



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

BP Deepwater Horizon – After the Spill

September 2011

Beach-nesting Birds of the Gulf

The Gulf of Mexico is a globally unique ecosystem, with a diversity of habitats, fish and wildlife that make it one of the nation's great natural treasures. Gulf habitats are essential to the annual cycles of many species of breeding, wintering and migrating waterfowl, wading birds, shorebirds, and songbirds.

The U.S. Gulf Coast is of particular significance to beach-nesting birds, species that breed on beaches, flats, dunes, bars, barrier islands and similar near-shore habitats. The northern Gulf Coast, from the Mississippi Delta of Louisiana to the Florida Panhandle, represents 18 percent of the southeastern U.S. coastline, and supports a disproportionately high number of beach-nesting bird species.

BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill

In April 2011, the Deepwater Horizon oil rig exploded, causing the death of 11 people and unprecedented damage to the natural resources and human



Female brown pelican being rinsed following extensive cleaning at the Theodore Oiled Bird Rehabilitation Center in Alabama, Tom MacKenzie/US Fish and Wildlife Service.

uses of the Gulf of Mexico. Before the spill was stopped, almost five million gallons of crude oil contaminated wildlife habitats from the deepwater to coastal marshes. Beach-nesting birds of the Gulf were among the many creatures that endured the harmful effects of this environmental disaster. Following are just a few of the birds affected:

Sandwich Tern

Breton National Wildlife Refuge off the Louisiana coast supports one of the world's largest colonies of Sandwich Terns. These gregarious birds, marked by a black crest and black bill, are found almost exclusively along coastal areas and barrier islands. The northern Gulf Coast harbors about three-quarters of the population of Sandwich Terns in the southeastern United States.



Brown Pelican

Nearly half the southeastern population of Brown Pelicans live in the northern Gulf Coast, generally nesting on protected islands. The Brown Pelican, Louisiana's state bird, has made a comeback in this region since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005. It was recently removed from the Endangered Species List.

Wilson's Plover

The northern Gulf Coast is also home to about one-quarter of the Southeast's Wilson's Plovers. The medium-sized plovers, with heavy black bills, nest along beaches and salt marshes.

The northern Gulf Coast is home to a large proportion of many other birds found in the Southeast, from south Texas to southeast Virginia. Some of these other Gulf Coast birds, and their estimated portion of their southeastern populations, are:

- Black Skimmer, 35 percent;
- Forster's Tern, 41 percent;
- Gull-billed Tern, 16 percent;
- Laughing Gull, 25 percent;
- Least Tern, 42 percent;
- Royal Tern, 36 percent; and
- Snowy Plover, 22 percent.



Brown pelicans at Breton National Wildlife Refuge with boom in the background, US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Assessing the Injury to Beach-nesting Birds

The Department of the Interior, together with the other Deepwater Horizon oil spill Natural Resource Trustees - the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and the states of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas, is conducting a Natural Resources Damage Assessment and Restoration (NRDAR) effort to determine the extent of injury to beach-nesting birds and other wildlife and natural resources. This process relies on many complex studies that will scientifically determine the extent of injury and the compensation required of BP and other responsible parties.

Sources: Southeast U.S. Waterbird Conservation Plan and the Southeastern Coastal Plain Shorebird Conservation Plan

For more information about BP Deepwater Horizon NRDAR

www.doi.gov/deepwaterhorizon

www.gullspillrestoration.noaa.gov

www.restorethegulf.gov

DOI BP Deepwater Horizon Case Management Office: (404) 679-4161