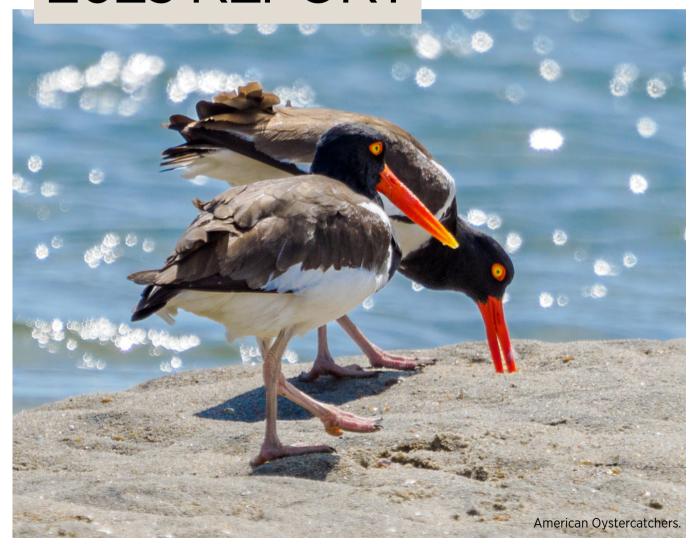


COASTAL STEWARDSHIP 2023 REPORT



Where birds thrive, people prosper.

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INTRODUCTION

Audubon South Carolina's (ASC) Coastal Stewardship Program is dedicated to protecting our state's most vulnerable coastal birds through education, engagement, advocacy, and direct intervention.

One of the greatest threats to the survival of coastal birds is human disturbance, which encompasses any behavior or action that people take with the potential to disrupt the natural behavior of birds.

When it comes to reducing human disturbance and safeguarding our declining coastal bird populations, Audubon's Shorebird Stewards represent the very frontline of defense. Since establishing the Coastal Stewardship program in 2016, ASC has trained and deployed hundreds of these volunteer Stewards along the South Carolina coast, where they educate beachgoers about coastal birds and how to protect them. The program has grown significantly since it began, with more than 120 Stewards donating 3,000+ volunteer hours annually. The program has also reached hundreds of thousands of people through annual public outreach campaigns spanning social media, radio, TV, and print outlets, and educated hundreds of South Carolina students through classroom programs.

While coastal bird conservation is year-round work, this report details ASC's Coastal Stewardship efforts during the spring and summer of 2023 and includes a review of our pilot season for the fall and winter of 2022, which is a new addition to the program.



THE BIRDS

ASC's Coastal Stewardship program exists to protect coastal bird species whose populations are threatened by human use of the beach and marsh. Humans, dogs, drones, and boats are all perceived as predators by birds, especially when they get too close. However, if we recognize that birds' survival depends on us, we can give them the space they need to rest and nest while responsibly enjoying the coast. Below are the focal species of ASC's Shorebird Steward Program along with the time of year we see them on our coast.



WILSON'S PLOVER

LEAST TERN

Nests April-August

State Threatened

April-August State Threatened

Nests



RED KNOT

Migratory

PIPING PLOVER Migratory & Overwinters

March-May & August-October Federally Threatened

August-April Federally Threatened/Endangered

AMERICAN **OYSTERCATCHER**

Nests & Overwinters

Year round Highest Conservation Priority in SC

THE UMBRELLA EFFECT

While focusing on these 5 species, stewards protect the many other shorebirds and seabirds that use the same habitat.

THE PEOPLE

Audubon South Carolina staff, volunteers, and conservation partners work together to reduce human disturbance to coastal birds, which undoubtedly benefit from having so many dedicated people involved in this work.

With nearly 3,000 miles of coastline, it's impossible for ASC staff or partners to be everywhere at once. This is why we rely on volunteer Site Leaders to create a sense of community among local Shorebird Stewards at each of our stewardship sites along the coast. Site Leaders play an important role in recruiting, coordinating, and orienting Shorebird Stewards to their beach site. They are often experienced Shorebird Stewards themselves, and will also monitor the birds at their site.

