

# Seabird Protection & Avoidance Tips



## NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE

Office of Sustainable Fisheries



### HOW CAN I HELP SEABIRDS?

#### Do

- Scan the surrounding sky, land, and water before casting your line to keep seabirds from stealing your bait.
- Use barbless fishing hooks, artificial lures and weighted fishing lines to avoid hooking seabirds
- Recycle or dispose of fishing hooks and line in the trash and keep the water and surrounding areas free of debris. Learn more about the Monofilament Recovery & Recycling Program (MRRP) effort at [www.fishinglinerecycling.org](http://www.fishinglinerecycling.org)
- Avoid disturbing resting or feeding seabirds by steering your boat around the flock rather than through them.

#### DON'T

- Don't feed seabirds or other wildlife.
- Don't begin chumming the water if seabirds are near your fishing boat.
- Don't fish near seabird roosting and nesting areas as disruptions may often cause birds to abandon their nest.
- Don't leave fishing poles unattended with bait dangling from the hook.

Seabirds live in a variety of habitats in and around shallow water and coastal environments. They represent a vital part of marine ecology and are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. In fact, most of the 312 species of seabirds you may encounter while fishing are likely to be protected by law, with some classified as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Depending on the geographic region, fishermen in the U.S. can observe species of Albatross, Cormorants, Gannet, Loons, Pelicans, Puffins, Sea Gulls, Storm-Petrels, Shearwaters, and Terns, among others.



### Be Aware of Seabird Behavior

Seabirds feed on smaller fish that most anglers use for bait, so they typically won't challenge a fisherman for his catch, however, the seabird's hunting methods still put them in danger of getting hooked or entangled in a fisherman's line.

Many seabirds feed on krill, fish, squid or other prey items at the ocean's surface, while some, such as Cormorants, are known to dive to depths of more than 100 ft below the waves to catch a fish. In another technique, seabirds in flight will "plunge dive" into the water in pursuit of a fast-moving fish. Brown Pelicans, for example, can make vertical dives from more than 70 feet above the water when chasing their prey. Young seabirds, especially young pelicans, are particularly susceptible to being ensnared by fishing line.

### What If I Accidentally Hook a Seabird?

In the unfortunate event of a hooked seabird, don't cut or break the line. If the bird is injured or severely tangled, the bird could easily drown, die of starvation or succumb to a predator attack. If you do accidentally hook a seabird while fishing, use the following tips to avoid further injury to the bird or yourself:

- Reel the bird in slowly and gently. Don't lift the bird by the line, instead use a dip net if available. If you are on a pier walk the line to shore, or use a hoop net positioned under the bird to lift it.
- Get control of bird's bill or beak before taking it from the net to prevent pecking of your face and hands. Cover its head and eyes with a cloth to calm it (do not obstruct breathing), and keep the wings folded in their normal closed position. Always maintain control of the bird's head and body.
- When removing the hook from a seabird, never simply grab the hook and yank it out! Grasp the hook and carefully snip off the barb, then you can easily back the hook out without causing further injury. Cut off and remove any tangled fishing line.
- Carefully, release the seabird. Call the local Game Warden if the bird is seriously injured or deeply hooked. Keep the bird calm and restrained until assistance arrives.

### How Can I Help Seabirds?

There are numerous threats to seabirds and the need for protection continues to increase. People often unwittingly disturb seabirds in their nesting or roosting sites through the introduction of loud noises, toxic chemicals, excessive artificial light, and other stresses.

Humane and respectful treatment of seabirds is critical to the future of fishing. Anglers must work to reverse negative public opinion of the Angler/Seabird relationship to prevent fishing closures or other limits. If you witness the mistreatment of a seabird, please notify your area's local Game Warden immediately.