to capture prey



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Least Tern • L 9" • Threatened in SC, declining • Smallest tern with yellow bill and legs, white forehead and black cap • Nests in colonies on sandy shelly ground and on flat pebble-covered roofs • Hovers and plunge-dives to catch small fish and shrimp

Black Skimmer • L 18" • Priority conservation species in SC, declining • Large, black bird with white underparts, neck, and forehead – large, red and black bill with lower bill longer than upper • Nests in groups on bare ground, sometimes with Least Terns • Feeds by skimming surface of water with bill, snapping up prey by feel



Greg Lavaty



American Oystercatchers: Chuck Tague



Fun Waterbird Facts

- Waterbirds take a wide variety of prey, including fish, crustaceans, snails, shellfish, worms, amphibians, reptiles, and insects. **Roseate Spoonbills** are pink because the crustaceans they eat contain pink pigmentation.
- The **Wilson's Plover**, like many plovers, will feign a wing injury if you get too close to its nest. This behavior is called a broken-wing display, and is used to lure predators away from the nest.
- Like owls, many fish-eating birds, such as terns and **Black Skimmers**, regurgitate "pellets" – non-digestible parts of their prey such as bones or scales.
- The **American Oystercatcher** has a laterally compressed bill that allows it to easily pry open shellfish to reach its soft-bodied prey inside.
- **Terns** and **Black Skimmers** display a behavior called "mobbing", flying up as a group to dive-bomb people, dogs, or predators that approach their nesting colonies. Agitated birds will peck at and defecate on intruders, so steer clear of nesting colonies!
- **Black Skimmers** rest in a strange position – they lay flat on the ground with their heads stretched out in front of them. "Rest assured" they aren't dead!



SCDNR
Coastal Birds Project
220 Santee Gun Club Road
McClellanville, SC 29458
www.dnr.sc.gov/wildlife/species/coastalbirds/index.html



American Bird Conservancy
4249 Loudoun Avenue
The Plains, VA 20198
540.253.5780 • www.abcbirds.org

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Sources: Sibley Field Guide to Birds (2003), Birds of North America Online (Cornell Lab of Ornithology, 2011)
2015 SC State Wildlife Action Plan <http://www.dnr.sc.gov/swap/index.html>

COVER PHOTO: Black Skimmer, Brown Pelican and young: Felicia Sanders
Fisherman and Boat Clipart: www.clipartpanda.com



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Breeding Birds of the South Carolina Coast

An Angler's and Boater's Bird Guide
April - September



Fish, Swim, and Play From 50 Yards Away!

Why Birds are Important

- Bird abundance is an important indicator of the health of coastal ecosystems
- Revenue generated by hunting, photography, and birdwatching helps support the coastal economy in South Carolina

Threats to Island-Nesting Bay Birds

- Habitat loss from erosion and wetland degradation
- Predators such as raccoons, mink, feral hogs, and laughing gulls that eat eggs and young
- Disturbance from humans and their pets
- Entanglement in discarded or lost fishing tackle and other debris



Felicia Sanders

Brown Pelican Nestlings



Felicia Sanders

Nesting Royal Terns

How to Avoid Disturbing Birds

"Fish, Swim, and Play From 50 Yards Away!"

— Gary P Nunn, the Music Ambassador of Texas

- Obey posted areas where groups of birds are nesting on islands
- Anchor your vessel at least 50 yards away from nesting islands and beaches
- Keep children and pets away from closed nesting areas
- Move away from nesting birds if they increase vocalization, fly off their nests, or otherwise move away from you
- Do not leave discarded fishing tackle behind — dispose of it properly on the mainland
- If you see someone destroying nests or disturbing a nesting colony of birds, please contact:

South Carolina Department of Natural Resources at
1-800-922-5431



Breeding Birds of the South Carolina Coast

American White Pelican • L 62" •

Common • Large, white bird with black flight feathers and bright yellow bill and pouch • Does not nest in SC, but visits year-round • Preys on small fish in groups



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Brown Pelican • L 51" • Common, stable • Large gray-brown bird with distinctive bill and pouch—breeding adults have yellow head with dark brown neck • Colonial nesters on islands with grassy dunes and low shrubs • Plunge-dives to feed on fish

