

- ◆ **DO NOT** fly kites inside of the Critical Shorebird Sanctuary as birds react to this as a predator and will avoid the area even when nesting.
- ◆ **DO NOT** use your Golf cart anywhere in the Critical Bird Sanctuary.
- ◆ **DO NOT** fly drones in the Critical Shorebird Sanctuary; they are not permitted in this area of the park.

For further information, please follow the Audubon, SCDNR and FOHI Recommended links below:

Audubon SC Coastal Birds:

<https://sc.audubon.org/coasts>

Audubon, The Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Explained:

<https://www.audubon.org/news/the-migratory-bird-treaty-act-explained>

Friends of Hunting Island Website:

<https://www.friendsofhuntingisland.org/>

SCDNR Coastal Bird webpage that has all of our coastal bird species and their state/federal Designations:

<https://www.dnr.sc.gov/wildlife/species/coastalbirds/shorebirds/index.ml>

SHOREBIRD STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

The shorebird stewardship program aims to inform visitors to the park on the critical needs of the shorebirds in which we share the beach environment. Dedicated and trained volunteer members of FOHI patrol the shorebird sanctuary to ensure that park and county rules are understood and complied with during the critical feeding, resting and nesting periods throughout the year. Interfacing with park visitors to share the wonders of park birdlife is rewarding for both the volunteers and the public and spreads knowledge that hopefully will create greater awareness and appreciation of the importance of Hunting Island to the wellbeing of its shorebirds. Volunteers are welcome to join and work with partners like SCDNR, Audubon, US Fish and Wildlife and others to not only patrol and educate the public, but to help erect protective fencing, note significant nesting areas and provide additional eyes and ears to aid professional biologists in helping the birds. Please inquire today about joining our dedicated team.

VOLUNTEER

Being a member of Friends of Hunting Island makes you a champion of the park and an environmental steward. We work in close partnership with the paid staff to maintain and improve the 5,000 acre barrier island. Lighthouse, Sea Turtle Conservation, Shorebird Stewardship, trail maintenance and project construction are all areas that seek volunteers.

Join today !



SHOREBIRD STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Membership opens up
a world of
Volunteer Opportunities
on Hunting Island



SCAN HERE FOR
CONSERVATION DETAILS



SCAN HERE FOR
SHOREBIRD
INFORMATION

If you value commitment to shorebird protection, increase your involvement by joining the Friends of Hunting Island as a member and get involved with the Shorebird Stewardship Program at Hunting Island State Park today.

**Shorebird Stewardship
begins with you!
At Hunting Island State Park**

Photo Credit: Jim Prince

Threatened and endangered coastal birds rely on the habitat designated as Critical Shorebird Sanctuary year-round at the north end of Hunting Island. These birds are protected under federal and state laws. If we want the satisfaction of being proud stewards of the Park's magnificent array of wildlife we can go beyond rules by following these important do's and don'ts particularly while in the Critical Shorebird Sanctuary.

PLEASE DO

- ◆ **DO** slow down and/or turn away at least 100 feet from groups of birds when approaching on any wheeled transport or on foot.
- ◆ **DO** stay below the high tide line during nesting season while walking, running and biking to avoid running over or stepping on nests, eggs and/or chicks.
- ◆ **DO** observe and enjoy the birds from a safe distance, about 100 feet of space from flocks and nesting, using binoculars, cameras, and/or spotting scopes.
- ◆ **DO** seek out our Shorebird Stewards with yellow vests for assistance and/or education.
- ◆ **DO** remove any litter observed anywhere in the park especially discarded mylar balloons and netting as this can entrap animals or be mistaken as food by Sea Turtles.
- ◆ **DO** educate any park visitors who are violating park policies
- ◆ **DO** report violations to a Park Ranger if unable or unwilling to speak with the person(s) performing the violation. Monday-Friday contact the visitor center office at (843) 838-2011 and off hours contact the on duty ranger at (803) 904-6121.
- ◆ **DO** respect zones indicated by posted signs and ribbon as restricted nesting areas by not entering them.
- ◆ **DO** avoid setting up your beach gear or fishing tackle too close to bird nesting areas or flocks as they will avoid the area losing further critical habitat.

PLEASE DO NOT

- ◆ **DO NOT** chase birds, this can use up their precious energy and cause great harm to their survival.
- ◆ **DO NOT** walk, run, or cycle through flocks of birds and/or nesting areas for the same reason.
- ◆ **DO NOT** walk dogs in the Critical Shorebird Sanctuary, please keep them on a leash and walk in designated dog-friendly areas only. Birds view dogs as predators similar to a coyote and will avoid them.

Birds are an essential feature of life here on earth. Can you imagine sitting in your backyard, a park, a beach or walking in the woods without the sight and sounds of bird activity? Artists and designers are inspired by them; sports teams named after them. “Eagle eyed”, “wise as an owl”, “watch them like a hawk”, “eats like a bird” and “crazy as a loon” are all common human expressions. Most importantly, birds play a vital role in natural ecosystems controlling insect and rodent pests, dispersing seeds of many plants and trees and as essential food for other predators including us. Chicken anyone?

