



# NEWS RELEASE

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## Black Skimmer Conservation on the Texas Coast

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The Black Skimmer is an iconic coastal seabird that can be found across the Texas coast. It nests on small islands and shell ridges in the bays. The species has declined by as much as 70% in the past 40 years, and they face multiple threats that continue to jeopardize their persistence in the state's waters. Low reproductive success is considered one potential driver of the decline, and this project aims to better understand the factors limiting their success. We are approaching this through multiple related lines of inquiry: GPS-tracking birds to determine how far (and to what habitats) they are traveling while raising young; determine frequency of supertidal events that wash out nesting colonies; assess frequency and causes of colony disturbance and their effect on colony success; evaluate prey resources that may be limiting; and assess knowledge and perceptions of coastal nesting waterbirds among coastal user groups.

In the first year of the study, we found that skimmers mostly forage within about 10 km of their nesting colony while provisioning their young, with occasional visits to more distant sites. There were no major supertidal events in 2022, but disturbance of nesting colonies was variable across sites. Colonies were occasionally disturbed by fishermen, and some were frequented by Crested Caracaras which result in flush responses potentially causing decreased reproductive success. Collaborators with Texas State University have been conducting in-person and push-to-web surveys of recreationists. Preliminary results indicate respondents perceive anglers as the largest threat to waterbirds and that a strategy to enhance self-governance among recreationists in remote spaces is required to mitigate disturbances to these avian species.

