

[From Summer 2005]

Colonial and Beach Waterbirds on Fisherman Island

Fisherman Island National Wildlife Refuge has long been a crucial breeding ground for Brown Pelicans, American Oystercatchers, and Royal Terns. Yet this year's recent stormy weather has proven problematic for many of the nesting shorebirds on Fisherman Island.

This year approximately 450-550 pairs of Brown Pelicans have been seen nesting on Fisherman Island National Wildlife Refuge. Despite storms and nearby gulls attempting to predate the pelican nests while parents are absent, the pelican nests seem to be doing well. Pelican chicks began hatching in mid-May and at this time nearly every nest on Fisherman Island has chicks. However, for other shorebirds, the weather has wreaked havoc on nests and breeding areas. The recent storms that came through the weekend of May 6 caused damage to the beach area which is nesting habitat for Royal Terns and American Oystercatchers (AMOY). So far no Royal Tern nests have been found nesting on Fisherman Island. As for the American Oystercatchers, they have faced adverse weather but many are still hanging on and continuing to nest on the island.

Early in the season 33 AMOY nests were found and their progress was being monitored by the refuge biologist Pam Denmon. This year small video cameras are being used to monitor several of the nests to obtain round the clock data of nest productivity and also determine what are the main predators depredating Oystercatcher nests. Yet, this season the main effect on American Oystercatcher nests has been the weather. With the storms and wind, especially earlier in May, the AMOYs of Fisherman Island are having a difficult breeding season. Twenty of the 33 nests originally found were washed out earlier this month when the wind and rains caused the tide to rise higher than normal. One of the cameras placed on a nest caught footage of the destruction as a wave crashed on a nest causing it to disappear. Luckily the storms happened early enough in the season leaving time for renesting to occur. To date there have been 16 renest sites found and some of the nests which survived the storms earlier in the year have begun to see chicks hatch. It is estimated that 44-50 pairs of American Oystercatchers are present on Fisherman Island.