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Audubon says watch out for nesting birds

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For those planning on visiting one of Florida's 1,100 miles of beaches in the coming weeks, Audubon of Florida has issued a warning to watch out for the birds who call these beaches home.

It is nesting season for many types of birds, and according to conservationists, if the mother bird is frightened away from the nest, her eggs can fry in the hot Florida sun in minutes.

Dave Kandz, conservation chair for the St. Petersburg Audubon Society, said Audubon volunteers, armed with telescopes, will be visiting some beaches to educate beachgoers about how to protect nesting birds.

"We're not really out there to be enforcers, although it is illegal to harass a threatened species," Kandz said. "We're mostly out there to educate the public, and to show people through the telescopes what these beautiful nesting birds look like."

Nesting birds find even leashed dogs to be a threat, said Kandz.

"They see a four-footed predator they might liken to a raccoon or a coyote, then they fly up off the nest and try to mob the predator, but that leaves their eggs exposed to the hot sun."

Migrating birds, such as the Red Knots, use Florida beaches to rest and replenish their fat before making the 2,500 mile trip back to the Arctic. Simply avoiding them may not seem like much, said Kandz, but small actions add up to saving lives – even species.

"If you lose one colony, in the great scheme of things, that may not seem so important," said Kandz. "But, if you lose 10 colonies or 100 colonies over time, now you're looking at a big difference in the future survivability of the species."

Some bird nurseries are roped off, but not all have this protection, and beach nests are nearly invisible. To be on the safe side, Audubon recommends giving flocks of birds a wide berth, and keeping dogs off beaches unless it's a designated dog beach.

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