

Other Ranks:

- NYS 2025 SGCN status: High Priority Species of Greatest Conservation Need
- COSEWIC: Not listed in Canada
- IUCN Red List: Least Concern
- Northeast Regional SGCN: RSGCN

Status Discussion:

New York is near the northern limit of the Black Skimmer’s breeding range, with breeding populations being restricted to beaches, dredge spoil islands, sandy non-barrier islands, and recently, salt marsh islands along the coast of southern Long Island (New York Natural Heritage Program 2009). Much of the former breeding habitat has been lost due to development and recreational activities along Long Island’s beaches, resulting in the Black Skimmer and other beach-nesting species to nest on salt marsh islands (Gochfeld and Burger 1994; McGowen and Corwin 2008).

II. Abundance and Distribution Trends

Region	Present?	Abundance	Distribution	Time Frame	Listing status or S-Rank	SGCN?
North America	Yes	Declining	Unknown	BBS 1966-2022 trend for US		
Northeastern US	Yes	Declining	Unknown	BBS 1966-2022 trend		RSGCN
New York	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	BBS 1966-2022 not credible trend	SC; S2	Yes
Connecticut	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	SNA	No
Massachusetts	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	S1B,S1N	No
New Jersey	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	BBS 1966-2022 not credible trend	E; S1B,S1N	Yes
Pennsylvania	No	Unknown	-	Unknown		No
Vermont	No	Unknown	-	Unknown		No
Ontario	No	Unknown	-	Unknown		
Quebec	No	Unknown	-	Unknown		

Column options

Present?: Yes; No; Unknown; No data; (blank) or Choose an Item

Abundance and Distribution: Declining; Increasing; Stable; Unknown; Extirpated; N/A; (blank) or Choose an item

SGCN?: Yes; No; Unknown; (blank) or Choose an item

Monitoring in New York

(specify any monitoring activities or regular surveys that are conducted in New York):

Black skimmers are surveyed annually as part of the Long Island Colonial Waterbird and Piping Plover (LICWPP). Additionally, beach maintenance in preparation for black skimmer breeding season occurs at Nickerson Beach, NY (Smith 2015).

Trends Discussion

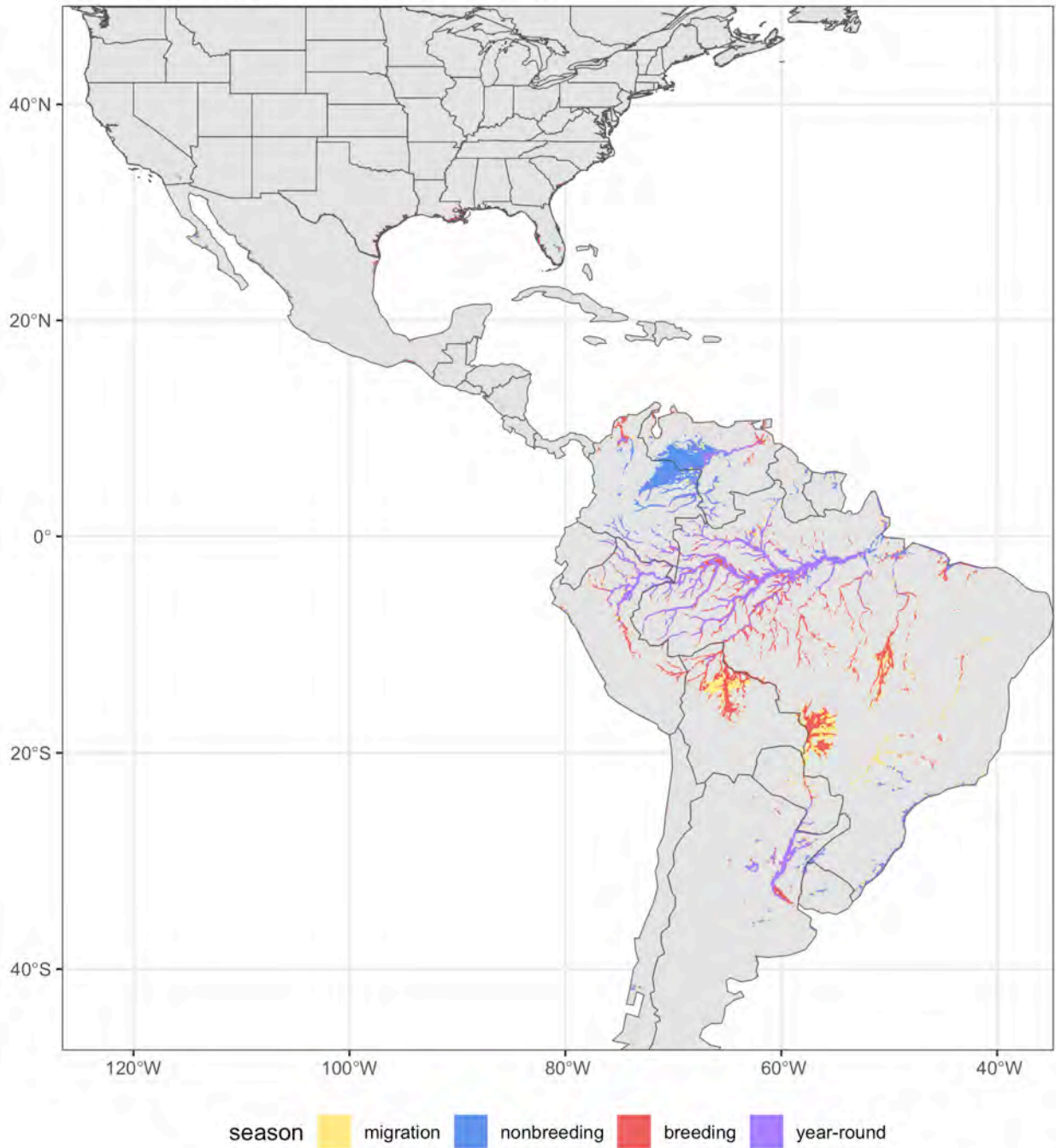
(insert map of North American/regional distribution and status):

