

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

J.N. "Ding" Darling

National Wildlife Refuge

Common Birds

Identification Guide



Birds of PREY



RED-SHOULDERED HAWK-

▶ *Buteo lineatus*

This common long-tailed and long winged hawk has thin crescent-shaped wing "windows" parallel to the dark tips of the wings. When perched, look for the cinnamon breast with reddish shoulders. Can often be seen perched eating small mammals, snakes and lizards. A subspecies found in South Florida are much paler in color than those found in the North.

OSPREY-

▶ *Pandion haliaetus*

This magnificent "fish hawk" nests in the refuge and feeds on larger fish found in the waters. Easily identified by its white head with darker markings. The female can be identified by her "necklace of brown feathers".

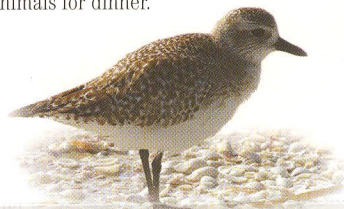


SHOREbirds

WILLET-

▶ *Catoptrophorus semipalmatus*

Willetts are year-round residents here at the refuge. This large, grayish, wading sandpiper has bluish gray colored legs. When in flight, the striking black and white wing stripes are the best field marks. Willetts may be seen at low tide in the mud flats sticking their long, sharp bills into the soft mud searching for small animals for dinner.



BLACK BELLIED PLOVER-

▶ *Pluvialis squatarola*

This stocky shorebird's grayish all over, darker above than below and has an eye ring giving it a "big eye" look. During the summer, it can easily be identified by its characteristic black belly plumage. In all seasons it can be identified in flight by its black "wingpits".

SPOTTED SANDPIPER-

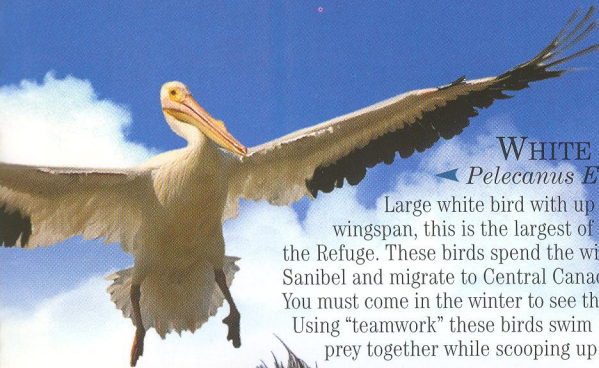
▶ *Actitis macularia*

In the sea of small shorebirds along Wildlife Drive, you can identify this small shorebird by spotting the repetitive bobbing of its tail while it walks.

The dark spots in summer on white underparts and pinkish orange bill with darker tip are also clues.



Seen SEASONALLY



WHITE PELICAN-

▶ *Pelecanus Erthrorhynchos*

Large white bird with up to a 10 ft. wingspan, this is the largest of the birds that visit the Refuge. These birds spend the winter here on Sanibel and migrate to Central Canada for the summer. You must come in the winter to see this all white pelican. Using "teamwork" these birds swim and encircle their prey together while scooping up their meals.

PIED-BILLED GREBE-

▶ *Podilymbus podiceps*

The pied-billed grebe is a small, stocky brown grebe with a short stout bill, floating in the water in the refuge. Look for the black ring around the white bill, this is more obvious in the summer season.



BELTED KINGFISHER-

▶ *Ceryle alcyon*

The belted kingfisher can be identified by its large bill, blue-grey head, back and wings. Look for the giant white collar around its neck. The female has a reddish brown belly band unlike the male. Look for this bird hovering over the water and plunging into the water along Wildlife Drive.



RED-BREASTED MERGANSER-

▶ *Mergus serrator*

This merganser has a long bill that is thin at the base making its forehead appears abrupt and vertical. The male has a dark green crested head, white neck ring, rusty breast and red bill. The female is a brown duck with red-crested head that gradually shades to the white breast, red bill also. These



birds winter here at the refuge, preferring sheltered coastal salt waters.

