

## **Gull, Tern & Skimmer Population Trends in Galveston Bay**

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The Texas colonial waterbird census data have been analyzed to determine population trends for 8 species of gulls, terns and skimmers (family Laridae), with similar feeding and nesting requirements, in Galveston Bay. Five nesting sites have been lost during the 1973-1998 period: Redfish Island, the Vingt-et-un Islands, Tiki Island, Down Deer Island, and Snake Island. Year-to-year variation in the number of breeding pairs has been very large for all species.

Three species have stable populations: laughing gulls (average 25,479, range 15,434 -36,582 breeding pairs), Forster's terns (average 1563, range 327-3083 pairs), and Caspian terns (average 117, range 0-450 pairs). Three species have shown statistically significant increases in population: royal terns (average 4446, range 0-18,175 pairs), Sandwich terns (average 2232, range 0-9060 pairs), and gull-billed terns (average 45, range 0-130 pairs). Two species have shown statistically significant decreases in population: black skimmers (average 1873, range 45-2035 pairs), and least terns (average 399, range 45-2035). The latter two species are apparently suffering from a shortage of nesting sites as both have resorted to nesting on gravel rooftops in recent years.

Large numbers of Sandwich terns have apparently migrated into the bay on several occasions. A substantial number of least terns may have left the bay in the mid-1970s. Some nesting islands, particularly Little Pelican Island and Jig Saw Island, are critical to the continued success of royal, Caspian and Sandwich terns.