NY Heritage short term trends: Black Skimmer populations in New York appear to be variable, with some degree of yearly fluctuation due to the timing of formal survey periods. The first Breeding Bird Atlas (1980-1985) had confirmed breeding Black Skimmers in 23 blocks mostly along the southern shore of Long Island. The second Atlas (2000-2005) saw reduced numbers of skimmers with confirmed breeding in 18 blocks, again, mostly along southern Long Island (McGowen and Corwin 2008). Black Skimmers are surveyed annually and over the last eight years, their numbers have ranged from a low of 265 in 2004 to a high of 622 in 2008 with an average of 445 pairs (Gibbons 2008). These numbers may be slightly low as Black Skimmers nest later in the season than the June survey period and numbers for the peak nesting season may be missed. About 16 out of 49 colonies are still active (New York Natural Heritage Program 2009).



Figure 1. Breeding range for black skimmer (eBird).

Year-round range map for Black Skimmer



Range map data from eBird Status and Trends, Data Version: 2022; Released: 2023

Figure 2. Full (year-round) range for black skimmer (eBird).

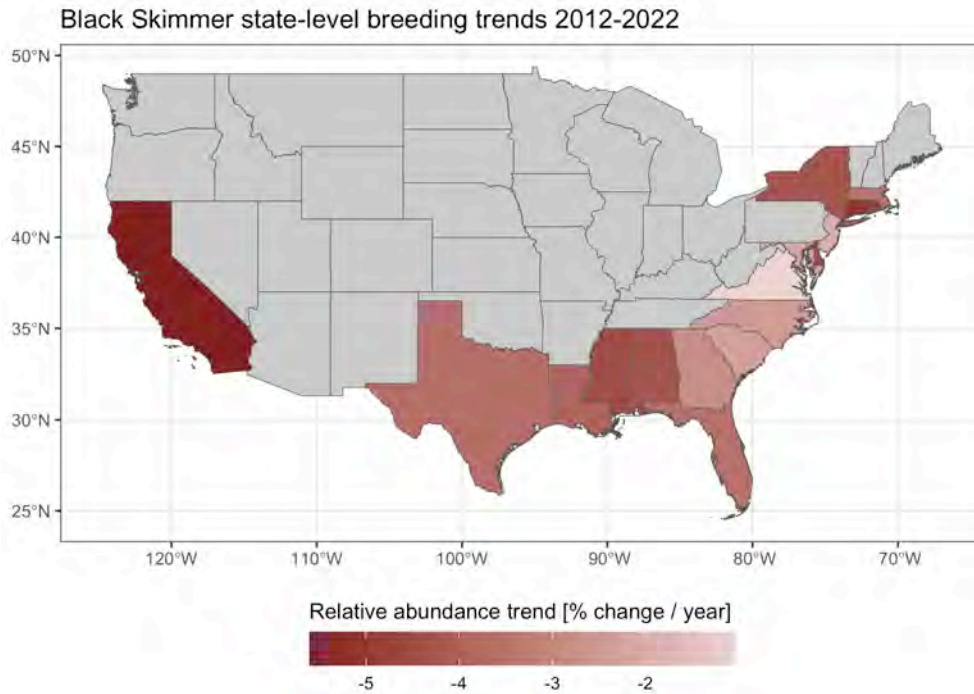


Figure 3. Breeding trends, by state, for black skimmer (eBird).