BLUE-WINGED TEAL-

▶ *Anas discors*

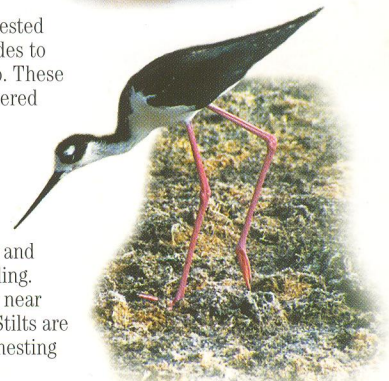
Look for the moon shaped white patch behind this bird's bill to identify the male of the species. The small brown duck is the female. In flight you can see the flashy, powdery, blue wing patches in both sexes. This bird spends winters on marshes and protected coastal areas.



BLACK-NECKED STILT

▶ *Himantopus mexicanus*

Black above, white below with long pink legs and needle-like bill. Seen at the refuge in spring and summer wading belly-deep in shallow water feeding. They feed on very small creatures that live on or near the surface preferring insects and crustaceans. Stilts are more partial to freshwater and can be observed nesting at the Bailey Tract.



Common Birds of the REFUGE



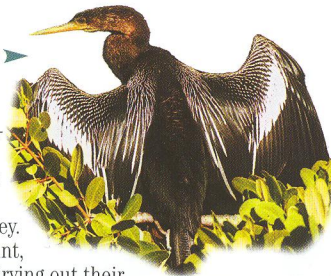
BROWN PELICAN- ◀ *Pelecanus occidentalis*

Large brown bird with huge pouchy bill used for scooping fish as it feeds. Unlike the white pelican, it is often seen diving from the air for fish. The adults have white heads, while the young have brown heads.

ANHINGA- ◀ *Anhinga anhinga*

Often called the "Snake bird", look for this bird swimming under the water for fish. It uses its sharp beak to spear prey. Soon after the hunt, they can be seen drying out their black wings and showing you their feathers that resemble "white piano keys" on its wings. The female

anhinga has a light brown head and neck.



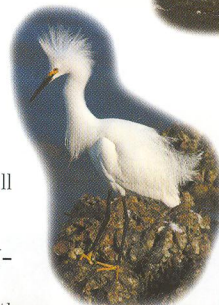
GREAT EGRET- ◀ *Ardea alba*

The great egret's larger size, its yellow bill and black legs and feet distinguish it from the snowy egret. Like herons and egrets, this bird holds its neck in an S-shaped posture in flight.



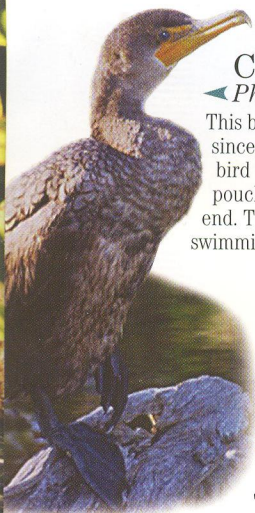
SNOWY EGRET- ◀ *Egretta thula*

Similar in appearance to the great egret, the snowy is often called the "bird with the golden slippers". Identification of these birds is easy, by noting its black bill and legs with yellow feet.



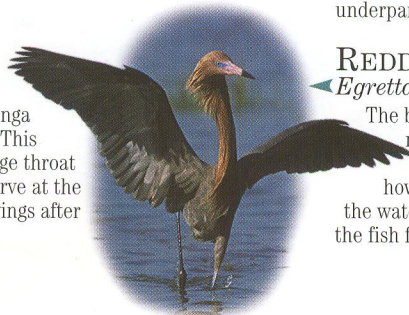
TRI-COLORED HERON- ◀ *Egretta tricolor*

This bird is bluish gray like the little blue heron and reddish egret, but look carefully. The most distinguishing field mark on this bird is its white underparts and rust stripe down its white neck.



DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT- ◀ *Phalacrocorax auritus*

This bird is often mistaken for the anhinga since they feed in the water similarly. This bird is also black but look for its orange throat pouch and beak with a slight down curve at the end. They too will be drying out their wings after swimming for their food.



