

# Rooftop / Chick Checking manual

Updated May 2014



*Young Least Tern Chicks*



*Almost fledged (flying) Least Tern*

## **Thank you for helping to save Least Tern chicks!**

### Background on Least Terns:

The Least Tern naturally nests on open-beaches throughout the coastal area of the United States. They form pairs each year and the pairs nests in colonies from 2 to 1,000 pairs. Because our beaches are so crowded with people, and the number of predators have increased, Least Terns have declined throughout their range. Least Terns that nest in California and along the Mississippi River are on the Federal Endangered Species list. Least Terns are listed as Threatened by the State of Florida.

Because of the crowds and disturbances on beaches, Least Terns often nest on tar and gravel rooftops. They appear to select rooftops that are near a body of water (for cooling), and avoid rooftops near taller structures where an avian predator can perch. We have had Least Terns on rooftops as small as a 1,000 square foot house and on a warehouse that is larger than an acre. Larger rooftops tend to support larger colonies. From late August to early April, Least Terns spend time in Central and South America. In April, they return to our area and begin looking for a place to nest. We believe they often first return to where they nested before, and that they are more likely to return to a roof or beach if they have nested there successfully before.

### Why chick-check?

Chicks may fall off rooftops if there is no raised edge (parapet), fencing, or drain screens to keep them safe until they fledge. We encourage partners to organize chick-checking programs at local rooftop nest sites. In areas where chicks are falling off rooftops, volunteers should check for chicks at least three times per day.

### Chick checkers responsibilities:

- Looking for chicks that have fallen on the ground
- Recording accurate data
- Maintaining good relationships with building occupants, managers and owners

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## What to bring when you chick check:

- Cardboard box (for putting chicks in)
- Net or light towel (if not stored at your roof) to help catch older chicks
- Small container of Pedialyte and an eye dropper (if possible)
- Water and sunscreen for yourself
- Notebook and pen/pencil (for recording data)
- Handi-wipes (to clean off your hands when you are done)

## Protocol:

1. Look for chicks as young as 3 days old (tiny fluff balls) to those that can fly a little, but can't fly back on the roof. Walk around the rooftop (holding your box and net or towel) looking in bushes, drainpipes, and under vehicles. Check downspouts, especially after rainstorms. Sometimes older chicks are found fairly far from the building.
2. If you find a dead chick, please put it in a bag and dispose of it. Record how many dead chicks you find.
3. If you see a live chick, gently capture it by hand, using a towel or net if necessary. You can toss the towel/net over the chick to stop it from running, and then gently retrieve the chick from underneath. It's ok to touch a chick – the parent will not reject it.
4. Examine the chick.
  - a. If the chick looks OK, put it back on the rooftop using the methods for that roof (contact [shorebird@myfwc.com](mailto:shorebird@myfwc.com) for more information). Least Terns are long-lived birds that teach their young how to fish and when to migrate, so healthy chicks do better when returned to the rooftop than when taken to a rehabilitation facility. All healthy chicks should be returned to the roof, even the ones that can fly a little bit, because they will not survive on the ground.
  - b. If the chick looks injured, you will need to transport it to the nearest wildlife rehabilitator. Please see Directory at: <http://flshorebirdalliance.org/resources/rehab-clinics.aspx>.
  - c. If the chick simply looks hot, keep it in a cardboard box in the shade for a few minutes (do NOT leave chick in a heavily air-conditioned location). You could also give it a few drops of Pedialyte before returning it to the rooftop. To do this, just slightly touch the eye dropper or needle-less syringe to the chick's bill. If it is thirsty, it will drink. **Never force a bird to drink because it is very easy to accidentally inject liquid in their lungs and kill them.**
5. Record how many chicks you put on the roof. Enter chick counts online at [www.FLShorebirdDatabase.org](http://www.FLShorebirdDatabase.org) or notify your rooftop coordinator.

For questions, please contact [shorebird@myfwc.com](mailto:shorebird@myfwc.com).

For information on banding rooftop-nesting birds, contact Beth Forys ([foryse@eckerd.edu](mailto:foryse@eckerd.edu)).