

Birds of Coastal Georgia



Created by Lindsay Bertch (2009)



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Large Soaring Birds

Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*)



Summer



Immature



Winter

Photos courtesy of Lindsay Bertch

Size: 6 ½' wing span

Description: A large dark bird seen very frequently. In the summer, the adult has a white head and a brown neck with a white stripe; in the winter, the entire head and neck are white. Immature pelicans have a brown head and neck.

Similar Species: The **American white pelican** is mostly white.

Behavior: Can be seen around all coastal waterways. Most often seen sitting on pilings or diving bill-first after fish. May also be flying just above the water's surface.

American White Pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*)



Photos courtesy of Fran Lapolla

Size: 8-9 ½' wing span

Description: A very large white bird with black wing tips. The bill and feet are orange/yellow.

Similar Species: The **brown pelican** is brown with a white head as an adult or with a mottled brown head as an immature.

Behavior: Often seen in large flocks soaring or floating on the estuary or ocean water. Fishes from the surface of the water by plunging in the bill while floating. May fish in groups.

Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)



Photo courtesy of Fran Lapolla



Photo courtesy of Lindsay Bertch

Size: 7-8' wing span

Description: A large soaring bird with a white head and white tail. Bill and feet are yellow, body is a dark brown.

Similar Species: The smaller **osprey** has a dark eye stripe and white breast. The **red-tailed hawk** has a dark head and is much smaller.

Behavior: Often seen perched in trees or soaring overhead near estuaries. Builds very large nests in live trees.

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)



Photos courtesy of Lindsay Bertch

Size: 6' wing span

Description: A large raptor with a dark brown back and white belly. Head is mostly white with a dark stripe through the eye. Note dark brown shoulder patches seen in flight.

Similar Species: The adult **bald eagle**'s head is entirely white and its breast is brown. The smaller **red-tailed hawk** has a brown head.

Behavior: Often seen perched in trees or soaring overhead. Hovers above estuary waters before plunging feet first into the water to catch fish. Builds nests in dead trees, on top of pilings, and on channel markers.

Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*)



Photo courtesy of Fran Lapolla

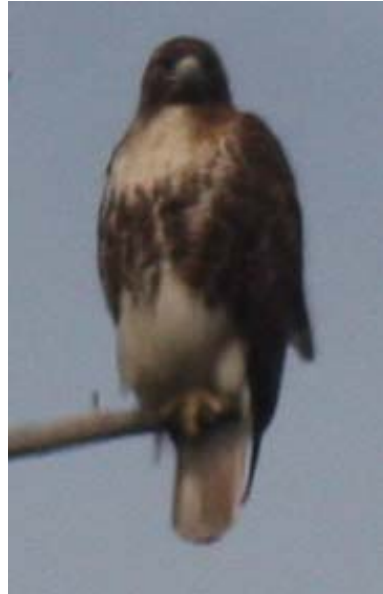


Photo courtesy of Lindsay Bertch

Size: 19-25" from beak to tail tip

Description: A large hawk with a brown back, white breast with band of brown, and a brown head. The tail is white underneath and a red/brown on top. Immature has brown/gray tail and some banding on the breast.

Similar Species: The larger **bald eagle** has a white head and brown breast. The larger **osprey** has a white head with a brown stripe.

Behavior: Most common hawk. Can be seen soaring overhead or may be perched in trees, telephone poles, and fence posts.

Northern Gannet (*Morus bassanus*)



Photo courtesy of Angela Bliss



Photos courtesy of
Lindsay Bertch



Size: 38" from beak to tail tip

Description: A large white sea bird with black wing tips, yellow-tinged head, white beak, and a pointed tail. Immature is brown with a light colored belly.

Similar Species: None. Much larger than gulls and not often present inshore where egrets are common.

Behavior: Can be seen near and over the ocean soaring and diving head first into the water in the winter.

Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*)



Photos courtesy of Lindsay Bertch

Size: 5' wing span

Description: A large black scavenger with a black head and pale gray legs. Tips of the wing undersides are silver. When soaring, keeps its wings level and flaps frequently.

Similar Species: The larger **turkey vulture** has a red head, a long tail, and silver along the entire underside of the wing. When soaring, the turkey vulture holds its wings in a shallow "V" and rarely flaps them.

Behavior: Usually seen perched in the tops of trees or soaring overhead; may also be found near road kill.

Turkey Vulture (*Coragyps aura*)



Photos courtesy of Lindsay Bertch

Size: 6' wing span

Description: A large black scavenger with a red head and pale pink legs. When soaring, holds its wings in a shallow "V" shape and rarely flaps them.

Similar Species: The smaller **black vulture** has a black head, a short tail, and only the tips of the wing undersides are silver. When soaring, the black vulture holds its wings level and flaps frequently.

Behavior: Usually seen soaring overhead with an unsteady rocking motion or perched near road kill.

References

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