REDDISH EGRET- ◀ *Egretta rufescens*

The bluish gray body with the reddish neck can make it hard to identify from other egrets and herons, but this bird can be easily identified by how it eats. Watch it "dance and stumble" through the water flapping its wings, creating shade for fish. As the fish flock to the shade, this egret catches its meal.

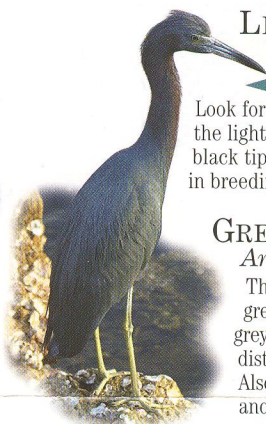
WOOD STORK- ◀ *Mycteria americana*

This is the only American stork. It is larger than the white ibis, and is often called the "Bird with the iron head". Look for its featherless dark head and neck. This endangered species can also be identified by its bubble gum pink feet.



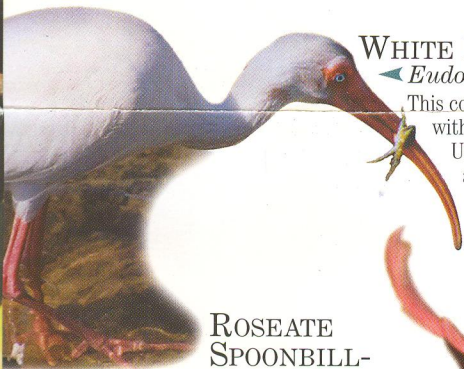
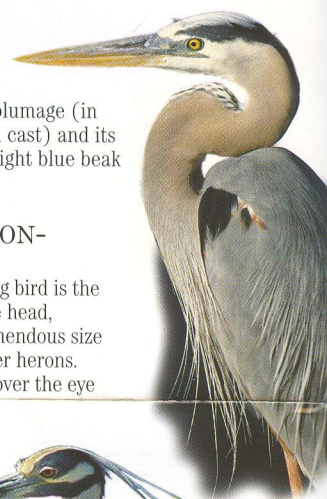
LITTLE BLUE HERON- ◀ *Egretta caerulea*

Look for its uniform blue-gray plumage (in the light the neck has a reddish cast) and its black tipped bill. Look for its bright blue beak in breeding plumage.



GREAT BLUE HERON- ◀ *Ardea herodias*

The largest Sanibel wading bird is the great blue heron. Its white head, grey-blue plumage and tremendous size distinguish it from the other herons. Also note the black stripe over the eye and plume on the head.



WHITE IBIS- ◀ *Eudocimus albus*

This common bird will never be confused with another when seen at close range. Uniformly white, its orangish red face and down-curved bill are unique. Often you can see the immature ibis feeding. They are all brown or brown turning white. Immature plumage is kept for 1 year.

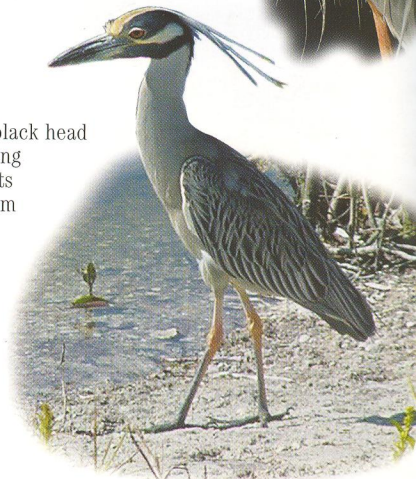
ROSEATE SPOONBILL- ◀ *Ajaia ajaja*

Watch for this large pink wading bird, often mistaken for pink flamingos. These birds feed by swinging their flat bills from side to side, using them to filter out food. They can be seen at the refuge all year round. When this bird hatches it is nearly white and gets pinker with age.



YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON- ◀ *Nyctanassa violacea*

Look for this stocky grey heron, with a black head and buffy-white crown along Wildlife Drive. Like its name says, this medium sized heron feeds mostly at night, but can also be seen during the day. The juvenile bird is grayish brown overall with fine white streaks on its breast and dots on back and wings. This immature plumage is kept for 2 years.



