

Rookery Bay Reserve *Finding Solutions*



Beach-nesting Birds

Throughout the world, many beach-nesting bird species are declining due to loss of habitat caused by rapid coastal development and to increased disruption of nesting activities. Due to declining numbers, both least terns and snowy plovers are listed as Threatened Species by the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). From March to

September, least terns and black skimmers nest in colonies along open, sandy Gulf beaches while snowy plovers and Wilson's plovers nest nearby. When beach-nesting birds are disturbed and flushed off their nests by people or dogs, eggs and chicks are exposed to high temperature extremes and predators. Frequent disturbance of birds on the beach, especially

disturbance that flushes birds from their nests, threatens their survival. These birds depend on southwest Florida beaches for nesting and to raise their chicks.



Least Tern courtship

Project Coordinator
Beverly Anderson with Rookery Bay Volunteers



Project Dates
2002 - present



Monitoring and Protection



Posting on Key Island

Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, in cooperation with FWC, seasonally posts and closes viable beach-nesting bird habitat within the Reserve. Reserve staff aided by volunteers post "Area Closed" signs

connected by string and orange flagging to enclose nesting colonies. Colonies are protected from the beginning of the nesting season (early - April) until nesting is completed and chicks have fledged (mid-August). These sites are monitored regularly and the numbers of adults, nests and chicks are recorded. Additionally, educational posters and hand-outs are provided to local partners and organizations for

distribution at beach access points and visitor centers within the community. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of nesting sites has indicated that the seasonal closure of nesting beaches in conjunction with increased public awareness through education enhances nesting success for beach-nesting birds.

Share The Shore

A MATTER OF SURVIVAL

Living Together: People and Rookery Bay Reserve Beach-Nesting Birds

Threats: From March to September four species of beach-nesting birds depend on Collier County beaches for their eggs and raise their chicks.

Least Tern: Least terns and black skimmers nest together in mixed colonies along open sandy Gulf beaches. Snow plovers and Wilson's plovers nest nearby.

Black Skimmer: To avoid the noise to nesting sites, beach goers may step on and crush eggs or small chicks.

Disturbance: Disturbance may cause parent birds to abandon their nests. Without parent protection, chicks and eggs are exposed to predators and the nesting site.

Human Habits: Feet and shadow casts appear on sand grounds to ground-nesting birds.

Share the Shore: Each year, Rookery Bay Reserve and FWC protects and closes locally important nesting beaches. Signs help and that work are produced by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP:

- ▶ Please keep your distance
- ▶ Never intentionally force birds to fly
- ▶ Avoid parked areas and encourage others to do the same
- ▶ If birds appear agitated, take flight or wade on you, they're trying to tell you, please stay closer to a sign or chick.

For more information visit us at www.rookerybay.org

Educational Poster Available Online

Find more information at
www.rookerybay.org
www.myfwc.com

Rookery Bay, located in southwest Florida, is recognized as one of the few remaining pristine, mangrove-forested estuaries in the U.S. As part of the National Estuarine Research Reserve System, it serves as an outdoor classroom and laboratory for students and scientists. For more information, visit www.rookerybay.org.