Our trained Shorebird Stewards are the boots on the ground that help prevent human disturbance. Stewards work 2 to 4 hour shifts at critical times of the year to provide education to beachgoers about coastal birds and their conservation. This year, Shorebird Stewards gathered data about the human disturbances they observed on their shifts. This data will help inform future habitat management and ensure that Audubon staff, volunteers, and conservation partners are doing the best we can to protect the birds.

2022 FALL AND WINTER STEWARDSHIP OVERVIEW

Historically, ASC's Stewardship Sites have been actively monitored during spring migration and summer nesting seasons. However, in the fall and winter of 2022, four sites hosted Shorebird Stewards from September to February, with the goal of protecting migratory and overwintering species that use South Carolina beaches in the winter. For Kiawah Island, this was the second year for their fall/winter stewardship season. Below is a snapshot of the data gathered from the fall and winter of 2022 and early 2023.

Volunteers



Reported Birds



Piping Plover and American Oystercatcher were the most observed of ASC's focal species



Wilson's Plover, Least Tern and Red Knot were observed at these sites, but much less frequently



38 other bird species were observed. The most common were Royal Tern, Black Skimmer, Dunlin, Semipalmated Plover and Sanderling.

Shorebird Stewardship Over the Years...



2023 SPRING AND SUMMER STEWARDSHIP OVERVIEW

The growth of ASC's Shorebird Steward Program over the years is shown by an increase in Shorebird Stewards and communities interested in protecting coastal birds, as well as the number of birds we have been able to protect from year to year. Below are a few quick statistics from March to August 2023, when human disturbance is most common on busy beaches. Later sections will give more details on each site.

Volunteers



3,149 total volunteer hours²



1,985 interactions with beachgoers

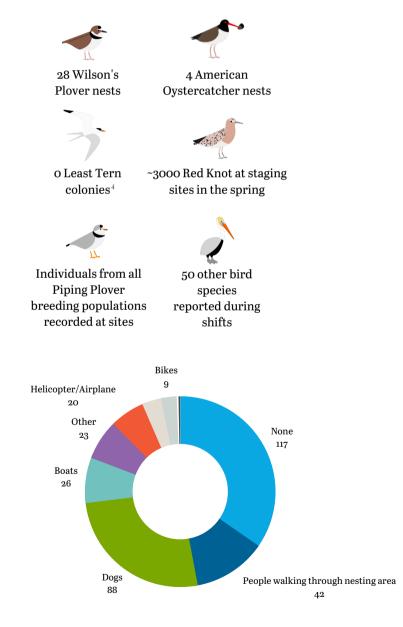


218 shift reports submitted



Economic value of volunteer time is \$100,138.20³

Nesting and Reported Birds



Human Disturbances

Shift surveys asked Shorebird Stewards to provide specific human disturbance data that was observed and/or addressed during their shift. This chart shows how many instances of each disturbance they reported. A breakdown of this data can be found on Page 9.

Disclaimer 1: Data was collected by ASC staff and Shorebird Stewards who attended training, worked shifts on the beach, and submitted post-shift reports. Not every Shorebird Steward submitted a report after each shift, so there may be some gaps in actual versus reported data.

Disclaimer 2: From year to year, sea-level-rise-driven erosion can impact shorebird nesting bird data because of over-wash from storms and potentially fewer suitable natural nesting sites along the coast.

² This accounts for hours served in training, stewarding on the beach and any hours spent posting nesting signage or conducting surveys

³ Based on the 2023 Independent Sector's "Value of Volunteer Time", estimated at \$31.80/hour

 4 Despite nesting attempts at 6 sites, each colony suffered from over-wash and ultimately were unsuccessful

2023 BIRD BREAKDOWN

Of the 218 post-shift reports submitted by Shorebird Stewards, 50 non-focal bird species ranging from songbirds to wading birds were observed during shifts. While focal species data can be found on the previous page, these reports reflect the variety of species that rely on coastal habitats and benefit from stewardship. The top 10 most observed species are below.