III. New York Rarity

(provide map, numbers, and percent of state occupied)



Figure 4: NYS breeding range for black skimmer based on eBird data.

Details of historic and current occurrence:

NY Heritage long term trends: Black Skimmers have been seen in New York since the mid 1800s (Gochfeld and Burger 1994). They were first discovered breeding on Long Island in 1934 at Gilgo State Park (Vogt 1934). They were common breeders on Long Island throughout the middle of the 20th century, with an average of over 400 pairs at 10-13 colonies reported during surveys conducted from 1974-1978 (Buckley and Buckley 1980).

The first Breeding Bird Atlas (BBA) (1980-85) documented occupancy in 37 blocks, 0.7% of the survey blocks statewide (Andrle and Carroll 1988). The second BBA (2000-05) documented occupancy in 25 blocks, 0.5% of the survey blocks statewide (McGowan and Corwin 2008).

The third BBA (2020-25) is currently underway and utilizes a different number and layout of survey blocks across New York, making direct comparison with the first two Atlases difficult. There were 5,333 blocks in the first and second BBAs, and there are 5,710 blocks in the current BBA, of which 1,815 are considered priority blocks. To date, black skimmer has been documented in 22 priority blocks, 0.3% of all priority blocks statewide during the third BBA (NY BBA III Overview, 2024).

New York’s Contribution to Species North American Range:

Based on eBird data, 0.48 percent of the population breeds in New York, while 0 percent of the non-breeding population occurs in New York. Among all states with breeding populations, New York ranks 12 of 15.

Percent of North American Range in NY	Classification of NY Range	Distance to core population, if not in NY
1-25%	Peripheral	

Column options

Percent of North American Range in NY: 100% (endemic); 76-99%; 51-75%; 26-50% 1-25%; 0%; Choose an item

Classification of NY Range: Core; Peripheral; Disjunct; (blank) or Choose an item

IV. Primary Habitat or Community Type

(from NY crosswalk of NE Aquatic, Marine, or Terrestrial Habitat Classification Systems):

NatureServe broad habitat types: Sand/dune, Riparian, Deep water, Shallow water, River mouth/tidal river, Herbaceous wetland, Bay/sound, Lagoon, Tidal flat/shore, Low gradient, BIG RIVER, Near shore

NY Natural Heritage Communities: High salt marsh, Low salt marsh, Marine dredge spoil shore, Maritime beach

Habitat or Community Type Trend in New York

Habitat Specialist?	Indicator Species?	Habitat/ Community Trend	Time frame of Decline/ Increase
No	No	Unknown	Unknown

Column options

Habitat Specialist and Indicator Species: Yes; No; Unknown; (blank) or Choose an item.

Habitat/Community Trend: Declining; Stable; Increasing; Unknown; (blank) or Choose an item.

Habitat Discussion:

Black Skimmers nest on open sandy beaches, barrier island beaches, dredge spoil islands, typically sharing these areas with terns, gulls, and plovers. They will also nest on open areas of salt marsh islands if suitable beach habitat is unavailable (Bent 1921; Erwin 1977; Gochfeld and Burger 1994). Foraging habitat, which is usually a considerable distance away from nesting areas, includes shallow and tidal waters of bays, inlets, marshes, estuaries, and salt marsh pools (Arthur 1921; Tompkins 1951).

Primarily coastal waters, including bays, estuaries, lagoons and mudflats in migration and winter (AOU 1983); also quiet waters of rivers and lakes (Stiles and Skutch 1989). Rest on mudflats, sandbars, beaches. Nests primarily near coasts on sandy beaches, shell banks, coastal and estuary islands, on wrack and drift of salt marshes (especially where traditional beach nesting areas have been lost or where Herring gulls have become abundant), along tropical rivers, salt pond levees (southern California), and locally, on gravelly rooftops; also on dredged material sites. Nests usually in association with or near terns. See Spendelow and Patton (1988) for further details.

V. Species Demographics and Life History

Breeder in NY?	Non-breeder in NY?	Migratory Only?	Summer Resident?	Winter Resident?	Anadromous/Catadromous?
Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No

Column options

First 5 fields: Yes; No; Unknown; (blank) or Choose an item.

Anadromous/Catadromous: Anadromous; Catadromous; (blank) or Choose an item.

Species Demographics and Life History Discussion

(include information about species life span, reproductive longevity, reproductive capacity, age to maturity, and ability to disperse and colonize):

Roosts in flocks of up to 100s or 1000s. Forages up to 5.2-8 kilometers from colony (summarized in Gochfeld and Burger 1994).

