

# Audubon Florida: Beach Birds Identification – Terns and Gulls

**Terns:** “sporty” appearance, most species dive to catch their food



Least Tern (LETE)\*: smallest, yellow bill and legs, white forehead, not in Florida in winter



Caspian Tern (CATE)\*: largest, stout red bill, black on head reaches bill in winter



Royal Tern (ROYT)\*: large, common. orange bill, usually in flocks



Sandwich Tern (SATE)\*: mid-size, black bill with yellow tip, shaggy crest in back of neck



Forster's Tern (FOTE): small, black rectangular patch around eye in winter



Black Skimmer (BLSK)\*: black and white, short legs, lower half of bill longer than upper

*Look to field guide to ID less common species including Common Tern (resembles Forster's Tern), Black Tern (mostly seen during fall migration, distinctive behavior and plumage) and Gull-billed Tern (stout black bill).*

## Help Beach Birds!

- Don't force birds to fly. Birds in flight might look pretty but it makes them expend energy they need for survival.
- Ask parents to keep children from chasing the birds. People don't know the consequences to the birds and educating them is key.
- Keep out of posted areas and encourage others to respect them too.
- Keep dogs off the beach where prohibited, leashed on beaches where they are allowed, and far away from nesting birds. Birds perceive dogs as predators and will be disturbed even if the dog is not chasing them
- Don't feed the birds at the beach. It will attract predators to eggs and chicks.
- Kites can flush groups of birds because they resemble aerial predators.
- Pick up trash, especially plastic, styrofoam, fishing line and tackle
- Share these tips with friends and family.
  - Get Involved! <http://fl.audubon.org>

**Gulls:** take 2-4 years to mature. Brownish gulls are juveniles of the various species – refer to field bird guide



Laughing Gull (LAGU)\*: small, common year round, black head during breeding



Ring-billed Gull (RBGU). medium, numerous in winter, light grey; adult's bill yellow with vertical black bar



Herring Gull (HERG): large, light grey, pinkish legs



Great Black-backed Gull (GBBG): the largest, back quasi black, pinkish legs



Lesser Black-backed Gull (LBBG): slightly smaller than Herring Gull, yellow legs in adults

## Size and coloration are great clues to identifying gulls!

**From small to large:** Bonaparte's, Laughing, Ring-billed, Lesser Black-backed, Herring, Great Black-backed

**From light to dark:** Bonaparte's, Ring-billed, Herring (similar), Laughing, Lesser Black-backed, Great Black-backed

*Refer to field bird guide for Bonaparte's Gull: smaller than LAGU, with a black spot behind "ear", only in Florida in winter, and rarer gulls like Glaucous and Iceland gulls, etc...*

\*Breeds in Florida

( ) Common species abbreviations provided in parentheses