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Beach Walk Guide - Birds

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Great Black-backed Gull: Largest of the gulls. This opportunistic feeder has a black back, pink legs, and a red spot near the tip of its beak. Can be found along the entire Atlantic Coast and inland on the Great Lakes.



Herring Gull: Has a gray back, yellow beak with a red spot, and yellow eyes. Can be seen dropping shelled items on hard surfaces to break them open.



Ring-billed Gull: Medium sized bird, has a somewhat short, slim beak with a black ring near the tip. Common on our beach, especially in the winter.



Laughing Gull: Medium size gull with a black head, reddish beak, and white above and below its eyes. People associate this bird with summer at the Jersey Shore and are familiar with its "ha ha ha ha" high pitched call.



Common Tern: With a streamlined body, this aerial diver feeds mostly on fish. It has a black head, gray back, white belly, and orange-red beak. Its feathers were prized for 19th century fashion and its numbers plummeted. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 helped this bird recover.

Note: The plumage (feather layers, pattern, color, and arrangement) of birds may differ at the various growth stages. Males and females of some species (like the cardinal) may also have different coloring.



Least Tern: The smallest of the terns in North America. Has a black cap with a white forehead and a yellow beak with a small black tip. Will usually hover before it dives for its prey. Due to human impact, many populations are endangered.



Double-crested Cormorant: The most widespread cormorant in North America can be seen from Maine to Florida. This large, black goose-loon like bird is a relative of the frigate bird. It dives underwater from a swimming position to catch its prey and then spreads its wings to dry as its feathers are not waterproof.

Additional Resources:

www.allaboutbirds.org

www.audubon.org

www.conservewildlifenj.org

www.fws.gov/northeast



Least Sandpiper: Not much bigger than a sparrow, it is the smallest of the sandpipers. Small shorebirds are referred to as "peeps". It is a wading bird that uses its slender beak to look for crustaceans, worms, and mollusks in the shallow water or mud.



Piping Plover: With pale, sandy colored plumage, this bird can be hard to spot. Its beak is orange with a black tip and its legs are yellowish, orange. You will also notice its distinctive black neck ring and black bar across its forehead. Habitat destruction has reduced its numbers. The piping plover is listed as endangered both federally and in New Jersey.



Osprey: This large, but slender bird has brown feathers on top and white underneath. It also has a black streak of feathers across its eyes. The legs and feet of the osprey are adapted for catching their main diet: fish. The osprey dives feet first and grabs its prey out of the water. You may have seen one carrying a fish to its large nest built with sticks.



Red Knot: Is the largest of the "peeps" in North America and can be seen in NJ around mid-May and early June when it is migrating north. The red knot relies on horseshoe crab eggs for food during the migration. This bird is federally protected under the Migratory Bird Act and is listed as endangered in New Jersey.

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