VI. Threats

Loss of suitable nesting and foraging habitat due to development, recreation, and erosion pose the greatest threat to the Black Skimmer. During the nesting season, the birds are often subject to disturbances such as beach grooming, recreation, vandalism, and predation by cats, crows, gulls, fox, and raccoons. These disturbances may cause nest abandonment and reduce productivity (Gochfeld and Burger 1994; Rosenblatt 2006; McGowen and Corwin 2008).

Bioaccumulation of toxins can occur in black skimmers, which have been associated with reduced breeding success, reduced hatch rates, deformities, and disrupt neurological behavior (Burger 2002, Smith 2015)

Some beaches in New York permit municipal vehicles to drive on beaches to allow access to remote sections of the coast for anglers. These vehicles are usually equipped with safety gear and comply with guidelines. However, driving near nesting areas still acts as a disturbance to colonies and can result in direct mortality from strikes, or death to chicks who may become stuck in tire ruts (Smith 2015). Watercrafts can also create wakes that disturb foraging efficiency

In New York's marine district, many social events take place near nesting habitats. Noise from these events can cause disturbances in colonies, as well as increase the chance of human interaction/disturbances with individuals (Smith 2015).

Threat Level 1	Threat Level 2	Threat Level 3	Spatial Extent	Severity	Immediacy	Trend	Certainty
6. Human Intrusions & Disturbance	6.1 Recreational Activities	-	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.
7. Natural System Modifications	7.3 Other Ecosystem Modifications	(control of overwash)	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.
8. Invasive & Other Problematic Species	8.1 Invasive Non-Native Plants & Animals	(domestic cats)	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.
8. Invasive & Other Problematic Species	8.2 Problematic Native Plants & Animals	(human-subsidized predators)	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.
11. Climate Change	11.5 Storms & Severe Weather	-	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.

Table 1. Threats to black skimmer

Are there regulatory mechanisms that protect the species or its habitat in New York?

Yes:  **No:** **Unknown:**

If yes, describe mechanism and whether adequate to protect species/habitat:

This species is included in the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 (16 U.S.C. 703-712) and is protected as a native species under the NYS Environmental Conservation Law. It also receives additional protections as a species listed as Special Concern in New York State.

Describe knowledge of management/conservation actions that are needed for recovery/conservation, or to eliminate, minimize, or compensate for the identified threats:

Continue to protect nesting and foraging areas by installing fencing, posting interpretive signs, performing yearly surveying and monitoring, conducting educational programs, and controlling predators. Work with landowners to participate in management activities. Habitat restoration practices such as removing vegetation from areas that are overgrown and depositing dredge spoil to replenish eroded beaches should be continued. Continue to develop and conduct management and habitat restoration plans along with state, local, and federal partners. Encourage beach maintenance activities to be conducted before or after nesting season. If possible, areas where birds are known to be nesting should be closed off until chicks have fledged. Encourage beach-goers with dogs to comply with the local Leash Laws (Gochfeld and Burger 1994; Rosenblatt 2006; McGowen and Corwin 2008).

Placing beach stewards at black skimmer nesting sites would allow the protection of colonies, as well as the documentation of disturbances to colonies (Smith 2015).

Action Category	Action	Description
A.1 Direct Habitat Management	A.1.0.0.0 Direct Habitat management	Site/area management
A.1 Direct Habitat Management	A.1.1.0.0 Manage plants, animals, fungi, or bacteria	Invasive/Problematic species control
B.3 Outreach	B.3.1.4.0 Public outreach and information	Awareness & Communications
C.6 Design and Plan Conservation	C.6.5.0.0 Conservation Planning	Site/Area protection Resource/Habitat Protection

Action Category	Action	Description
C.6 Design and Plan Conservation	C.6.5.1.3 Develop a conservation, management, or restoration plan for protected private lands	Habitat/Natural process restoration
C.10 Institutional Development	C.10.2.0.0 External support and organizational development	Alliance and Partnership Development

Table 2. Recommended conservation actions for *black skimmer*.

Potential tasks from NYSDEC Black Skimmer management plan (2015):

- Beach maintenance (cleanup, regrading)
- Wrack Mats
- Habitat restoration (beach nourishment, dune restoration, vegetative community restoration, marsh island restoration using dredged sediments)
- Social attractions (partnership w/ other orgs, decoys, audio calls)
- Predator/Disturbance control (symbolic fencing, remove artificial perches, predator management)
- BMPs (walkways, motorized vehicles, discourage feeding, trash removal, dogpark/restriction areas, firework use)

VII. References

This SSA drew heavily from these resources:

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