

## FAQs: Black Skimmer



- Q: How many eggs do they lay?  
A: Usually 3-4. They begin incubating once the first egg is laid.
- Q: How long do the eggs take to hatch?  
A: About 3 ½ weeks (21-25 days)
- Q: How long until the chicks can fly?  
A: About 4 weeks, 5 weeks until they can fly well and can learn to fish.
- Q: What do Black Skimmers eat?  
A: Fish – we most often see needlefish and sardines being eaten in this colony.
- Q: What is the difference between males and females?  
A: Coloration is the same for both males and females. Males are slightly larger.
- Q: Why is this area roped off?  
A: The Black Skimmer is a State Threatened species, due to human disturbance, predation from human-subsidized predators (such as crows, gulls, and raccoons), and habitat loss from coastal development. Since they nest on the sand, it's difficult to see the nests and eggs. We roped off the area to make sure the colony isn't disturbed.
- Q: What are their predators?  
A: Crows, gulls, raccoons, and ghost crabs can eat eggs and chicks. Dogs and feral cats are also threats and can disturb the birds enough to cause abandonment of nests.
- Q: Why is there a big group of skimmers by the water? Are they nesting, too?  
A: No, they aren't nesting. The skimmers outside of the posting are part of the colony, but they are cooling off by the water or taking a break from fishing.

## Black Skimmer Facts

- Black Skimmers nest in colonies – this means that they usually nest in large numbers close together. There is strength in numbers!
- The nesting season for Black Skimmers is from May – September.
- Both parents will take turns incubating the eggs and bringing home fish for the chicks.
- Black Skimmer chicks are “semi-precocial,” meaning they hatch covered in down feathers and can walk around just a few hours after hatching. Chicks, however, cannot forage for themselves, so parents will bring fish to them.
- Black Skimmers “skim” for their food. They literally skim the water by dragging their longer bottom bill through the water until it makes contact with a fish. The upper bill then snaps down, trapping the fish!
- During the winter, the Black Skimmers may remain near their breeding grounds or move further south in Florida. We are still learning about their movements through the U.S. There is a banded skimmer in our colony – A06, white writing on a green band. He was banded as chick in 2015 at St. Pete Beach! We now know they may not necessarily return to their natal colony (where they hatched).
- Fireworks set off too closely can cause an entire flock of skimmers to abandon their colony. At least football field’s distance away (300ft) is safest for the skimmers.
- There are about 3,600 skimmers in Florida. They stay here year-round. In the winter they disperse, then in the summer they group together on the beach.
- Like a lot of seabirds, skimmers exhibit dichromatic coloration: black on top, white underneath. This acts as camouflage at sea.
- Skimmers can live for 20 to 25 years.