

Other Birds:

Double-crested Cormorant *Phalacrocorax auritus*,



Common Tern

Sterna hirundo,



Least Tern *Sternula antillarum*

At the start of the 20th Century, the Least Tern, the Common Tern and the Double-crested Cormorant were on the verge of becoming extinct in the northeastern United States including New York and New Jersey. Like herons and egrets, they were killed for their feathers used to decorate ladies hats. Protective laws and changes in fashion allowed these species to recover in the 1920's and 30's, only to face other human pressures like pollution and coastal development starting in the 1950's.

Following its earlier recovery, the Double-crested Cormorant was next impacted by widespread pesticide use during the 1950's and 60's. Since it is a fish eater, and the fish it was eating then were contaminated with toxic chemicals from pesticide run-off, it became a victim of bioaccumulation. Bioaccumulation occurs when an organism absorbs toxic substances at a rate greater than that at which the substance can be lost. In this case, the more fish the Double-crested Cormorant (a large bird at 29"-36" tall with a wingspan up to 52" and an excellent fisher to boot) ate, the more contaminated it became. Like many other fish eating birds at that time, the Double-crested Cormorant began to lay unhatchable eggs, so thin they could not support the weight of an incubating parent. By 1972 the National Audubon Society named the Double-crested Cormorant a species of concern. But that's not the end of this bird's story. Likely due to a cleaner environment and less use of pesticides that caused reproductive problems, Double-crested Cormorant populations have increased markedly in New York and New Jersey recently. So much so that they are considered a nuisance by some and a challenge to environmental managers. Accumulated fecal matter below the nests of cormorants can kill trees. This along with competition for food and space can impact other birds including the already threatened common tern. Increasing cormorant populations also present conflicts with human

This bird has a long tail and a yellow throat-patch. A white crest appears on its head during its short breeding season during the warm weather months. Juveniles can be brown with a white face, neck, and breast. The cormorant is widely distributed across North America. It breeds locally along all coasts, extensively in Florida, and also all along the center of the continent, and into the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence Seaway region. Cormorants can also be found in Mexico, Belize, the Bahamas, and Cuba. Double-crested Cormorants like to make use of diverse aquatic habitats, such as ponds, lakes, rivers, lagoons, estuaries, and open coastline and are more widespread in winter.

The Common Tern has a light grey back, white underparts, a white, deeply forked tail, and a glossy black cap and nape. Common terns breed from Alberta and Northwest Territories of Canada southward to Montana, and eastward to Newfoundland and New Jersey, southward along Atlantic Coast to South Carolina and Louisiana and also across Eurasia. They winter along the coasts from the southern United States southward to South America. Also Common Terns winter in Africa, Asia, and Australia. These terns inhabit sand and shell beaches, grassy uplands and rocky inland shores in North and South America, Eurasia, and northern Africa.

The Least Tern is the smaller of American terns and has a black cap, white forehead, gray mantle, white underparts, with yellow legs, and black on the outer primaries. The tail is short and forked. Least terns are found all along the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts from New England south through the Caribbean. Least terns prefer to nest on islands, marshes, and sometimes beaches of lakes and barrier beaches along the ocean. Most terns frequent estuaries, coastal lagoons, river sandbars, and sandy beaches, and can be sighted and easily identified by its tiny size and buoyant flirty flight.

Protection of nesting sites due to active management program locally and on military installations and protected lands has led to a population on the rebound for most of these birds. In some cases like the Cormorant, populations have rebounded so much that they are considered pests by some. Fishers in particular may dislike the birds because they have to compete with the Cormorant for the same fish. The biggest threat to these birds during the summer season in the Harbor area is loss of breeding habitat due to over development of shore areas and recreational use of beaches. The Least Tern is on the New Jersey's Endangered and Threatened Wildlife list due to unsuccessful breeding. This tern nests on the ground, where it is vulnerable to predators and to human activity such as beach recreation. Most parks have a program to educate the public about the nesting habits of these birds which includes physical protection in some cases in the form of beach closing or fencing off known nesting areas.



This entry was researched and written by Claire Antonucci, Rosemary Higgins and Cathy Yuhas of the New Jersey Sea Grant Consortium Extension Program. It is part of a larger project, "The Key Species of New York/New Jersey Harbor Estuary" produced with funding from the New York/New Jersey Harbor Estuary Program.