

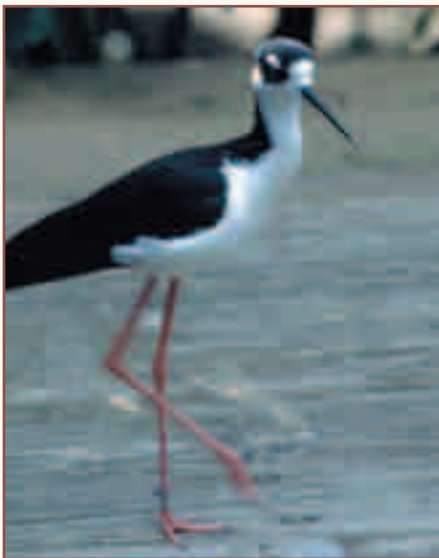
If you're looking for birds in the Lowcountry, you've got it made. Bird diversity reigns here more than anywhere else in the state. The Lowcountry also has some success stories that have area birders excited.

SHORE BIRDS

Ruddy Turnstone – This arctic-breeding bird's handsome chestnut, black and white colors make it easy to identify in breeding season. But in the Lowcountry it is usually seen in the winter, when its colors vary to brown and gray. It favors areas with little vegetation and lays its eggs in a grass-lined depression in the ground.



A year-round Lowcountry resident, the **American Oyster-Catcher** has a thick red bill and patchy coloration. A good swimmer and runner, it likes sandy and rocky coasts, often wading belly-deep in search of prey. The birds form small flocks apart from other shorebirds. They've been known to favor Bull's Island in South Carolina's Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge.



Few birds are more aptly named than the **Black-Necked Stilt**, whose black and white plumage and long dark pinkish legs are distinctive as they actively search for insects, snails and crayfish. The stilt breeds in small colonies in the Lowcountry near the mudflats, shallow marshes, ponds and flooded fields it favors. If you wander too close to a nesting bird, the stilt will fly at you, splash, run ashore and feign a crippled wing to try to distract you from its nest on the ground.

LOWCOUNTRY SONG BIRDS

Painted bunting - The red, green and blue adult male is striking. A member of the finch family, it frequents Lowcountry birdfeeders and baths, but can be spotted in brushy, weedy fields, hedges and in roadside shrubbery. Buntings breed in the Lowcountry, but most head south in winter. Many song birds bluff when defending territory. Painted buntings will fight until one of the males has lost an eye or has even been killed.



The tiny yellow-throated, blue-gray **Northern Parula** is one of many wood warblers that pass through the Lowcountry during migrations. If they can find a suitable clump of hanging Spanish moss, cluster of hemlock or spruce twigs, they'll nest here. At times, they seem fearless when you approach. They are busy, buzzing their high-pitched call and scouring the treetops of wooded swamps and roadside parks of the region for all sorts of insect pests.



Carolina wren – South Carolina's state bird can be heard year round in the Lowcountry. Its "tea kettle!, tea kettle!, tea kettle!" call brightens the gloomiest of mornings. Seeing the bird may be trickier. It often sings from hidden perches. You will find the bird in woods, brushy fields and residential areas. Any cavity, box, hole or flower pot – even in garages or sheds – is fair game for a wren nest.

LOWCOUNTRY BIRDING RESOURCES

The Coastal Discovery Museum, (www.coastaldiscovery.org), aside from nature exhibits, leads two guided boat nature tours to Pinckney Island each week, beach walks, dolphin cruises and kayak tours of Jarvis Creek where wading birds can be viewed close up.

The Sea Pines Resort (www.seapines.com), conducts eco-tours of the various habitats found in Sea Pines.

The Charleston Natural History Society (www.homestead.com/cnhsaudubon/), provides links to nature centers and information regarding various Lowcountry bird walks.

The Hilton Head Audubon Society lists its birding activities and links

at: www.hiltonheadaudubon.org. One link is for Skimmer Boat Tours for those who'd like to see shore birds that are harder to see from land.

For additional information regarding birds of the Lowcountry, you can also call the Federal Department of Wildlife and Fisheries at (843) 844-2473 and the South Carolina Center for Birds of Prey at: (843) 928-3494.

Both the ACE Basin and the Savannah NWR have driving tours. Victoria Bluff State Heritage Preserve, a plant preserve near Hilton Head, is a good place for birding, as is the Pinckney Island NWR, between Hilton Head Island and the mainland.