

# HELPING TO CONSERVE COASTAL SHOREBIRDS



## PURPOSE OF THE SHOREBIRD STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Welcome and thank you for your interest in becoming a Steward! Positions like this are essential to fulfilling our mission to help wildlife thrive.

### Why are Shorebird Stewards Important?

Every year shorebirds and seabirds breed on the shores of the United States, Canadian Arctic tundra, and winter along the eastern shores of South America, stopping at critical migratory sites along the east coast of the United States to nest and to rest. These migrations are thousands of miles round trip, with species like the [red knot flying nearly 20,000 miles a year for its annual migration](#). Shorebirds that breed along the United States coast include American Oystercatcher and Piping Plover. Along the way these shorebirds face significant threats – many of them caused by humans.

[Shorebirds need the beach for survival](#); while people simply love going to the beach for recreation. The sun, the surf, and the memories created with friends and family make the beach a special place. While there, people swim, fish, play, fly kites, walk dogs and relax. But for shorebirds like Piping Plover and Red Knot, and seabirds like the Roseate Tern, the beach is ‘home sweet home.’ They depend on beaches to feed, rest, and raise their young.

Most beaches are posted with signs alerting visitors to the importance of the site while shorebirds nest, feed, and rest. However, under most circumstances, signs posted around the nests are not enough to prevent people from disturbing nesting birds, and it requires time and effort from caring individuals - stewards - to monitor

both people and birds. Most people do not believe their activities are impacting birds, but stewards play an important role in communicating how human behaviors impact wildlife.

### ***Stewards will perform some of the following work:***

***Interpretation and Education:*** Interpretation involves using elucidative principles to relay messages through a variety of mediums such as signage, talks, guided tours, exhibits, demonstrations, and information stations. Interpretation goes beyond providing factual information. In his groundbreaking book, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, Freeman Tilden defines interpretation as, “an educational activity which aims to reveal meaning and relationships through the use of original objects, by first-hand experience, and by illustrative media rather than simply to communicate factual information.” Interpretation strives to be interesting and entertaining to the audience.

Most interpretive work for Stewards will be informal encounters with beachgoers but can also include nature walks that will vary depending on the audience. Stewards interpret effectively by explaining to visitors, in a way they can best understand, why shorebirds and seabirds are important and why they need everyone’s help to thrive. Many beachgoers have no idea that vulnerable wildlife will be trying to raise their young on the very beach they’d like to visit, and it will be the Steward’s job to tell visitors why sharing the shore is essential.

According to the North American Association for Environmental Education, “environmental education (EE) is a process that helps individuals, communities, and organizations learn more about the environment, and develop skills and understanding about how to address global challenges. It has the power to transform lives and society. It inspires, influences attitudes and motivates action.” Environmental education is generally conducted by Stewards with organized groups - such as schools, scout troops and lifelong learning groups – while using an established curriculum. EE programming is often the most formal encounter a Steward will have with the public, and it may even take place over multiple visits.

**Boundary Monitoring:** It is extremely important that Stewards monitor refuge boundaries and closed areas to ensure that people are not encroaching into sensitive nesting areas. Signage, symbolic fencing, and predator enclosures must be kept in good order to be effective in protecting habitat. There are many examples where - when these deterrents were not in place, and people were not monitored – shorebird nests and sometimes entire shorebird colonies have been destroyed or abandoned.

**Visitor Monitoring:** Keeping track of the number of people using a beach, as well as the number and types of violations witnessed, can be very useful in shorebird protection. Stewards cannot enforce regulations like law enforcement, but they are essential to educate visitors and keep them informed about rules and reporting relevant information to management. If warranted, refuge managers may allocate more staff resources to a site and law enforcement officials may adjust their patrols and strategies depending on the information collected by Stewards.

**Bird Monitoring:** Stewards can be a very important part of collecting wildlife data for biologists and other staff. Effectively watching shorebirds as they go through the process of nesting, incubating eggs, etc. can be crucial to



*Helping visitors understand the importance of shorebirds and the rules at your site is a critical role of stewards. Jean Hall*

breeding success. Stewards might record routine statistics such as number of eggs, or they might report back more urgent items such as predators threatening a nest, nest washout by a storm, or other events. A good Steward will learn how to properly monitor shorebirds without creating any additional stress or disturbance and maximize the chances of reproductive success.

**Community Engagement:** Community Engagement: Community outreach can be described as a range of activities that aim to inform, consult, or engage a target audience. The type of outreach performed and the degree of outreach conducted will depend on organization/agency goals and target populations.

Many members of the community – such as refuge neighbors, local businesses, town officials, and even members of land trusts and conservation commissions – may not know about the important work we do to help wildlife. Stewards can get the message out to people by being advocates for the refuge within the community and reaching out to partners with people in areas where we can all mutually benefit. Stewards also work to understand the motivations and values of the community and to communicate with them in ways that resonate with their interests.

*Coastal birds live on the edge of the land and the sea, and their lives are on the edge as well. More and more they must share their habitat with humans, and face a multitude of threats related to human activities. You play a critical role in helping these birds thrive!*

