

Birds at risk from the Gulf Oil Spill

Title

Brown Pelican -The state bird of Louisiana nests on barrier islands and feeds near shore. Their breeding season just began and many pairs are already incubating eggs. Removed from the U.S. Endangered Species list only late last year, Brown Pelicans remain vulnerable to storms, habitat loss and other pressures. Their relatively low reproductive rate means any disruption to their breeding cycle could have serious effects on the population.

Beach-nesting terns and gulls (Caspian Tern, Royal Tern, Sandwich Tern, Least Tern, Laughing Gull, Black Skimmer) - These birds nest and roost in groups on barrier islands and beaches. Some species have begun nesting or building pair bonds in preparation for nesting. They feed on fish and other marine life. Roosting and nesting on the sand and plunging into the water to fish, they are extremely vulnerable oil on the surface or washing ashore.

Beach-nesting shorebirds (American Oystercatcher, Wilson's Plover, Kentish [Snowy] Plover) -These birds nest on the ground on barrier islands and beaches. They feed on small invertebrates along the beach or – in the case of oystercatchers – on oysters. They are at risk if oil comes ashore or affects their food sources.

Reddish Egret – Populations of these large, strictly coastal egrets have dwindled due to habitat loss and disturbance. As specialized residents of coastal environments, they have nowhere else to go if their feeding and nesting grounds are fouled by oil.

Large wading birds (Roseate Spoonbill, Ibises, Herons, Egrets) - Many herons, egrets and other species feed in marshes and along the coast and nest in large colonies called rookeries. They are vulnerable if oil comes ashore in these areas. The central Gulf Coast region hosts continentally and globally significant populations of many of these birds.

Marsh birds – (Mottled Duck, Clapper Rail, Black Rail, Seaside Sparrow, Marsh-Dwelling Songbirds) – Many of these birds are extremely secretive, hindering understanding of their population dynamics. Recovery efforts would be difficult or impossible if oil accumulates in the coastal salt marshes where they live.

Ocean-dwelling birds -Birds that spend a significant portion of their lives at sea, including the Magnificent Frigatebird, may be affected by oiled waters. Contact with oil could lead to ingestion or damage to feathers. Oil also threatens their food supplies. These birds are difficult to monitor, and potential impacts are not fully understood.

Migratory shorebirds (plovers, sandpipers and relatives) - These birds' travels span the western hemisphere. But many species are currently en route from wintering grounds in South America to breeding grounds in boreal forests and arctic tundra. They congregate in great numbers on beaches and barrier islands to rest and refuel during their long journeys.

Migratory songbirds (warblers, orioles, buntings, flycatchers, swallows, and others)- Many of our most colourful and familiar summer songbirds fly nonstop across the Gulf of Mexico twice each year as they migrate between their breeding and wintering grounds. The biggest push of spring migrants moves across the gulf during a two-week period from late April to early May. The journey across 500 miles of open water strains their endurance to its limits. They depend on clear skies and healthy habitats on both sides of the gulf in order to survive the journey.

To read the latest news about the Gulf Oil Spill, visit [Audubon's website](#) (BirdLife Partner in the US) or see the latest within the [BirdLife Community](#).