Ethical BIRDING

Our guide to spotting wildlife: Observation Guidelines

Enjoy your experience on the Refuge—and may it be said that the wildlife was unaware of your presence.

The J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge provides a sanctuary for many species of wild animals, birds and native vegetations. Many people come to the refuge each year to observe and photograph the inhabitants of this unique ecosystem.

While the disturbance of a single visitor may be small, the cumulative impact by nearly a million people a year is large. To enhance the experience of each visitor and to reduce our impact on the wildlife these guidelines should be followed:



Leave nothing but footprints; take nothing but pictures. To all who take pictures, use courtesy to fellow visitors and wildlife.



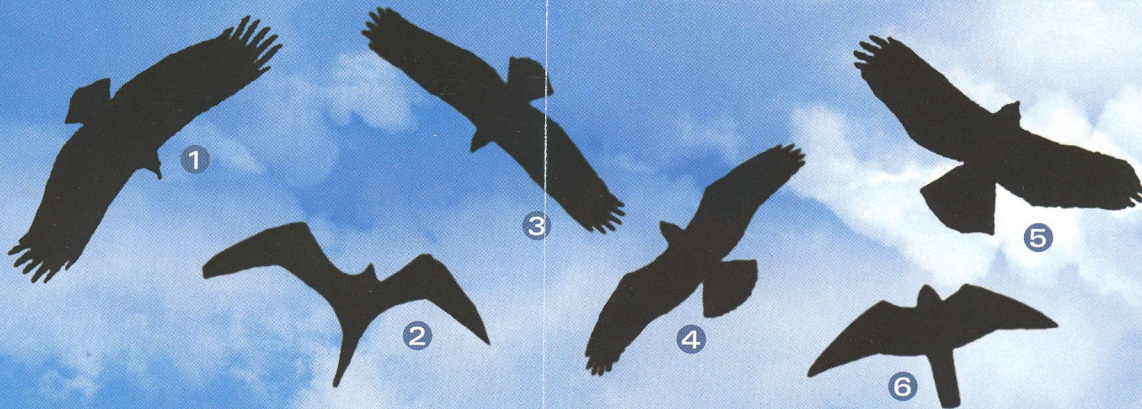
Enjoy and appreciate our native vegetation, but please leave it untouched. It is the food and lodging of the wildlife.



Please place all trash and recyclables in receptacles. If you do not, wildlife could ingest or become entangled in plastic and other trash. They often become ill and die.



Do not feed or approach the wildlife. Animals that are fed lose their fear of us. They become dangerous and may have to be destroyed.



1. Turkey Vulture 2. Magnificent Frigatebird 3. Bald Eagle
4. Osprey 5. Red-Shouldered Hawk 6. Peregrine Falcon

“... birds are only the delicate indicators of the prognosis for human existence...”

—J.N. “Ding” Darling



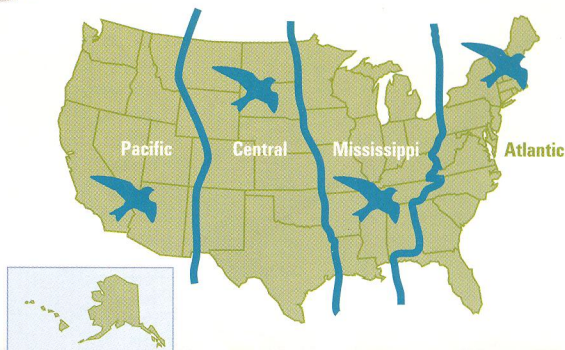
FLYWAYS are like HIGHWAYS for BIRDS

These are routes that the birds fly (migrate) to get to their winter and summer homes. There are four different flyways in the United States: Atlantic, Mississippi, Central, and Pacific.

National Wildlife Refuges are located along the flyways so birds can use them to rest and eat while making their long journeys. Refuges are important stopover sites for migrating birds.

Who flies the furthest?

Arctic terns can migrate as far as 20,000 miles per year. From the Arctic to Antarctic and back!



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J.N. "Ding" Darling Refuge**

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