Great Blue Heron • L 46" • Common, moderate conservation concern • Largest heron – overall gray-blue with yellowish bill – will extend and coil long neck • Nests colonially in mature pine trees on hammock islands or over brackish/freshwater • Wades to feed on a wide variety of prey



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capture fish or other prey

Snowy Egret • L 24" • Common, species of conservation concern • Small, white egret with long black bill; yellow feet contrast with dark legs; yellow skin around eye • Nests in mixed-species colonies among shrubs in brackish or freshwater ponds • Slowly wades through water with neck extended in search of prey



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through water, crouching low and quickly stabbing bill to catch prey

Tricolored Heron • L 26" • Common, priority conservation species • Mid-sized heron; slate gray back and dark breast with contrasting white belly • Nests in mixed-species colonies on islands in dense vegetation or in shrubs in brackish or freshwater ponds • Chases fish



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stir up prey

Reddish Egret • L 30" • Priority conservation species in SC • Dark morph has slate gray body with reddish breast, neck, and head; white morph completely white – both have pink bill with black tip; shaggy looking plumage • Rarely nests in SC • Uses quick, erratic movements to

Little Blue Heron • L 24" • Uncommon, SC priority conservation species • Smaller wader; entirely blue-gray with long, greenish legs and bluish bill – immature birds are white with or without blue mottling • Nests in mixed-species colonies on islands in low shrubs • Slowly wades through water with a stiff, extended neck in search of prey



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Robert Stalnaker

Cattle Egret • L 20" • Common, stable • Smallest white egret, with stocky body, short legs, rusty-buff plumes on back, chest, and head, and reddish-orange bill • Nests in mixed-species groups on vegetated coastal islands or in low trees/shrubs over water • Usually seen foraging in agricultural areas inland; feeds on insects



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Black-crowned Night-Heron • L 25" • Common, SC priority conservation species • Mid-sized, nocturnal heron with short legs and neck – black cap and back, gray wings and tail, and red eyes. Juveniles are brown with white streaking • Nests in groups on islands in shrubs • Crouches at water's edge waiting to strike and capture fish and other prey



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search of food

White Ibis • L 25" • Common, SC high priority conservation species • White, mid-sized wader with long, downward-curving, red orange bill and legs. Juveniles mottled brown • Colonially nests in small trees and shrubs over freshwater • Uses touch-sensitive bill to probe shallow water and soft mud in

Roseate Spoonbill • L 32" • Uncommon SC conservation species • Unmistakable pale pink wading bird with a long bill ending in flat "spoon" • Does not nest in SC, but visits in summer and fall • Wades slowly through water, sweeping touch sensitive bill side to side in search of prey



Christy Hand



Christy Hand

Wood Stork • L 40" • Federally threatened species and SC endangered • Bald head, large with black trailing edge of wings • Nests with other wood storks high in trees over water • Feeds by feeling for prey with its bill in the water

Anhinga • L 35" • Priority conservation species in South Carolina • Black diving bird with a long straight bill and snakelike neck • Nests in mixed species groups in trees and shrubs in brackish or freshwater areas • Spears fish with its bill



Christy Hand



Christy Hand

Green Heron • L 18" • Priority conservation species in South Carolina • Greenish black cap, dark grayish back and wings, reddish neck and grey underparts • Solitary nesting on tree limbs over water • Sometimes uses "bait" to attract fish which it catches with its bill

Clapper Rail • L 14.5" • Locally common, trend unknown • Thin, chicken-like bird, grayish to rusty brown with long, orange bill • Nests in clumped grasses or low in forks of woody vegetation • Secretive, forages along marsh edges



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crayfish, and shrimp

Wilson's Plover • L 8" • Threatened in SC, decreasing • Mid-size plover with single neck band, thick black bill, and white forehead • Solitary ground nester near beach dunes or on flat open areas • Eats mostly crustaceans, including crabs,

American Oystercatcher • L 17" • SC high priority conservation species • Black and brown with white underside; large, laterally flattened, reddish-orange bill and red eye ring • Solitary nester on slightly vegetated sandy berms and shell rakes • Forages on tidal flats for oysters and other shellfish



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