2023 DISTURBANCE BREAKDOWN

Of the 218 submitted reports, 117 reported no human disturbance to birds during their shift. This could speak to the presence of the Shorebird Stewards affecting behavior at these sites, though this was not validated. Dogs were the most commonly reported disturbance. In the 88 reports that observed dogs, Shorebird Stewards counted approximately 271 dogs both on and off-leash that disturbed either flocks of birds or nesting birds. People walking through nesting areas was the second most common disturbance, despite nesting areas being roped off or posted with signs at all sites. Other commonly reported disturbances included boats, helicopters/airplanes, and bicycles. Less commonly reported disturbances included drones, people setting up their beach gear too close to nesting areas, and driving on the beach. Disturbances reported as "Other" included people flying kites near nesting areas, people playing sports too close to nesting areas, and jet skis disturbing flocks of birds on the shoreline.

As part of their reports, Shorebird Stewards were asked if they addressed the disturbances they observed. Approximately half were addressed and ultimately prevented from impacting birds, while the other half were disturbances such as helicopters/airplanes, offshore boats, and people that were too far away from the Steward to reach. It is important to remember that just one human disturbance is enough to destroy a nest or colony, so every prevented incident gives these birds a greater chance of survival.

STEWARD REFLECTIONS

Our program is successful because of its volunteers. Below, some of these incredible people share what is the most rewarding aspect of being a Shorebird Steward.

"Watching beach goers response when you show them the adorable baby shorebird chicks with their parents and have them thank you for doing what you do."

Peggy Lucas, Harbor Island

"..I loved taking photos of the beautiful birds and I was hoping that I would learn more about them..I was captivated by their migration habits and nesting habits. The shorebirds and seabirds now have a special place in my heart. I learned so much and now I look forward to sharing my knowledge with everyone who comes on to the beach. It's my hope that the people I talk to will also fall in love with these special birds and that our conservation efforts work so future generations can also enjoy these beautiful creatures."

> Lorraine Holcombe, Huntington Beach State Park

As a newbie..the most rewarding moment so far was after I watched the Shorebird training videos and studied to ID the birds. My first time back on the beach afterwards felt like someone opened my eyes for the first time. I wasn't just seeing seagulls at the beach all these years! ..It showed me how magnificent the beach is- a place that is beautifully complex. Getting this lens and learning the awe-inspiring journeys and hardships of each species has truly broadened my world."

> Ellie Foster, Harbor Island and Hunting Island State Park

STEWARD REFLECTIONS

"I have enjoyed learning about the shorebirds and all the other amazing creatures at the coast. Being a steward gets me outside and I get to explore the area. I love to walk around the beach and find shells, feathers, footprints, etc..When my shift is over I feel so amazing that I get to help not only the birds but our beautiful beach."

Jennifer Adduce, Huntington Beach State Park

I enjoy walking up to complete strangers on the beach and tell them that it's time to ask all of their burning questions about the sea and shorebirds of the Carolina Lowcountry. After a few laughs, there is almost always a person who does have a great question that becomes the focus of discussion for the next few minutes. I also love it when kids are the first to ask questions. In fact, they tend to have the most insightful questions. I share their amazement when I tell them that some of these small birds on the beach will fly hundreds or even thousands of miles before they land to eat and rest. The beach is the best classroom in the world."

Joe Taylor, Bull Point

"Being a Shorebird Steward I'm able to pass along the story of shorebirds and the issues they face. Most folks are just not aware of the triumphs and tragedies that most shorebirds face just to survive. Most of us take the birds at the beach for granted and that they will always be there. I hope that being a Shorebird Steward I have educated a few folks on the Shorebirds habitat needs and environmental issues. Let them rest and nest so we will have them for years to come."

