



Coastal Carolina Wildlife Post-breeding Dispersal Brings a Rare Visitor

Many wading birds wander extensively before reaching their breeding age. They generally return to their natal colonies to breed, especially males.

Reddish Egrets, inhabitants of coastal lagoons in Gulf Coast states, disperse from their natal area (mostly juveniles) in late spring or summer traveling as far north as our coast.

Before 1900, they were almost eliminated from the United States by plume hunters; however, their population has somewhat recovered to nearly 2,000 breeding pairs.

Considered very rare in North Carolina, approximately a half-dozen have been reported in our state this year including a juvenile I photographed on the west end of Oak Island.

Reddish Egrets use a disturb-and-chase foraging method, finding and chasing schools of small fish across mudflats. They perform a wild dance that combines running, jumping, flying, and wing flicking. Often they run forward with wings extended, stop, and bring both wings overhead to form a shadow that seems to attract fish.

John Ennis

