

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 Alabama

Threats to Coastal Nesting Birds

- Habitat loss from erosion and wetland degradation
- Predators such as foxes, coyotes, and feral and free-roaming cats that eat eggs and young
- Disturbance from humans and their pets
- Entanglement in discarded or lost fishing tackle and line, as well as other debris – PLEASE DISCARD FISHING LINE IN APPROPRIATE TRASH CONTAINERS



Cattle Egret nestlings



Tricolored Heron nestlings

How to Avoid Disturbing Birds

“Fish, Swim, and Play From 50 Yards Away!”

- Please observe posted areas where groups of birds are nesting on beaches and islands
- Anchor your vessel at least 50 yards away from nesting islands and beaches
- Keep children and pets away from all posted 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 on beaches and islands or in the water – dispose of it properly
- If you see someone destroying nests or disturbing nesting birds, please contact:

**Alabama Wildlife Law Enforcement
at 1-800-272-4263**

All birds are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, as amended, and Alabama Nongame Species Regulation 220-2-.92. Game species can only be taken through legal hunting

Breeding Birds of the Alabama Coast



Chuck Tague

Brown Pelican • L 51" • Stable • 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



John Turner

Least Bittern • 13" • High Conservation Concern, declining-limited distribution • Small marsh bird; buffy with black cap and back • Secretive solitary nester in reeds or cattails • Stalks through water or stands on vegetation hunting fish, frogs, and insects



Chuck Tague

Great Blue Heron • L 46" • Stable • Largest heron – overall gray-blue with yellowish bill – will extend and coil long neck • Nests colonially on islands in woody shrubs or trees • Wades to feed on a wide variety of prey



Chuck Tague

Great Egret • L 39" • Stable • 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 wood shrubs or trees • Wades or waits motionlessly to capture fish or other prey



Chuck Tague

Snowy Egret • L 24" • Stable • 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



Robert Starker

Little Blue Heron • L 24" • Moderate Conservation Concern, declining • 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



Chuck Tague



Chuck Tague

Tricolored Heron • L 26" • Moderate Conservation Concern, declining • 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 Lowry

Reddish Egret • High Conservation Concern, rare, limited distribution • 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 – in only one location • Uses quick, erratic movements to stir up prey



Chuck Tague

Cattle Egret • L 20" • 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 Tague



Reah Wright

Green Heron • L 18" • Moderate Conservation Concern, declining • Small, stocky heron with long bill, dark body and dark rufous neck; juveniles similar with streaked neck • Nests alone or in loose groups in wetland trees and shrubs • Feeds at water's edge; may use bait to capture small fish



Chuck Tague

Black-crowned Night-Heron • L 25" • Moderate Conservation Concern • 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

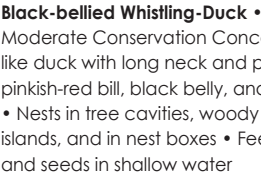


Chuck Tague



Chuck Tague

White Ibis • L 25" • Stable • White, mid-sized wader with long, downward-curving, red-orange bill and legs – juveniles mottled brown • Nests in live and dead vegetation • Uses touch-sensitive bill to probe shallow water and soft mud in search of food

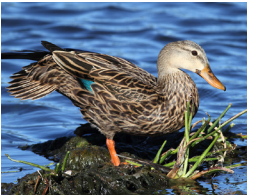


Chuck Tague

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck • L 21" • Moderate Conservation Concern • Goose-like duck with long neck and pink legs, pinkish-red bill, black belly, and white eye-ring • Nests in tree cavities, woody vegetation on islands, and in nest boxes • Feeds on plants and seeds in shallow water

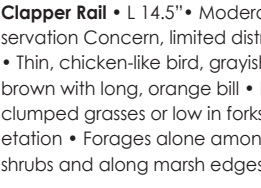


Chuck Tague



Bill Hubick

Mottled Duck • L 22" • High Conservation Concern, declining-limited distribution • Brown dabbling duck with paler buffy head and dull olive to orange (female) or bright yellow bill (male) • Nests in meadows, wetlands, or agricultural areas • Feeds on seeds and aquatic invertebrates

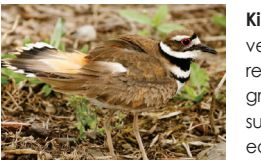


Chuck Tague

Clapper Rail • L 14.5" • Moderate Conservation Concern, limited distribution • Thin, chicken-like bird, grayish to rusty brown with long, orange bill • Nests in clumped grasses or low in forks of vegetation • Forages alone among woody shrubs and along marsh edges

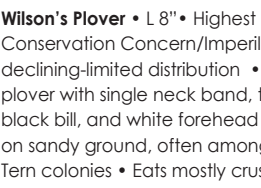


Chuck Tague



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Killdeer • L 10.5" • Stable • 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 eating insects and worms



Chuck Tague



Chuck Tague

Wilson's Plover • L 8" • Highest Conservation Concern/Imperiled, rare, declining-limited distribution • Mid-size plover with single neck band, thick black bill, and white forehead • Nests on sandy ground, often among Least Tern colonies • Eats mostly crustaceans, including crabs, crayfish, and shrimp

