



LEAST TERNS.

Least Terns are protected by law and listed as a threatened species by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC).

Least Tern pair. Photo by Jack Rogers

Least Terns nesting on rooftops. Please excuse our mess.

In Florida, Least Terns traditionally nested on sandy beaches of barrier islands and along isolated stretches of the mainland shore. However, in recent times possibly due to the increasing number of people, pets, and vehicles on our beaches, Least Terns started regularly using gravel rooftops as an alternative. Today, nearly 80% of Florida's Least Terns reside on rooftops when nesting. The switch has been successful for the most part, but there are potential drawbacks, both for people and the birds.

Least Terns nest in loose groups or colonies, which can range in size from a few pairs to several hundred birds. Pairs construct nests by simply working a shallow depression, or scrape, into the loose sand or gravel. The female then lays one to three eggs, usually two. Once hatched, a large colony on a roof can have many hungry mouths to feed. Adults will work diligently to provide enough food for their chicks, and it can get pretty busy and noisy around the building as a result. In addition, where there are birds, there are usually droppings.

Three or four days after hatching, the chicks leave the nest and are fairly mobile, which can be a problem if roofs lack a lip or barrier along their edge. Chicks which fall off the roof or get washed down the gutters face numerous hazards on the ground (e.g. cats, dogs, ants, vehicles, foot traffic), and need to be returned to the roof as soon as possible. If you find a chick on the ground, please notify the managers or staff of the building immediately. Chicks must be returned to the roof carefully, since the colony is very sensitive to disturbance.

Despite these dangers, Least Terns have been able to adapt to the many changes we have made to our coastal landscapes. They still

need our help, and building owners cooperating with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission to protect important rooftop colonies are integral to their conservation in Florida.

FALLEN CHICKS.

Occasionally chicks fall off, are blown off, or get washed down gutters. If you find a chick on the ground, please notify the managers or staff of the building immediately.



Least Tern Chick. Photo by Chris Burney

FLORIDA
SHOREBIRD
ALLIANCE



We appreciate your assistance. If you would like to learn more about Least Terns or get involved with local monitoring and management efforts, contact us at shorebird@myfwc.com