> Charlie Sticklin, Lighthouse Inlet HeritagePreserve



Data makes you credible. Stories make you memorable.

THE PLACES

When the Shorebird Steward program officially launched in 2016, there were three sites. This year, twelve locations hosted Shorebird Stewards with two of them, Kiawah and Seabrook Islands, being autonomous from ASC's program. Kiawah Island hosted volunteers yearround for the second year in a row and four other sites were able to host volunteers in the fall and winter for the first time.

APPROXIMATELY 64 ACRES OF NESTING HABITAT WERE PROTECTED BY STEWARDS

At the following 12 Stewardship Sites, approximately 64 acres of nesting habitat (as measured by Google Earth) were protected by Stewards: Huntington Beach State Park, Dewees Island, Isle of Palms, Morris Island, Folly Beach's Lighthouse Inlet Heritage Preserve, Kiawah Island, Seabrook Bay Island, Botany Wildlife Management Area, Edisto Beach State Park, Harbor Island, Hunting Island State Park and Bull Point.

HUNTINGTON BEACH

1.Huntington Beach State Park Site Profile: Huntington Beach State Park (HBSP) is located in Murrells Inlet, SC, and has been a Shorebird Steward site since 2018. The ~2acre nesting area is roped off with signs and an electric fence to exclude predators. Hurricane Ian in September of 2022 caused a significant change to the nesting habitat. The most reported human disturbance at this site was boat traffic disturbing birds.

Site Leader: Mike Walker

Mike Walker, along with his duties as a Park Ranger, is a leader and educator for HBSP's Stewards. Two of his fellow Interpreters, John and Dakota, were helpful in transporting volunteers to the nesting site.

Data Breakdown: Fall/Winter 2022





192.5 total volunteer hours



Spring/Summer 2023



20 active volunteers



494 total volunteer hours





388 interactions with beachgoers

2 Wilson's Plover nests

AUDUBON SOUTH CAROLINA // 2023 Coastal Stewardship Report

Wilson's Plover.

DEWEES ISLAND

Dewees Island is only accessible by ferry and has hosted Shorebird Stewards since 2016. For the third year, island interns have played a key role helping to transport Stewards and educating beachgoers as part of their internship responsibilities. The biggest reported source of disturbance are dogs getting too close to the ~15-acre nesting area.

Site Leader: Lori Sheridan-Wilson & Judy Fairchild

Lori and Judy have worked together as Site Leaders since the initiation of stewardship on the island. Lori is the island's Environmental Program Director while Judy produces nature-related educational content for a variety of audiences.

Data Breakdown



5 active volunteers



5 interactions with beachgoers⁵



32.5 total volunteer hours



4 Wilson's Plover nests



Because of a lack of volunteer reports, this number does not fully 5 represent the total number of interactions that occurred at this site.

ISLE OF PALMS

Isle of Palms shorebird nesting was greatly affected by a combination of extreme storms and overwash this year. While the site began with approximately 2 acres of nesting habitat, ultimately, there were no successful nesting birds at this site. Volunteers worked from April-June, when the last of the nesting habitat was over-washed after a third attempt by the birds to nest. This data represents those efforts.

Site Leader: Diane Troy

Diane is an island resident who is passionate about protecting all wildlife, especially birds. She works closely with ASC, SCDNR and the Town of Isle of Palms to ensure the most protection for nesting shorebirds and seabirds. Laura Lovins assisted with leadership duties. atthe start of the season.



Data Breakdown

10 active volunteers



with beachgoers

194 total volunteer hours



MORRIS ISLAND

Morris Island is a boat-access only site, with its southern beach featuring approximately 2 acres of posted nesting habitat. This year, one Least Tern colony attempted nesting, but due to continued over-wash, the colony eventually abandoned the site in July. The most commonly reported disturbance are dogs, both on and off leash.

Site Leader: ASC Staff

ASC Staff supports volunteers and connects interested volunteers to captains that can transport them to the site. ASC staff also spent summer the island for holidays on stewardship. Staff presence and time is not counted in this site's data.

