

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 Texas

Threats to Island-Nesting Bay Birds

- Habitat loss from erosion and wetland degradation
- Predators such as raccoons, 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



Cattle Egret nestlings



Tricolored Heron nestlings

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
- Keep children and pets away from nesting islands
- 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:

Texas Parks & Wildlife at 1-800-792-GAME (4263)

Breeding Birds of the Texas Coast

American White Pelican • L 62”

• Common, increasing • Large, white bird with black flight feathers and bright yellow bill and pouch • Nests in groups on islands with sparse vegetation • Preys on small fish in groups



Chuck Tagge



Chuck Tagge

Brown Pelican • L 51” • Endangered in Texas, but common and increasing • Large gray-brown bird with distinctive bill and pouch – breeding adults have yellow head with dark brown neck • Colonial nesters on islands with dense vegetation and low shrubs • Plunge-dives to feed on fish

Great Blue Heron • L 46” • Common, slightly decreasing • Largest heron – overall gray-blue with yellowish bill – will extend and coil long neck • Nests colonially on islands in mangroves • Wades to feed on a wide variety of prey



Chuck Tagge



Chuck Tagge

Great Egret • L 39” • Common, slightly decreasing • Large, white wading bird with long, orange-yellow bill and black legs; during breeding season has long plumes on back and lime-green skin around eyes • Nests in groups among other species on mangrove islands • Wades or waits motionlessly to capture fish or other prey

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



Chuck Tagge



Chuck Tagge

Tricolored Heron • L 26” • Common but decreasing • Mid-sized heron; slate gray back and dark breast with contrasting white belly • Nests in mixed-species colonies on islands in dense vegetation • Chases fish through water, crouching low and quickly stabbing bill to catch prey



Greg Lanery

Reddish Egret • L 30” • Threatened in Texas, decreasing • 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 • Nests in mixed-species colonies in low vegetation or on ground • Uses quick, erratic movements to stir up prey



Chuck Tagge



Robert Steinhilber

Little Blue Heron • L 24” • Uncommon, decreasing • 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 or mangroves • Slowly wades through water with a stiff, extended neck in search of prey



Chuck Tagge

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 • Usually seen foraging in agricultural areas inland; feeds on insects



Chuck Tagge



Chuck Tagge

Black-crowned Night-Heron • L 25” • Common, decreasing • 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 or mangroves • Crouches at water’s edge waiting to strike and capture fish and other prey



Chuck Tagge



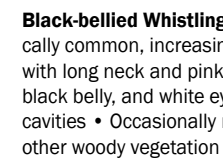
Chuck Tagge

White Ibis • L 25” • Common, stable • White, mid-sized wader with long, downward-curving, red-orange bill and legs. Juveniles mottled brown • Nests on mangrove islands • Uses touch-sensitive bill to probe shallow water and soft mud in search of food



Chuck Tagge

Roseate Spoonbill • L 32” • Uncommon, declining • Unmistakable pale pink wading bird with a long bill ending in flat “spoon” • Nests on islands in vegetation • Wades slowly through water, sweeping touch-sensitive bill side to side in search of prey



Chuck Tagge

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck • L 21” • Locally common, increasing • Goose-like duck with long neck and pink legs, pinkish-red bill, black belly, and white eye-ring • Nests in tree cavities • Occasionally nests in mesquite and other woody vegetation on bay islands • Feeds on plants and seeds in shallow water

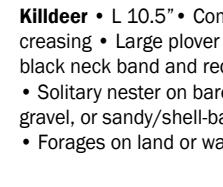


OlgaPart.com



Greg Lanery

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 • Forages alone among mangroves and along marsh edges



Chuck Tagge

Killdeer • L 10.5” • Common, decreasing • Large plover with double black neck band and red eye ring • Solitary nester on bare ground, gravel, or sandy/shell-based surfaces • Forages on land or water’s edge

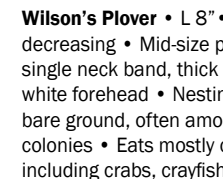


Chuck Tagge



Chuck Tagge

Snowy Plover • L 6.25” • Uncommon, decreasing • Small pale brown-gray plover with black forehead stripe and ear patch, and partial neck band – black bill and gray legs • Solitary nester on sandy or shelly ground • Feeds on ground or on tidal flats



Chuck Tagge

Wilson's Plover • L 8” • Uncommon, decreasing • Mid-size plover with single neck band, thick black bill, and white forehead • Nesting on sandy bare ground, often among Least Tern colonies • Eats mostly crustaceans, including crabs, crayfish, and shrimp



Greg Lanery



Chuck Tagge

American Oystercatcher • L 17” • Common, stable • Black and brown with white underside; large, laterally-flattened, reddish-orange bill and red eye ring • Nests on shores and dredge spoil islands with little to no vegetation • Forages on tidal flats for shellfish



Tom Gray

Black-necked Stilt • L 14"

