

## A Beachgoer's Guide to Protecting Shorebirds

### Beach-nesting bird populations are in serious decline....

From February to August each year, four species of birds seek space on Sarasota County's busy beaches to lay their small and well-camouflaged eggs in the sand. Over the past few years the numbers of these birds has been reduced as breeding habitat is

#### Sarasota County's Beach-nesting Birds:

- Snowy Plover
- Wilson's Plover
- Least Tern
- Black Skimmer

lost to development and recreational uses. Snowy Plovers, Black Skimmers and Least Terns are now listed as Imperiled Species by the State of Florida and are protected. Greater awareness and concern among Sarasota's beach-going public can make a critical difference in helping to save and protect coastal birds and their beach habitats.

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### Protect and respect nesting areas...

Least Terns and Black Skimmers nest in large groups, called colonies, on the open sandy beach. Snowy Plovers and Wilson's Plovers are solitary nesters, seeking more secluded beach locations, often among the low vegetation along back beach areas. Eggs, chicks and even nesting adults blend in with their surroundings and are nearly invisible on the ground. Do not enter posted sites as this can result in your crushing chicks or nests of these protected species. During the nesting season, look out for tiny chicks which are capable of walking several hundred meters from their nest soon after hatching.

Dogs pose a serious threat to sea and shorebird populations. Brohard Paw Park and Dog Beach in Venice are on the only beach in Sarasota County that allows dogs. County ordinance prohibits pets on all other beaches.

### Watch for shorebirds all year....

Sarasota County beaches are also important wintering or stopover grounds for numerous migratory species. Piping Plovers, American Avocets and Red Knots are among the many species that refuel along local shorelines during long winter migrations. Many of these birds are also threatened and require space at the beach to rest and recover.



A male Snowy Plover at the beach wrack line.  
© Rick Greenspun

### Spread the word...

Many people don't realize their actions might threaten the survival of shorebirds. If you see other people feeding, chasing or harassing birds or other wildlife, let them know why their actions may be harmful. Teach others to appreciate Sarasota County's beach-nesting birds. They are an important part of our coastal ecosystem and a sign of a wild and healthy beach. We are fortunate to share our shores with these beautiful creatures!



Juvenile Piping Plover on Siesta Key beach.  
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An adult Black Skimmer feeding a chick inside a nest.  
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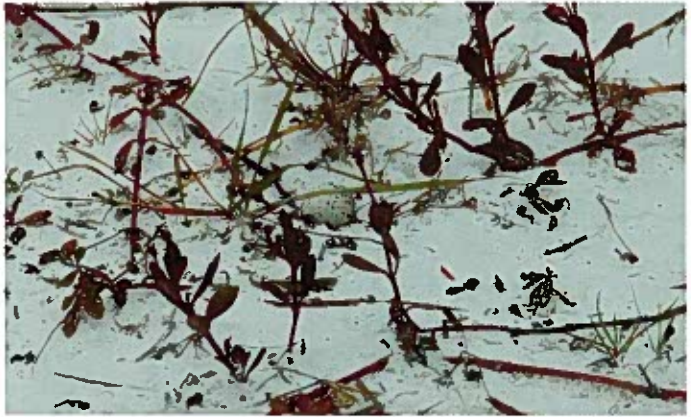


Adult Least Tern and chick.

© Marina Scarr



Wilson's Plover with eggs and chicks at a nest on Siesta Key's Turtle Beach. © Rick Greenspun



*How you can help...*

- Keep dogs and pets off the beach.
- Respect posted nesting areas.
- Do not flush or chase birds.
- NEVER FEED WILDLIFE, including gulls and raccoons. These animals prey on eggs and chicks of nesting birds.
- Avoid flying kites or throwing balls near designated beach-nesting bird areas.
- Stick close to the water's edge and avoid the vegetated upper beach areas. Stay on established paths when crossing vegetation.
- Always take trash and food with you when you leave the beach.

To Report Violations Call:

1-888-404-FWCC

*With your help, beach-nesting birds will be here for future generations to enjoy.*



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www.sarasotaaudubon.org  
www.sarasotabay.org

**SHARING THE SHORE WITH SARASOTA'S BEACH-NESTING BIRDS**

*While enjoying the beach, remember to be respectful of wildlife. Their survival depends on you!*

Front cover photo: Snowy Plover chick on Siesta Key beach. © Rick Greenspun

Back cover photos: Snowy Plover nest with egg on Siesta Key beach (top) and female Snowy Plover brooding chicks (bottom). © Michelle van Deventer