



For The Birds

Boat and personal watercraft operators share the waters and marshes of Barnegat Bay with a remarkable number of bird species. Coastal areas such as the Barnegat Bay estuary have a high bird diversity. The way that we operate our watercraft can have a direct impact on the ability of these birds to survive on the Bay. Impacts that boaters can have on Bay birds range from damage to the marsh and the foundation of the Bay's food chain to direct disturbance of nesting and feeding birds. Boaters must recognize that they share the bay with other animals and need to be responsible in order to minimize their impacts on Bay life.



Fig. 1

Terns, skimming shorebirds; some groups that depend on the Bay and marshes. During the spring, skimmers and terns nest on the small, fragile line of salt marsh wrack (area where dead vegetation and other debris accumulate at the high tide line) found close to the water's edge as well as on open beaches. These marsh nesting birds usually feed within of their breeding colonies in shallow bay areas and in tidal creeks. Adults and their young use out the summer. Herons, egrets and ibis are birds that nest on marsh islands in Barnegat shallow near shore waters and small tidal a few hundred yards and salt-marsh pools these areas through-long-legged wading Bay and feed in Creeks.



Fig. 2

Wetlands associated with sedge islands are important resting and feeding areas for migratory waterfowl (ducks and geese) on the Atlantic flyway. Osprey are birds of prey that live in marshes along sedge islands during the spring and summer and feed primarily on fish in the back bays (Figure 1). Many osprey platforms have been built throughout the bay area and are used as nesting sites during the spring and summer. Migrating shorebirds, such as greater yellowlegs (Figure 2) and semipalmated sandpipers, feed in the Bay's shallow mudflats.

MAKE AN EFFORT TO PROTECT BARNEGAT BAY BIRDS AND THEIR HABITAT

Everyone has a responsibility to protect the Barnegat Bay ecosystem for future generations. Take the time to learn about Barnegat Bay's habitats, plants, and animals and ways to prevent degradation from boating activities. To lessen boating impacts upon the birds of Barnegat Bay, reduce your speed, wake, and engine noise; avoid nesting and feeding areas; and do not enter shallow areas.

**BOAT AND PERSONAL WATERCRAFT OPERATORS...
HELP LESSEN YOUR IMPACTS ON BARNEGAT BAY BIRDS BY:**

Reducing boat wake - Excessive boat wake causes shoreline erosion; so slow down to reduce your boat wake.

Do not operate in small tidal creeks and very shallow waters and near the shoreline - Operating in these areas can disrupt/disturb feeding birds, especially long-legged wading birds (herons, egrets, and ibis).

Avoid operating near nesting colonies - Open boats where the operator and passenger are visible to the birds, can disrupt nesting, exposing eggs and chicks to heat and predators. Repeated disturbance can lead to colony abandonment.

Avoid operating in shallow seagrass regions - Seagrasses can be destroyed by boat propellers, wakes, and prop wash. Seagrasses provide shelter for many small fishes and other "bird food" and forms the foundation for part of the Bay's food chain.

Do not operate at fast speeds near shore and in small creeks - Boat wake causes erosion of marsh banks. Slow to "no wake" speed when operating near marsh banks and in narrow creeks.

Avoid marked or known nesting sites - Many of the most vulnerable birds nest on marsh islands and on the salt marsh wrack near creek banks.

Reduce boat noise near nesting sites, near shore regions and narrow tidal creeks - Boat noise can prevent birds from getting adequate rest, food, and properly incubating eggs.

Avoid operating near marsh islands - Many of the most vulnerable birds nest on marsh islands and on the salt marsh wrack near creek banks.

Avoid osprey nesting platforms - Many nesting platforms are found throughout the bay. Osprey build nests on these platforms in the spring.

Do not operate in narrow tidal creeks - Operate in these areas only when fishing, crabbing, or clamming. Travel only at "no wake" speed.

Figure 1. Osprey (bird of prey) by wildlife photographer Richard King

Figure 2. Greater Yellowlegs (migrating shorebirds) by wildlife photographer Richard King

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