• Common, trend unknown • Slender shorebird with long reddish-pink legs, black upperparts, white underparts, and long, thin, black bill
• Nests on vegetation clumps over water • Stands or wades slowly through shallow water to catch prey

Willet • L 15" • Common, status unknown • 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



Greg Lavaty

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 • Nests in large colonies • Opportunistic feeder; will take eggs and young of other birds

Caspian Tern • L 21" • Common, stable • Large tern with thick red bill and black cap • Nests with other terns and gulls on bare or sparsely vegetated ground • Dives to capture fish near the water's surface



Greg Lavaty



Greg Lavaty

Gull-billed Tern • L 14" • Local, declining • Mid-sized tern – breeding adults have black cap, short, sturdy, black bill, pale gray upperparts • Nests in small colonies on bare to sparsely vegetated ground • Makes long, swooping dives to capture aquatic prey

Royal Tern • L 20" • Common, increasing • Similar to Caspian Tern, but with thinner orange bill – adults have black cap, non-breeders partial cap • Nests in large, mixed-species colonies on bare to sparsely vegetated ground • Plunge-dives to catch fish, also eats crabs and shrimp



Gary Snyke

Sandwich Tern • L 15" • Common, increasing • 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 crustaceans

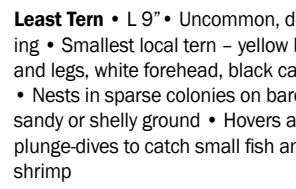


Chuck Tague



Chuck Tague

Forster's Tern • L 13" • Local, declining • 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



Greg Lavaty

Least Tern • L 9" • Uncommon, declining • Smallest local tern – yellow bill and legs, white forehead, black cap • Nests in sparse colonies on bare, sandy or shelly ground • Hovers and plunge-dives to catch small fish and shrimp



Chuck Tague

Black Skimmer • L 18" • Common, decreasing • 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 **Killdeer**, 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!



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361.885.6202 • www.cb bep.org



Gulf Coast Bird Observatory
103 Hwy 332 West
Lake Jackson, TX 77566
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American Bird Conservancy
4249 Loudoun Avenue
The Plains, VA 20198
540.253.5780 • www.abcbirds.org



Audubon Texas
510 S. Congress Ave., Suite 102
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Sources: *Sibley Field Guide to Birds* (2003), *Birds of North America Online* (Cornell Lab of Ornithology, 2011)

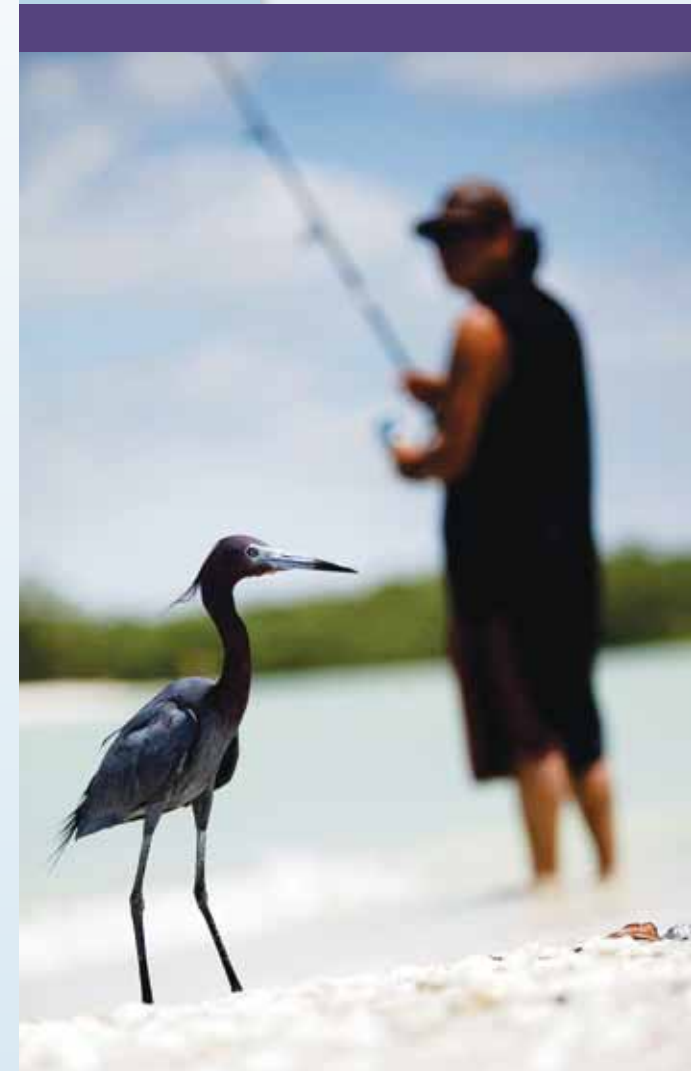
Great Egret: ClipArt.com

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**Breeding Birds
of the Texas Coast**

A Fisherman's and Boater's Bird Guide

February – August



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From 50 Yards Away!**