Data Breakdown



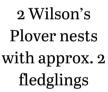


248 total volunteer hours



202 interactions eachgoers







1 American Oystercatcher nest with 2 fledglings

FOLLY BEACH'S LIGHTHOUSE INLET

Folly Beach's Lighthouse Inlet Heritage Preserve is located at the north end of Folly Island. It has been an active stewardship site since 2017. The nesting area this year was about ~4.5 acres of a long, thin strip of beach above the high tide line. Most Stewards reported no disturbance at this site, but people recreating too close to the nesting area and presence of dogs (despite no dogs being allowed on this beach) were the biggest issues encountered.

Site Leader: ASC Staff

ASC Staff coordinates volunteers at this site, with support from Charleston County Parks and Recreation Commission.

Data Breakdown: Fall/Winter 2022





3 active volunteers 7.5 total volunteer

hours



87 interactions with beachgoers

Spring/Summer 2023



8 active volunteers

129 total volunteer hours





While 4 nests were established, over-wash at this site ⁶ likely caused some nest abandonment or relocation where staff was unable to monitor the nests.



KIAWAH ISLAND

CHICKS ON BE

Kiawah Island is a private island that has run their autonomous Shorebird Stewardship Program through the Town of Kiawah since 2018. ASC and Kiawah's Shorebird Steward Program Coordinator work closely together throughout the year to ensure that Stewards have plenty of resources. An addition to stewardship work this year was the new FlockWatch Program, organized by Kiawah's Program Coordinator, where volunteers closely protected flocks of Red Knots on the beach during spring migration.

Program Coordinator: Bette Popillo

Bette has been coordinating the Shorebird Steward Program for 5 years and works closely with one of the Town's Biologists, Aaron Given, to ensure that Stewards are trained. This year, Bette worked closely with SCDNR staff to assist with research efforts of Red Knot. Stewards do not collect data on their interactions.

Data Breakdown: Fall/Winter 2022





17 active volunteers 272.5 total volunteer hours

Spring/Summer 2023



54 active volunteers



4 Wilson's Plover nests



750 total volunteer hours



2 American Oystercatcher nests



~2,500 individual Red Knots using the beach 7

As reported on eBird by the 'high count' of Nathaniel Watkins 03/20/23

SEABROOK ISLAND

Seabrook Island is a private island that began their autonomous Shorebird Stewardship program in 2020 through the Seabrook Island Birders Club associated with the Town of Seabrook Island. ASC leads annual Shorebird Steward training to new and returning Seabrook Stewards. This program mainly focuses on protecting the thousands of Red Knot that use the shores of Seabrook, Captain Sam's Spit and Kiawah to rest. When the large flocks of Red Knot migrate north, stewards switch their focus to the nearby nesting area.

Program Coordinators: Mark Andrews, Lesley Gore, Bob Mercer

Seabrook's program is run by three volunteers, Mark, Bob and Leslie, all of whom are members of the Seabrook Island Birders. Stewards collect more specific interaction data, as shown in the figures below.

Data Breakdown



202 total volunteer hours



920 interactions with beachgoers ~2,200 individual Red Knots using the beach ⁸

91% adults, 9% minors

36% residents, 64% visitors

100% positive interactions

As reported by the 'high count' of Mark ⁸ Andrews and Fletcher Smith on 3/24/23

BOTANY BAY WMA

Botany Bay Plantation Wildlife Management Area is located next to Edisto Island and has been an active stewardship site since 2018. Nesting habitat this year measured ~8 acres. Historically, the biggest source of disturbance is people walking on the marsh relics, which are an important feeding area for nesting, migratory and wintering birds. However, volunteers reported very little human disturbance while on shift this year.

Site Leader: Bess Kellett

Bess is the SCDNR Volunteer Coordinator at Botany Bay Wildlife Management Area. This was her last summer as Site Leader, since she retired in the fall of 2023. She worked hard to establish a community of volunteerism at this site.



