

Rooftop & Chick Checker Manual

Revised January 2022, by Kara Cook, Holley Short, & Dr. Elizabeth Forys



Thank you for helping save Least Tern chicks!

Important Information on Least Terns:

The Least Tern naturally nests on open beaches throughout coastal areas of the United States. They form pairs each year between April and August, and these pairs nest in colonies from 2 – 1000+ pairs. Least Terns are small seabirds and are especially vulnerable to predators and human disturbances on crowded public beaches. Least Terns are listed as **Threatened** by the State of Florida.

Along urban coastlines, Least Terns avoid crowded beaches by nesting on tar and gravel rooftops that have fewer sources of disturbance. They appear to select rooftops that are near a small body of water (for cooling the adults in the hot summer months) and that have few surrounding structures higher than the rooftop (to prevent predators from perching). We have had Least Terns on rooftops as small as a 1,000 square foot house and on rooftops larger than an acre on warehouses. 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 Florida and begin looking for a place to nest. We believe they often return to sites near where they nested before, especially if they were successful at nesting there in the past.

Chick checker responsibilities:

- Looking for chicks that have fallen off the roof and are in danger on the ground
- Return chicks to rooftop colony
- Recording accurate data
- Maintaining good relationships with building occupants, managers and owners

What to bring when you chick check:

- Cardboard box for putting fallen chicks in (shoebox works well)
- Bags for dead birds (sad, but it happens)
- Net or light towel to help catch older chicks
- Small container of Pedialyte and an eye dropper (if possible)
- Notebook and pen/pencil (for recording data)
- Handi-wipes (to clean off your hands)

What to do with fallen Least Tern chicks



When Least Tern chicks fall from a rooftop colony, they end up in a dangerous environment with cars, dogs, cats, etc. Returning chicks to the rooftop as quickly as possible is their best chance for survival. Their parents will find them there and continue to care for them (even after they've been handled by humans).

Instructions for returning Least Tern chicks to the rooftop:

You are looking for chicks from as young as 3 days old (tiny fluff balls) to those that can fly short distances but can't fly back to the roof.

1. Walk around the rooftop with your box and net/towel looking in bushes, drainpipes, and under vehicles and dumpsters. 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. If you see a live chick, either grab the chick gently with your hands or with your net/towel, holding the chick's wings against its body.
3. Examine the chick. If it looks injured, please contact your local Rooftop Coordinator for next steps. If the chick looks hot, keep it in the shade for a few minutes in your cardboard box or give it a few drops of Pedialyte. To do this, put the eye dropper or needleless syringe so it's just touching the tip of bill. If they are thirsty, they will drink. *Never* force a bird to drink or put its whole bill into the Pedialyte. In general, we believe healthy chicks do better when returned to the rooftop than taken to a rehab facility provided, they have no visible injuries. Least Terns are long-lived birds that teach their young how to fish and when to migrate.
4. If the chicks look okay, put it back on the rooftop using the methods for that roof.

Where there is a rooftop access point: Management should have access to the roof. When returning the chick to the roof, minimize your disturbance to the colony or you will end up with more chicks on the ground! Place the chick away from the roof edge and quickly retreat from the roof. The parents will find it and guide it back to safety.

Where there is no rooftop access: A chick-a-boom (pictured) will have to be used to get the chick back on top of the roof. Call your local Rooftop Coordinator and keep the chick in a cardboard box in the shade until someone arrives to return the chick to the roof. If it's after hours or a chick-a-boom isn't available call your local Rooftop Coordinator. Please call or email your local rooftop coordinator with any questions, to report fallen chicks, and to report how many chicks you've returned to the roof.



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