



Piping Plover

Help protect Virginia's nesting birds.

Nests and chicks are sensitive to your presence from April through September. Please:

- 1 Respect all posted bird nesting areas. Do not enter nesting colonies.
- 2 Leave your dogs at home. They may step on nests and chase birds.
- 3 Avoid the berm, dunes, washovers, and backside mudflats.
- 4 Remain below the last high tide line to avoid disturbing chicks or damaging eggs.
- 5 Be aware of birds calling loudly from the beach or over your head. They are letting you know that you are too close to a nest or hidden chicks.
- 6 Teach others to appreciate the beauty and wildlife of Virginia's barrier islands.

WATCH YOUR STEP!



See the egg hidden in the sand? That's why it's so important to walk below the high tide line whenever possible.

LIFE ON THE BEACH
ISN'T ALWAYS EASY



Please help protect
beach-nesting birds
while visiting
Virginia's barrier islands.

YOU'RE JUST VISITING, BUT FOR THESE BIRDS, THE BEACH IS HOME.

From April through early September, thousands of birds nest on the beaches of Virginia's barrier islands. The islands provide important breeding areas for several bird species whose populations are declining or that are considered threatened or endangered. Life on the beach can be tough, and these birds need your help to survive.



Beach-nesting birds, such as the Black Skimmer, lay their eggs directly into shallow depressions in the sand. The eggs and nests are very hard to see against the sandy background. Some species nest in colonies that range in size from two to over a thousand pairs of birds and can be very noisy and conspicuous.

Others, such as the Piping Plover

are less noticeable because they breed in territories defended by a single pair. Once the eggs hatch, adult birds raise their young along the beaches, dunes, mudflats, and marsh edges of the islands where the chicks can feed and hide until they are able to fly. By learning about these vulnerable birds and their breeding habits, you can help ensure that they successfully raise young and that they continue to be a part of the rich biodiversity of Virginia's barrier islands.

NESTING ON THE BEACH CAN BE TOUGH.

Beach-nesting birds have to beat some hefty odds to successfully produce young on Virginia's barrier islands. Natural threats such as storm waves and extremely high tides can wash out large numbers of nests or drown flightless chicks. Predators such as raccoons, foxes, gulls, and crows who love to feast on eggs, chicks, and occasionally adult birds, also are significant threats. Breeding birds are only successful when

all of these unpredictable circumstances are in their favor. Most importantly, they need undisturbed nesting sites near good feeding areas, favorable weather, and few predators.



Black Skimmer

PEOPLE ON THE BEACH CAN MAKE NESTING EVEN TOUGHER.

People using the beaches during the breeding season present an additional challenge to beach-nesting birds and may unknowingly impact the birds' chances of success. Someone wandering through a nesting area may accidentally step on well-camouflaged eggs or chicks. Dogs can quickly find and destroy nests or chase young birds. Additionally, people and pets venturing too close to nesting sites cause adult birds to leave their nests, exposing chicks and eggs to predators or excessive temperatures. Trash left in nesting areas attracts raccoons and gulls, and places the birds in greater danger of being discovered by predators.

You can help protect these beach-nesting birds so that they continue to grace Virginia's coastal environment. Before visiting the islands, become familiar with the various beach habitats the birds call home by referring to the diagram on the inside of this brochure.

LEARN TO RECOGNIZE BARRIER ISLAND BEACH-NESTING BIRDS.

AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER

Oystercatchers are striking brown, black, and white shorebirds with long, orange-red bills. They defend solitary nesting territories on the berm, dunes, washovers, and high marsh areas. Their loud, high-pitched call will let you know when you are too close to a nest or chicks.



American Oystercatcher

BLACK SKIMMER

Skimmers are black above and white below with long, slender wings. The lower part of their knife-shaped black and red bill is longer than the upper part. They feed by 'skimming' the water's surface with their bills to catch small fish. Skimmers nest in colonies on washovers and have a distinct 'barking' call.

TERNS

Several species of terns breed on Virginia's barrier islands. All are whitish, slender-winged birds that aggressively defend their nests by swooping down on intruders. Some tern species nest in colonies on washovers, often with Black Skimmers, while others nest in the marsh.



Least Tern

PIPING PLOVER

A federally threatened species, this small ghostly solitary-nesting shorebird is well camouflaged against the background of a beach. They are sand colored above, white below with a black breast band, and have a short orange and black bill. You may not notice Piping Plovers until you hear their soft whistling call warning that you are close to a nesting territory on the berm or washover.

WILSON'S PLOVER

An endangered species in Virginia, this shorebird is slightly bigger than the Piping Plover and has darker upperparts and a more upright posture. Wilson's Plovers have a single dark breast band and a heavy black bill. They nest on washovers and often sneak around dune grass and beach debris, making them difficult to detect. Their high-pitched alarm call announces you are too close to a nest.



WHO OWNS VIRGINIA'S BARRIER ISLANDS?

The islands are owned by public and private agencies. Call the numbers below before planning a trip to the Barrier Islands. Many islands are seasonally closed to protect beach nesting birds.

- The Nature Conservancy**
Call (757) 442-3049
www.nature.org/vcr
- Dept. of Game and Inland Fisheries**
Call (804) 829-6580
www.dgif.virginia.gov
- Dept. of Conservation and Recreation**
Call (757) 787-5989
www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural_heritage
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Refuges**
 - Chincoteague NWR – Call (757) 336-6122
www.fws.gov/northeast/chinco/
 - Eastern Shore of Virginia NWR – Call (757) 331-2760
www.fws.gov/northeast/easternshore/
 - Fisherman Island NWR – Call (757) 331-2760
- National Aeronautics and Space Administration**
Wallops Flight Facility – Call (757) 824-1720
sites.wff.nasa.gov/code250/

- Boating Access & Seaside Water Trail**
 - Public Access Sites
 - Seaside Heritage Program Canoe/Kayak Water Trail

For more information on access to the islands and the Virginia Seaside Heritage Program including the Canoe/Kayak Water Trail go to:
<http://www.deq.virginia.gov/Programs/CoastalZoneManagement/CZMIssuesInitiatives/VirginiaSeasideHeritageProgram.aspx>



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BARRIER ISLAND BIRD NESTING HABITATS

