

# Beach-nesting Birds of the Gulf



Brown Pelicans

FWS/Drew Wirua



Black Skimmers

FWS/Donna A. Dewhurst



Laughing Gulls

FWS/Donna A. Dewhurst



Sandwich Terns

FWS/Donna A. Dewhurst

The Gulf of Mexico is a globally unique ecosystem, with a diversity of habitats, fish and wildlife that make it one of the nation's great natural treasures. Gulf habitats are essential to the annual cycles of many species of breeding, wintering and migrating waterfowl, wading birds, shorebirds and songbirds.

The U.S. Gulf Coast is of particular significance to beach-nesting birds, species that breed on beaches, flats, dunes, bars, barrier islands and similar near-shore habitats. The northern Gulf Coast, from the Mississippi Delta of Louisiana to the Florida Panhandle which represents 18 percent of the southeastern U.S. coastline, supports a disproportionately high number of beach-nesting bird species. Following are a just a few:

### *Sandwich Tern*

Breton National Wildlife Refuge off the Louisiana coast supports one of the world's largest colonies of Sandwich Terns. These gregarious birds, marked by a black crest and black bill, are found almost exclusively along coastal areas and barrier islands. The northern Gulf Coast harbors about three-quarters of the population of Sandwich Terns in the southeastern United States.

### *Brown Pelican*

Nearly half the southeastern population of Brown Pelicans live in the northern Gulf Coast, generally nesting on protected islands. The Brown Pelican, Louisiana's state bird, has made a comeback in this region since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005. It was recently removed from the Endangered Species List.

### *Wilson's Plover*

The northern Gulf Coast is also home to about one-quarter of the Southeast's Wilson's Plovers. The medium-sized plovers, with heavy black bills, nest along beaches and salt marshes.

The northern Gulf Coast is home to a large proportion of many other birds found in the Southeast, from south Texas to southeast Virginia. Some of these other Gulf Coast birds, and their estimated portion of their southeastern populations, are:

- Black Skimmer, 35 percent;
- Forster's Tern, 41 percent;

- Gull-billed Tern, 16 percent;
- Laughing Gull, 25 percent;
- Least Tern, 42 percent;
- Royal Tern, 36 percent;
- Snowy Plover, 22 percent.

Sources: Southeast U.S. Waterbird Conservation Plan and the Southeastern Coastal Plain Shorebird Conservation Plan

### Hotlines

For media: Joint Information Center: 713/323 1670 and 713/323 1671

To report claims related to damages: 800/440 0858

To volunteer: 866/448 5816

To report oiled or injured wildlife: 866/557 1401

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: <http://www.fws.gov/home/dhoilspill>

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