



ABOUT SHOREBIRDS Many kinds of birds share beach habitat with turtles. Some forage and rest here year round. Others stay temporarily to rest and feed during their long migrations. From mid-February through August, though, and overlapping the sea turtle nesting season, several shorebird species also nest on southwest Florida's open beaches. Unlike turtles, these shorebirds lay their eggs on top of the sandy beach surface in slight hollows called scrapes.

Shorebirds nest here February through August.

Disturbances threaten their survival. When flushed from their nests, adults are forced to waste vital energy and to leave eggs exposed to temperature extremes, to predators such as fish crows, gulls and ghost crabs, and to people and pets who might unintentionally or unknowingly step on them.

Pets and vehicles are particular threats. New chicks, flightless for their first several weeks, are especially vulnerable. Though the chicks of some species are mobile and very active immediately after hatching, they often freeze when approached, rather than run away.

COLONIAL NESTERS gather in groups to lay their eggs. Some of them, such as Least terns (*Sterna antillarum*) vigorously warn away predators and people once they have begun to nest, usually sometime in April. Black skimmers (*Rynchops niger*), much larger and noticeable birds, are also found on beaches in southwest Florida. Because these birds often nest in the same location each year, large areas can be posted for their protection with signs alerting people not to enter the enclosed areas.

SOLITARY NESTERS such as Snowy plovers (*Charadrius alexandrinus*) and Wilson's plovers (*Charadrius wilsonia*) are often nearly invisible, camouflaged by their cryptic coloration or hidden by sparse vegetation. They may signal alarm - such as feigning a broken wing - but the signals, like the birds, are easily missed. If they are still nesting or have re-nested in April when Least terns begin courtship behavior, both may be afforded some protection by the terns' noisy and aggressive behavior. Another solitary nester occasionally found here is the American oystercatcher (*Haematopus palliatus*). Relatively large and with distinctive coloring, it is easily recognizable visually and by its unique call.

How to help

Walk low. Avoid dunes and upper beach and stay near or below the high tide line. Try to avoid the wrack line (debris left by recent tides) where chicks which blend in may be feeding. Fortunately, most people prefer to walk low, close to the water.

Walk without pets. Even leashed dogs cause extreme distress to shorebirds which view them as four-legged predators.

Pets allowed to roam free may harm shorebird eggs, chicks, and turtle hatchlings.

For related information:

www.abcbirds.org

www.myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats

www.flap.org