

ONE GOOD TERN DESERVES ANOTHER



LEAST TERN ON ITS NEST

Least Tern (*Sternula antillarum*)

Least terns depend on Collier County beaches for their continued survival. Waterfront development, boat traffic and recreational beach use is increasing in Southwest Florida, and many nesting beaches that were once isolated are now teeming with beach goers.

MARCO ISLAND DEVELOPMENT



PROTECTED LEAST TERN NESTING AREA ON SOUTHERN KEY ISLAND



NEST "SCRAPE" WITH EGGS

Least terns are migratory and return to Florida in late March. They nest together in colonies on our open sandy beaches and sandbars. Adult least terns construct their nest by making a shallow depression or "scrape" into the loose sand. Two eggs are usually produced, but clutches of 1 or 3 are not unusual. The eggs, which are cream-colored with dark blotches, are laid in April or May and hatch after about 21 days. Both parents share the job of incubating the eggs. **Parent birds are easily disturbed and can be frightened off their nests by running dogs and people walking too close. Each time parent birds are driven away, eggs and chicks are increasingly vulnerable to the intense summer heat and to predators such as gulls and crows.**



LEAST TERN CHICK

The young least tern chicks leave the nest area shortly after hatching, but cannot fly strongly until 4 weeks of age. During this time, young terns are dependent on their parents for food and protection. In late August, young and adult least terns leave Florida on a southward journey to their wintering grounds in Mexico and Central and South America.

WHAT ROOKERY BAY RESEARCH RESERVE IS DOING TO HELP

Each year, from early April until mid-August, Rookery Bay Research Reserve, in cooperation with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, closes an important least tern nesting area within the Reserve at the south end of Key Island. This area is seasonally closed in order to protect least terns from human disturbance during their breeding season. Adult terns, tern nests and chicks are monitored bi-weekly to determine seasonal nesting success and assess population trends.



LEAST TERN IN FLIGHT

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

- **RESPECT POSTED AND CLOSED BEACH-NESTING AREAS AND KEEP YOUR DISTANCE**
- **LEAVE YOUR PET AT HOME OR KEEP IT ON A LEASH WHEN YOU GO TO THE BEACH DURING LEAST TERN NESTING SEASON (APRIL through AUGUST)**
- **DON'T LEAVE LITTER ON THE BEACH THAT WILL ATTRACT POTENTIAL PREDATORS (GULLS, RACOONS AND CROWS) TO EGGS OR CHICKS**

Least terns are listed as a Threatened Species by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and are protected by the Florida Endangered and Threatened Species Act and the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

