

# Shorebirds of Southeastern North Carolina

*Every year the Wrightsville Beach Museum of History offers a new exhibit featuring the natural world of our area. This year, the Museum collaborated with local naturalist Joe Abbate to showcase the life of shorebirds indigenous to our coastal area.*

This summer's nature exhibit at the Wrightsville Beach Museum highlights the life history of nesting shorebirds of southeastern North Carolina. By focusing on six important species, the exhibit displays educational information on species identification, threats, and conservation issues associated with these birds. The exhibit display will be supplemented by a series of educational birding (bird watching) walks and eco-tours, allowing the public to learn first-hand, from local experts, how to identify and understand shorebirds native to our area.



photo by Valerie Robertson

*Wrightsville Beach Museum offers a glimpse of the life of shorebirds in its current nature exhibit.*

**Wrightsville Beach Museum of History**  
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Wrightsville Beach, NC  
(910) 256-2569  
info@wbmuseum.com  
www.wbmuseum.com  
Monday - Closed  
Tuesday - Friday  
10am until 4pm  
Saturday - 12pm - 5pm  
Sunday - 1pm - 5pm  
Free Admission!

Our Cape Fear Region boasts a wide diversity of shorebirds and habitats that are vulnerable to many threats. Both the shorebirds and their habitats demand our recognition and conservation efforts in order to be sustained. Photographs of a colony of birds on the south end of Masonboro Island are used to illustrate the seasonal shift in shorebird habitat and the issue of bird management on local barrier islands. Home to skimmers, oystercatchers, terns and plovers—as well as non-native fox predators—Masonboro is an eight-mile-long, undisturbed barrier island; it serves not only as a wildlife sanctuary, but as a prime recreation destination for boaters, surfers, campers, and beach-goers. Masonboro Island site manager Hope Sutton, of the North Carolina Coastal Reserve, says that direct human impacts are one of the biggest obstacles to shorebird conservation. Sutton asserts, “Becoming aware of how your actions impact these birds, and taking the time to educate yourself on these impacts,” is one of the most helpful things a person can do to help preserve these winged wonders.

The Wrightsville Beach Museum exhibit, coupled with the birding field-trip series, was designed to allow local naturalist and birding experts to share their knowledge of area shorebirds as well as threats our presence can introduce. This is a great opportunity for the general public to develop a stronger appreciation for these species and an awareness of what we can do to assure them a safe future.

Andy Wood, Education Director of Audubon NC, notes, “people are not generally aware that birds are using the beach and that they depend on the beach environment. Many people think that they can just fly off to nest in the woods or in other areas, but that is just not the case.” Regulating the balance between the “public’s desire to use the beach, and the birds’ need to use the beach,” has become one of the most challenging management obstacles.

Cape Fear River Watch offered a seminar on shorebirds as part of its popular First Saturday Seminar series, typically held at their headquarters location in downtown Wilmington. UNCW’s Dr. Marcel van



photo by Rusty Ingold-Smith

*Pictured here is the Black Skimmer. The skimmer is so named because in order to feed, it flies low over the water, skimming the surface with its lower bill. When a small fish is encountered, the skimmer closes its mouth quickly, capturing its meal.*

Tuinen spoke on shorebird diversity; avian biologist Joe Abbate presented information on local shorebirds and how to diminish threats to their local habitat. Held this time at Banks Channel Pub and Grille, the seminar allowed attendees to have lunch and then tour the newly opened exhibit at nearby Wrightsville Beach Museum.

Abbate explains his vested interest in designing this shorebird exhibit: “My main passion resides in fostering coastal environmental education programs for kids and adults, to help educate them about the rich flora and fauna diversity found on our coast.” An exciting aspect of the exhibit is that it is available to schools wanting to use the display materials for their students. Wrightsville Beach Elementary School was the first to use the displays in its curriculum.

As owner of Wrightsville Water Tours on Wrightsville Beach, and in his role as program director for Cape Fear River Watch, “Captain Joe” offers a variety of birding and eco-tours throughout the year. He is leading 90-minute tours to Masonboro Island specifically relating to this exhibit in August and September.

The museum exhibit will be on display through August, and likely well into September (call ahead to find out).

For information and reservations for birding tours during the exhibit and beyond, contact Captain Joe Abbate at captainjoe@capefearnaturalist.com or at (910)200-4002.

*See page 23 for shorebird photos.*



*Photos taken on the South end of Wrightsville Beach demonstrate how fragile shorebird nests are, and how well camouflaged the chicks are in the sand.*

*Shorebird nests are simple scrapes in the sand. When walking near a colony it is a good idea to watch where you are going very carefully. Some shorebirds only hatch one or two eggs, so each one is precious. Shorebirds eggs are cryptically colored, and made so to blend with the sand.*

*Pictured above are Least Terns that have recently hatched. The Least Tern is considered a species of concern in many states due to loss of habitat, mainly caused by humans using the beaches for recreation.*



*A Black Skimmer catches small fish at the North end of Wrightsville Beach by skimming the water with its lower beak. Skimmers are summer residents on the North Carolina coast, coming to breed and staying from April until October. They prefer to nest in colonies on coastal beaches, or on dredge spoil islands like those around Wrightsville Beach. Skimmers winter in South Carolina, Georgia and Florida.*



*These Black Skimmers are nesting on the North and South ends of Wrightsville Beach, and in surrounding areas. Their nests are feeding grounds for the Red Fox, which is not a native North Carolina species, but was introduced by English settlers in the 1800s. There are many Red Foxes located throughout the islands around Wrightsville, and they decimate nesting shorebird and turtle eggs.*



*This adult nesting pair of Least Terns will build a nest like the one pictured at top of page.*

*These photos taken by Rusty Ingold-Smith were used in the Shorebird exhibit on display at Wrightsville Beach Museum of History. See article on page 3.*



*The Ruddy Turnstone is named for its habit of flipping over small pebbles and shells in search of food.*