

Black Skimmer

Rynchops niger

The remarkable bill of the Black Skimmer sets it apart from all other American birds. The large red and black bill is knife-thin and the lower mandible is longer than the upper. The bird drags the lower bill through the water as it flies along, hoping to catch small fish.

Keys to Identification

Adult Description

- Medium-sized to large waterbird.
- Long red and black bill; lower half longest.
- Black back and cap.
- Underparts white.
- Very short red legs.
- Long, pointed wings.

Immature Description

Similar to adult, but with mottled black-and-white back and head.



Cool Facts

- The Black Skimmer is the only American representative of the skimmer family. The other two, rather similar, species are the African Skimmer and the Indian Skimmer. All use the same unusual feeding method.
- At hatching, the two mandibles of a young Black Skimmer are equal in length, but by fledging at four weeks, the lower mandible is already nearly 1 cm longer than the upper.

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 15.7 - 19.7.1inches
- Weight - 7.5 - 15.8 ounces