



CTYBC TIPS

for birding the Gulf Coast

BEACH BIRDS

Shorebirds most commonly found in April on Mustang Island beaches: Sanderling, Ruddy Turnstone, Dunlin, Willet, Black-bellied Plover, Brown Pelican, Laughing Gull, Great Blue Heron, Royal Tern, Least Tern.

Other possible sightings: Least Sandpiper, Red Knot, American Oystercatcher, Piping Plover, Herring Gull, Ring-billed Gull, Sandwich Tern.

Sanderlings are the most common, and are easily spotted because of their wind-up toy running style along the water's edge, taunting the waves. The adults and juveniles have different plumages, so base your ID on their actions and size rather than on specific color patterns. Sanderlings have no hind toe—good luck getting a look.

Ruddy Turnstone males and females both have very distinctive colors and patterns—they are easy to spot in the sargassum.

Dunlins are about the size of Sanderlings and are often seen with them, but in April are normally starting to get their black belly patch. Look for the slightly down-turned bill.

Willetts are usually seen walking singly at the water's edge. They are the tallest birds that walk along the beach, apart from the occasional heron. In April they are gray with no special markings to look for until they fly. In flight they have a very noticeable white stripe on each black wing. They often fly short distances along the beach to get away from people and dogs, so you should be able to spot one in flight.

Black-bellied Plovers are usually found away from the crowds, feeding in the sargassum zone with the turnstones. They are usually seen singly or in a pair. In April they are getting their black bellies, but do not have their full black plumage yet. They keep their white undertail coverts as the black comes in, unlike the American Golden-plover, which has black undertail coverts and a dark cap.

Red Knots hang out in a large group at the water's edge, and are just starting to get their red chest in April. They are bigger than the Sanderlings and Dunlins, but smaller than the Willets. The **American Oystercatcher** can be seen snoozing on the beach occasionally, but can also be seen active in the ponds elsewhere on the island. The **Piping Plover** can occasionally be seen on the beach mixed with the peeps.
