

## SHOREBIRD LIFE

Kiawah Island's beachfront provides valuable year-round habitat for a wide variety of shorebird species. Many of these shorebirds are migratory and stop on Kiawah to feed and rest during their journey. Undisturbed beach areas, such as the extreme eastern and western portions of Kiawah, have become increasingly rare along the east coast. These areas provide vitally important nesting, roosting, and feeding areas for these birds.

### Common Shorebirds



Sanderlings are small, pale sandpipers, 7-8 inches in size. They are one of the most common birds on our beach and are usually spotted in small groups chasing receding waves along the beach as they hunt for food.

The willet is a large grayish shorebird, 13-16 inches in size. They have a distinctive black and white pattern on their wings that can be observed in flight.



Red Knots are large bulky sandpipers 9-10 inches in size. Red Knots make one of the longest annual migrations of any bird, traveling up to 10,000 miles from southern South

America to its Arctic breeding grounds. Red Knots can be seen along the Kiawah beach from November-May. Their breeding plumage has a distinctly reddish color (as their name implies), while they are predominantly gray at other times of the year.



American Oystercatchers are large shorebirds, 16 to 17 inches in size. They are easily distinguished by their bright orange eyes and bill. Oystercatchers specialize in feeding on bivalves and mussels and use their long blade-like bills to sever the abductor muscles before the shells can close.

Dunlins are medium-sized shorebirds, 6-9 inches in size. Their bill is moderately long and slightly drooping. Dunlins have very distinctive breeding plumage and are easily recognized by their reddish brown back and large black spot on their chest.



Marbled Godwits are large shore birds, 17-19 inches in size, with long up-turned bills. Their bill has a dark tip and a pinkish base. They can be seen probing soft muddy/sandy areas for invertebrates.

Short-billed Dowitchers are medium sized shorebirds, 10-11 inches in size, with a long bill. Dowitchers probe, in a pattern similar to that of a sewing machine, soft wet areas for food, often foraging to the depth of their bill.



Whimbrels are large shorebirds, up to 17 inches in size, with large downward curved bills. They are one of the most wide-ranging shorebirds in the world, and can be found from the Arctic to South America, as well as in Australia, Africa, and south Asia. Some migrating whimbrels make nonstop migrations of up to 2,500 miles.

Ruddy Turnstones are stocky medium-sized shorebirds, 6-8 inches in size. They are most commonly observed along the beach sorting through areas of dense shell. As their name suggests they often turn over stones in search of food.



### Plover Species

Semipalmated Plovers are small shorebirds, up to 7 inches in size. They are very similar to, and are often mistaken for piping plovers, but have much darker, brownish plumage. They are the most common plover seen on Kiawah Island.



Wilson's Plovers are medium sized shore birds, 6 to 8 inches in length. They are similar to semipalmated plovers, but are easily distinguished by their longer, thicker bill, which they use to capture larger prey items than other plovers on the beach.

Black-bellied Plovers are medium to large-sized shorebirds, up to 11 inches in size. These plovers are the largest found in North America, and are easily identified by their striking black and white breeding plumage.



Piping Plover—See Back Cover

## Tern Species

Least Terns are the smallest of the American tern species, measuring 8-9 inches in size. They are fast flying birds that can often be seen almost hovering in place before they dive into the water to capture fish. Least terns are considered threatened in South Carolina, and Kiawah's beaches serve as important nesting grounds for this species.



Royal Tern

Royal Terns are large shorebirds 18-20 inches in size. They have a distinctly black-capped head and a bright orange bill. They are very similar to Caspian terns, which are actually a bit larger and

have a more reddish bill. These birds can be seen diving head-first into the water to catch fish and shrimp.



Caspian Tern

Sandwich Terns are medium sized terns, 13-18 inches in size. They are easily distinguished by their slender black bill with a yellow tip. ID Tip: *the sandwich tern has mustard on its beak.*



## Piping Plover

The piping plover is a federally listed species and a common resident from August-April each year. The Atlantic coast and the Northern Great Plains breeding populations are listed as threatened, while the Great Lakes breeding population is endangered. Plovers from all of these breeding populations can be observed on Kiawah. Plovers are most common on the eastern end of Kiawah feeding on sand and mud flats. The US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Town of Kiawah Island have designated the eastern and western portions of Kiawah Island as critical habitat for piping plovers. Special regulations are in effect in these areas, signs are posted accordingly.



Winter Plumage

## Conservation

Shorebirds population levels in North America are declining. These are some ways you can help!

### DO NOT

- DO NOT let your pet chase shorebirds or disturb nests.
- DO NOT run or walk through large flocks of birds
- DO NOT try to get close to shorebirds
- DO NOT create loud noises near shorebird flocks

### DO

- DO leash your pet when birds or nests are near
- DO move around flocks and not through them
- DO observe birds from a distance
- DO follow posted rules and regulations in critical habitat areas.

## KIAWAH ISLAND NATURE SERIES

## SHOREBIRDS



Piping Plover



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