

Seabirds on Edisto Beach

General Description

Seabirds spend most of their lives in the ocean and are excellent swimmers that use their webbed feet to paddle through the water. Because of the time spent in the ocean, seabirds will have more feathers than other birds to help insulate and waterproof them. Their diet in the ocean consists of krill, squid, and small fish, often feeding on whole schools of fish. Their bills are adapted to how they obtain their food. Seabirds also have a system in their bodies that removes excess salt as they tend to take in a lot of seawater.

Nesting Behaviors

Seabirds tend to spend months at sea and only return to land to nest. They will nest in massive colonies – either laying nests directly on the sand or creating nests out of grass, twigs, and sticks. There are several small islands near to Edisto Beach that provide the perfect habitat for these colony nesters as these habitats are free from mammalian predators, are less disturbed by humans, and are usually close to foraging areas.

Three species of birds that nest on and/or near to Edisto Beach include: the brown pelican (high priority conservation status), black skimmer (highest priority conservation status and species of concern), and least tern (highest priority conservation status and threatened in SC).

Protect Our Seabirds

It is so important to not disturb the nests of these seabirds on our beaches! Be sure to keep dogs on leashes as one free-running dog can wipe out many nests very quickly. Try to not run through a group of seabirds that have landed on the shore because flushing the birds causes them to waste much-needed energy!



Brown Pelican
Photo by Bill Cumming



Black Skimmer
Photo by Bill Cumming



Least Tern

Source: South Carolina Department of Natural Resources <https://dnr.sc.gov>
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