Data Breakdown

2 active volunteers



63 interactions with beachgoers



19 total volunteer hours



3 Wilson's Plover nests

1++++

EDISTO BEACH

Edisto Beach State Park is a new site in 2023. The small ~1-acre nesting habitat was unfortunately over-washed during extreme tidal and storm events this year. However, park staff and Stewards are dedicated to continuing to protect the birds that use the habitat and continue to build their program. The most commonly reported disturbance this year was dogs.

Site Leaders: Sam Petitt & Leah Schwartzentruber

Sam is a Park Interpreter and Leah is the Park's Lead Sea Turtle Specialist. Both are committed to protecting the wildlife at the park and continue to recruit more volunteers to build the program.

Data Breakdown



6 active volunteers



68 total volunteer hours



198 interactions with beachgoers



1 Wilson's Plover nest

HARBOR ISLAND

Harbor Island is a private island located in Beaufort County. It began as a pilot site in 2016 and has had an active program ever since. Higher-than-normal tides and strong storms significantly changed the beach at the south end of the island, where the \sim 1.5 acres of nesting habitat was roped off. This year, a small portion of the north end of the island was also roped off after a resident found a nesting bird above the high tide line. The most common reported disturbance was dogs, both on and off-leash.

Site Leader: Peggy Lucas

Peggy is a Harbor Island resident and Master Naturalist. Even before becoming a Steward, she loved birding and photographing the many species different that migrate through or call the island home. Now, she works hard to build a community among her fellow stewards.



Data Breakdown

8 active volunteers



366 interactions with beachgoers



110 total volunteer hours



4 Wilson's Plover nests

23

HUNTING ISLAND

Hunting Island State Park (HISP) has been an active stewardship site since 2019. This year, the nesting area measured ~9 acres and was located at the north end of the island. Because Harbor and Hunting Islands are separated by Johnson Creek, many migratory and wintering birds spend time on both beaches. The most commonly reported source of disturbance is dogs, despite the area being designated as a "No Dog" zone.

Site Leader: Becky McCollam

Red Knots

Becky began as a Leader in 2022 and has worked hard to recruit new volunteers to HISP's program. She inspires other 'Friends of Hunting Island' members and state park staff to learn about and help protect these birds.

Data Breakdown: Fall/Winter 2022





5 active volunteers 32 total volunteer hours



87 interactions with beachgoers

Spring/Summer 2023





11 active volunteers

167 total volunteer hours





486 interactions with beachgoers 2 Wilson's Plover nests



1 American Oystercatcher nests

BULL POINT

Bull Point, located on Little Capers Island, to the south of Pritchard's Island, became a stewarding site in May 2021. Because the site is only accessible by boat, ASC relied on Beaufort-area captains to either steward themselves or shuttle Stewards to the island. Some Pritchard's Island Turtle Patrol members are trained Stewards and will often report bird and disturbance data to ASC staff. The most commonly reported disturbance to the ~2 acres of nesting habitat were dogs and helicopters.

Site Leader: Joe Taylor

As a retired teacher, Joe hopes to preserve this pristine area for future generations through educating the locals about its importance. Frequent visitors to the island fondly known him as "Bird Man of Bull Point".



Data Breakdown

2 active volunteers



30 interactions with beachgoers



18 total volunteer hours



2 Wilson's Plover nests

CRAB BANK SEABIRD SANCTUARY'S STORY

This island is owned and managed by SCDNR. Its story is one of hope for future conservation efforts. Crab Bank was first built in the 1950s; but, in 2017, Hurricane Irma washed away the last bit of high ground, leaving thousands of coastal birds without the critical nesting and foraging habitat they had come to rely on. The island was restored in December 2021 using dredge material from the Charleston Harbor Deepening Project, thanks to many years of hard work by SCDNR and partner organizations including ASC, Coastal Expeditions Foundation, Coastal Conservation League; and with support from the Town of Mt. Pleasant, a grant from the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, and countless businesses and individuals. Today, the newly restored island has approximately 32 acres of high ground and, once again, is providing critical habitat for hundreds of coastal birds whose populations are in steep decline. Birds returned to nest for the first time since 2017 in the spring of 2022, and this year, hundreds more continued to fledge chicks.