Yet across our planet wild birds are in staggering decline. As reported in the journal Science- of 529 species of birds in the U.S. and Canada, 419 native migratory species had experienced dramatic losses totaling 3 billion birds in the last 50 years. Alarmingly, this is consistent with other animal taxa showing massive declines, including insects and amphibians. The causes are many, but all are traceable to human activity and its ever growing impact on other creatures in which we share the planet. Shorebirds in particular are experiencing consistent and steep population losses. Nearly all North American shorebird species have experienced steep declines with many losing over 70 % of their population in just the past four decades. That is within most of our lifetimes!

Studies show that when it comes to shorebirds not all habitat is equal which explains why some shorebird populations are plummeting much faster than the rate at which coastal environments are being lost to development. Migratory shorebirds overwhelmingly rely on the upper tidal flats closest to dry land. This is the same land most often lost to development. These tidal flats are not only vital to Shorebirds and other marine life survival, but also provide people with seafood such as clams and crabs and protection from storm surges creating coastal flooding.

Existing Federal and State laws protect birds. Shorebirds and seabirds are all protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. This law states that it is illegal to pursue, hunt, take, capture, kill, possess, sell, purchase, barter, import, export, or transport any migratory bird, or any part, nest, or egg of any such bird.

Two of our birds are also protected under the Endangered Species Act- the Piping Plover and the Red Knot. In addition, South Carolina designates the Wilson’s Plover and Least Tern as State Threatened or Endangered and several other shorebird species are listed as Species of Highest concern and Highest Priority such as the American Oystercatcher.

Hunting Island State Park has specific rules governing visitors and the protection of shorebirds with fines for violations. Rules include: do not approach or harass wildlife, pets must be constrained on a leash not to exceed 6 feet, must not disturb wildlife and dogs are not allowed in the critical shorebird sanctuary at any time of the year. Additionally, no live animals or plants may be collected, littering is prohibited, and the sand dunes, sea oats and sand fences must not be disturbed.

Clearly, stopping or reversing this trend is vital and begins with each of us and our behavior and habits. You can help. Hunting Island is an uncommon example of a coastal barrier island that remains much as nature intended and offers migrating and nesting birds an increasingly rare refuge to rest, feed and breed with minimal human disturbance. When visiting here and particularly while in the Critical Shorebird Sanctuary, you can show your commitment to helping reverse the decline of birds, sea turtles and nature by simply respecting the needs of birds and other animals while enjoying what they bring to our lives. This brochure was created to help educate us on their needs so they are still around and thriving for our grandchildren to enjoy as well.



THE CRITICAL FIVE FOCAL BIRDS

American Oystercatcher- Beautiful and distinctive shorebirds listed as of “Highest Priority” for protection with 400 nesting pairs in South Carolina. Oystercatchers are very territorial during nesting and often nest on Oyster mounds, but also on barrier island beaches. One third of their Atlantic population overwinters here, approximately 3,000 individuals. They use their red bills to cut the abductor muscle of their namesake prey.



American Oystercatcher

Least Tern



Least Tern- Petite and graceful these smallest of all terns are state and federally protected and recently had 671 nesting pairs in South Carolina but have declined 30% since the 1980’s. Even though the majority have been found to nest on pebble rooftops their beach nests are equally crucial. These agile flyers aggressively defend their nests which are shallow scrapes in the sand or pebbles. Incubation is around three weeks, but eggs and chicks can be cooked in a few minutes in the sun unprotected. When observing, look for fish exchanging courtship behavior.

Wilson’s Plover- State threatened with approximately 375 nesting pairs in South Carolina. Population is declining due to loss of habitat and human disturbance. Seen alone or in pairs they stand very erect and are competitive feeders for marine worms, fly larvae, crustaceans etc, often on tidal mud flats. Their well camouflaged sand scrape nests usually contain up to 3 eggs. Both parents tend the young, but chicks feed themselves and are capable of flight in 21 days. Adults perform broken wing behavior to distract perceived nest predators. Disturbance can cause nest abandonment and eggs as well as chicks can overheat in the sun as a result.



Wilson’s Plover

Red Knot



Red Knot- This Federally Threatened species’ population has declined 70% in the last 20 years. They are distinguished by having one of the longest migrations of any bird; up to 19,000 miles round trip and can spend 84 days resting and feeding. South Carolina is an essential staging spot during their epic journey with Hunting Island being a prime location. They feed along the shoreline with a sewing machine motion feasting on coquina clams and horseshoe crab eggs to build up fat reserves. Studied extensively by SCDNR some fly directly to their arctic nesting sites from here.

Piping Plover- Have experienced a massive decline due primarily to human disturbance. Migratory populations breed in the Great Plains, Great Lakes and Atlantic Coastal regions. The Federally Endangered Great Lakes population which was historically known to have between 500-800 breeding pairs is currently around 70; the Federally Threatened Great Plains and Atlantic Regions around 2,000 breeding pairs. Their food choices are similar to the Wilson’s Plover, but they only stage at Hunting Island in the winter for essential foraging and resting before continuing 1,000 to 1,500 miles north to breed.



Piping Plover