Snowy Plover • L 6.25" • Highest Conservation Concern/Imperiled, rare, declining-limited distribution • Small pale plover with black forehead and ear patch, partial neck band – black bill and gray legs • Solitary nester on sandy or shelly ground • Feeds in coastal habitats on insects and worms

American Oystercatcher • L 17" • Highest Conservation Concern/Imperiled, declining-limited distribution • Black and brown with white underside; large, laterally- flattened, reddish-orange bill and red eye ring • Nests on sandy or shelly shores • Forages on tidal flats for shellfish



Chuck Tagoe



Tom Gray

Black-necked Stilt • L 14" • Stable • 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" • Stable • 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 Locaty



Greg Locaty

Laughing Gull • L 16" • Stable • 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" • 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 Locaty



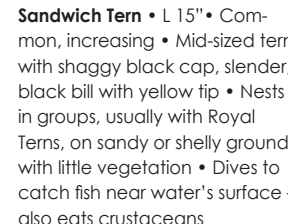
Greg Locaty

Gull-billed Tern • L 14" • High Conservation Concern, declining-limited distribution • 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



Gary Smyke

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



Johanna van de Westdijne

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 Tagoe

Common Tern • L 12" • Moderate Conservation Concern, declining • Mid-sized tern with black cap, orange bill with black tip, and orange legs • Nests on sandy/shelly substrate within sparse vegetation • Plunge-dives to capture fish



Johanna van de Westdijne

Least Tern • L 9" • Moderate Conservation Concern, 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 Tagoe

Black Skimmer • L 18" • Moderate Conservation Concern, 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 • Feeds by skimming surface of water with bill, snapping up prey by feel



Greg Locaty



American Oystercatchers: Chuck Tagoe



Fun Waterbird Facts

- Waterbirds take a wide variety of prey, including fish, crustaceans, snails, shellfish, worms, amphibians, reptiles, and insects.
- Green Herons** may use bait such as insects, small twigs, and leaves to capture small fish. This is one of few bird species that uses a tool and baiting behavior to capture its prey.
- White Ibis** have long decurved bills that are touch-sensitive. They forage through shallow water sweeping their bills back and forth until it comes into contact with prey, causing the bill to reflexively close.
- 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.
- 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!
- 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!



Gulf State Park
Alabama State Parks
20115 State Hwy. 135 Gulf Shores, AL 36542
251-948-7275 • alapark.com/GulfState



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Alabama Ecological Services Field Office
1208 Main St. Daphne, AL 36526
251-441-5181 • www.fws.gov/daphne



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

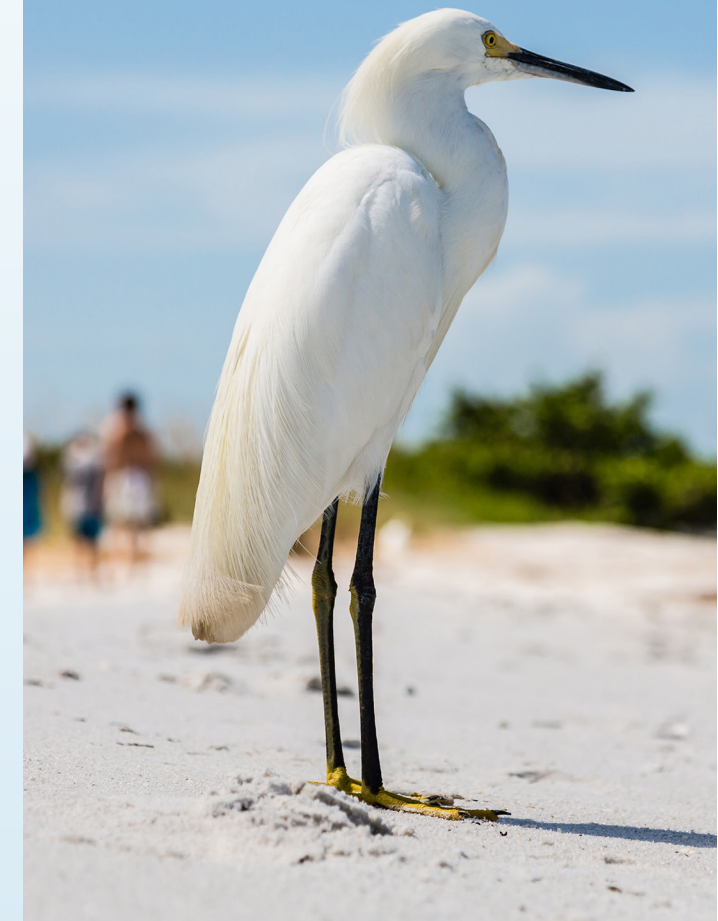
Sources: Checklist of the Birds of the Gulf Coast Region of Alabama (2011), ADCNR Checklist of Alabama Birds (2012), Field Checklist of Alabama Birds (2013), The Birds of North America Online (2014)

Great Egret: ClipArt.com
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Breeding Birds of the Alabama Coast

A Bird Guide for Anglers and Beach-Goers
February – August

Fish, Swim, and Play
From 50 Yards Away!



Not all of the inland coastal breeding species are listed in this guide. This guide features beach- and barrier island-nesting birds.