ASC and the many local conservation organizations that made this project possible help to keep the community informed about island closures and updates. Signage at local walkways helps tell the story of this island and the birds that rely on it. For more information and updates, check out: <u>https://www.sccoastalbirds.org/crab-bank</u>

The island is closed to landing from March 15- October 15 in order to give nesting birds the space they need to raise their families away from the threat of human disturbance.

Remember to report banded birds—this contributes to our better understanding of these vulnerable species.

bandedbirds.org

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ADDITIONAL OUTREACH

In addition to our volunteer Shorebird Steward Program, we work in other community spaces to educate people about South Carolina's coastal birds. Below are some of the other activities we've done this year.



CRAB BANK SEABIRD SANCTUARY

ASC staff placed educational signage at 3 locations around Mt. Pleasant where patrons could view Crab Bank from afar. Signage designed by Dawn Witherington.



STUDENT PROGRAMMING

ASC works with elementary and middle school students, including Title 1 schools, to teach about shorebird conservation. Then, these students design educational beach signs.



FOLLY ART PROJECT

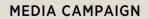
For the second year in a row, ASC installed an educational art project at Folly Beach's Lighthouse Inlet. Design by Jen Tyrrell and restored after vandalization by Savannah Young.



MONITORING

ASC staff and experienced Shorebird Stewards assist with monitoring nesting and migratory birds at each stewardship site. SIGN POSTING

Led by SCDNR and USFWS, ASC staff and stewards assist in the roping off of nesting habitat.



Audubon's "Share the Love, Share the Shore" campaign helps spread the love for coastal birds throughout the U.S. As a conclusion to this Coastal Stewardship Report, it is with extreme gratitude that ASC acknowledges its partners and volunteers, without whom this program would not be successful. This report was compiled by ASC's Coastal Stewardship Coordinator, Allyssa Zebrowski.

- Boeing Company Employee Community Fund
- Bosch Community Fund
- Charleston County Parks and Recreation Commission
- City of Folly Beach

- Coastal Community Foundation
- Coastal Expeditions Foundation
- College of Charleston
- Dewees Island Conservancy
- Harbor Island HOA and Environmental Committee
- Henry and Sylvia Yaschik Foundation
- IOP Wild Dune's POA
- · Kiawah Conservancy and the Town of Kiawah
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
- North Inlet-Winyah Bay and ACE Basin, National Estuarine Research Reserves
- Post and Courier Foundation
- SC Department of Natural Resources
- SC Ports Authority
- SC Shorebird Project
- SC State Parks
- Seabrook Island Birders and the Town of Seabrook
- The Joanna Foundation
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- Volvo Community Fund

The greatest acknowledgment of all goes to our dedicated volunteers!

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All photos in this report were taken by Shorebird Stewards, ASC staff or National Audubon Society staff!

- Cover. American Oystercatcher. Photo: Sharon Eisenzopf
- Page 2. Sanderlings. Photo: Lorraine Holcombe
- Page 4. Semipalmated Plovers. Photo: Lorraine Holcombe
- Page 5. Wilson's Plover. Photo: Charlie Stricklin
- Page 5. Least Tern. Photo: Alice Belanger
- Page 5. American Oystercatcher. Photo: Alice Belanger
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- Page 28. Student looking at a bird wing. Photo: Madison Proctor
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- Page 28. Mary Beth Roy observing nesting birds. Photo: Peggy Lucas
- Page 28. Lighthouse Inlet Heritage Preserve sign posting. Photo: Allyssa Zebrowski
- Page 28. Share the Shore towel on beach. Photo: Nancy Borowick
- Page 32. Black-bellied Plover. Photo: Lorraine Holcombe

