

# How to Be a Shorebird- Friendly Photographer



Roseate terns, FWC

## Photographing shorebirds

Photography of shorebirds and seabirds (collectively called “shorebirds”) along Florida’s shores and beaches is a popular recreational activity for persons of all ages. When taking photos, please take great care to avoid disturbing the birds, and their nests and chicks. Many shorebird populations are in decline, due in part to human disturbance. Therefore, by photographing shorebirds without disturbing them, you help protect and conserve them.

Here are guidelines on how to safely photograph shorebirds without disturbing them.

## During Shorebird Nesting Season (February through August)

Many shorebird nests are posted, or staked off with signs and string.\* This gives the birds space to nest without disturbance from people or pets. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) needs your help to ensure these posted areas do not draw excessive attention or prolonged disturbance to nesting birds.

*\* If you find a nest that isn't posted, please notify the land manager or FWC's Wildlife Alert Hotline (1-888-404-3922) as soon as possible.*

### When photographing a bird on a nest:

- **Remain behind the posted area.** No part of you or your camera equipment should go beyond the string or signs. If the area around the nest is not staked off, you should remain far enough away to avoid disturbing the birds (typically 300 feet). If the birds show any sign of agitation as a result of your

presence, please quietly and slowly retreat until the birds no longer appear disturbed.

- **Never get close enough to cause the bird to leave its nest.** Please back off immediately if you flush a bird. Sometimes birds nest near the edge of a posted boundary, so even if you are outside the string, if the bird responds to you, you're too close!

- **Scan for predators.** Make sure there are no predators nearby such as raccoons, cats, and crows that may be attracted to human presence or scent. Predators also are alert to movement, so by flushing a bird, you may inadvertently help predators notice birds that would otherwise have remained camouflaged.



Snowy plover on nest, FWC

- **Don't exceed 10 minutes.** Too much time near the nest may unduly stress the birds. Be considerate and do not spend more than 10 minutes near the nest. If other photographers are present, try to coordinate your time near the nest, and leave the area together, so that the birds have at least three hours of undisturbed time.

- **Don't specify the nest's exact location** when sharing or publishing photos. Advertising the birds' nesting location may draw additional disturbance to the nest.

### When photographing birds that are away from their nests, or birds with chicks:

- **Stay at least 100 ft away from the birds.** Wait for the birds to approach you for closer shots.



■ **Don't "push" the birds around the beach.**

Birds need to be able to feed and rest without disturbance. Shorebird chicks must constantly forage to gain enough weight to fledge in time, so any time taken away from foraging can be harmful to their health and survival.

**During Shorebird Wintering Season (September through January)**

Even outside of the nesting season, disturbance can be harmful to shorebirds. Each time a bird is disturbed and forced to fly off while it is feeding or resting, it uses important energy reserves needed for survival, migration, and future breeding. Due to the widespread decline of shorebird populations, it is especially important to let the birds feed and rest without causing disturbance that could pose additional threats to their survival. Therefore, many of the same guidelines listed above apply.



Large crowds and extended presence outside of a posted area may disturb nesting birds. Photo © Ericka Hering.

■ **Remember to never push birds around the beach.** Stay far enough away so the birds do not change their behavior in response to your presence.

**Report Banded birds**

If you photograph a bird with plastic or metal leg bands, please report band colors & codes to [www.bandedbirds.org](http://www.bandedbirds.org).



Snowy plover, © Robert Doiron

**These protected birds are among those that nest on Florida's beaches**

**Nesting from March to August**

**Black skimmers** nest in colonies. They have large orange and black beaks which they use to skim the water's surface for prey.



**Least terns** are small yellow-billed birds with white "foreheads." They nest in colonies on beaches and frequently nest on rooftops as well.



**American oystercatchers** have long red beaks which they use to dig for prey. They often return to the same nesting area each year.



**Wilson's plovers** have thicker beaks than other plovers. They may pretend to be injured in an effort to lead you away from their nest.



All photos above © Jack Rogers

**Nesting from February to August along the Gulf Coast**

**Snowy plovers** are small, pale birds with short beaks. Snowy plover chicks begin to forage on their own just hours after hatching.



Snowy plover, FWC

Brochure developed by Joel Caouette (Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation), with input from the Snowy Plover Working Group, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Florida Shorebird Alliance, and the Coastal Wildlife Conservation Initiative.



One-day-old Snowy plover chick. © M. Zdravkovic-Conservian/CBC

**Advocate for the birds!**

Wildlife photographers can be important advocates for birds, if they follow these simple guidelines and help educate their peers on the beach. However, if you observe someone disturbing shorebirds and seabirds, and they do not respond to a polite request to stop, please immediately notify the applicable land management authority or the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's **Wildlife Alert Hotline at 1-888-404-3922**. Thank you for your interest in helping to protect and conserve Florida's wildlife.

For more information, visit: [MyFWC.com](http://MyFWC.com)

The Florida Shorebird Alliance: [FLShorebirdAlliance.org](http://FLShorebirdAlliance.org)

Report violations against wildlife:  
**888-404-FWCC (3922)**



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