

# Guide to the Marine Birds of Zuma Beach

Malibu, California

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name \_\_\_\_\_ per \_\_\_\_\_

**SHOREBIRDS:**

(BIRDS SEEN MOSTLY ON THE SAND)

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Factual information and identifications are based on  
 the Audubon Society book: David Allen Sibley,  
*The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Western North America*,  
 2001, Knopf Publishing, NY.

**SHOREBIRDS:**

**\*\*pale gray upper**

**\*\*dark shoulder patch**

**\*\*beak short black & straight**

**\*\*3rd SMALLEST BIRD SEEN AT ZUMA BEACH !!**

**\*\* black and white wing stripes when seen in flight**



**Feeding position. Typical colors.**



**Always seen running on sand.**



**In flight.**

**SHOREBIRDS - BIRDS SEEN MOSTLY ON THE SAND:**

**Sanderling  
Calidris alba**

**8 inches.**

**Pure white belly. Dark shoulder patch.**

**Pale gray upper body.**

**In flight notice black and white striped wings.**

**Breeding plumage is brownish and mottled.**

**Almost always seen running.**



**Breeding colors - in Spring ONLY.**

**THE MOST COMMON OF THE TINY SHOREBIRDS.**

**SHOREBIRDS:**



**SHOREBIRDS:**



AN EXTREMELY RARE  
SHOREBIRD at  
ZUMA BEACH !



- \*\*dark brown upper
- \*\*beak orange and black
- \*\*breast band goes completely around body
- \*\*2nd SMALLEST BIRD SEEN AT ZUMA BEACH !!

SHOREBIRDS - BIRDS SEEN  
MOSTLY ON THE SAND:

**Semipalmated Plover  
Charandrius semipalmatus**

7.25 inches.

Generally common on open sand beaches and mud flats.  
At Zuma Beach - one of the most rarely seen shorebirds.

Slightly smaller than *Calidris alba*, but slightly  
larger than *Charandrius alexandrinus*.

Dark brown upper body.  
Dark cheeks and orange legs.

**SHOREBIRDS:**



**SHOREBIRDS:**



Often sits in small depressions in the dry sand.



A VERY RARE  
SHOREBIRD at  
ZUMA BEACH !

\*\*pale gray-brown

\*\*beak black at all stages

\*\*breast band does not  
go completely around body

\*\*SMALLEST BIRD SEEN AT  
ZUMA BEACH !!



**Snowy Plover  
Charandrius alexandrinus**

Generally uncommon but increasing population due to protection of habitat.

At Zuma Beach a recently common bird at the Trancas end of the beach (Tower 8 and to the west)

6.25 inches

Small, short, and stocky.

Pale grayish brown upper parts. Gray legs. Thin, dark bill.

**SHOREBIRDS:**

**SHOREBIRDS:**



Above: breeding coloration April - September.

Very common at Zuma Beach.



For comparison: *Calidris alba*, on left *Pluvialis* on right-->

**SHOREBIRDS - BIRDS SEEN MOSTLY ON THE SAND:**

**Black-bellied Plover  
*Pluvialis squatarola***

11.5 inches - Medium-sized.  
Mostly seen one at a time.  
Short, stout bill.  
White tail and underwing in flight; also black armpit.  
Mottled above with white belly except Apr - Sept when belly turns dark black.

**SHOREBIRDS:**

**SHOREBIRDS:**



- \*\*broad wings with bold stripes
- \*\*gray outer colors
- \*\*bill straight and long
- \*\*one of the largest shorebirds

Very common at Zuma Beach.

**SHOREBIRDS - BIRDS SEEN MOSTLY ON THE SAND:**

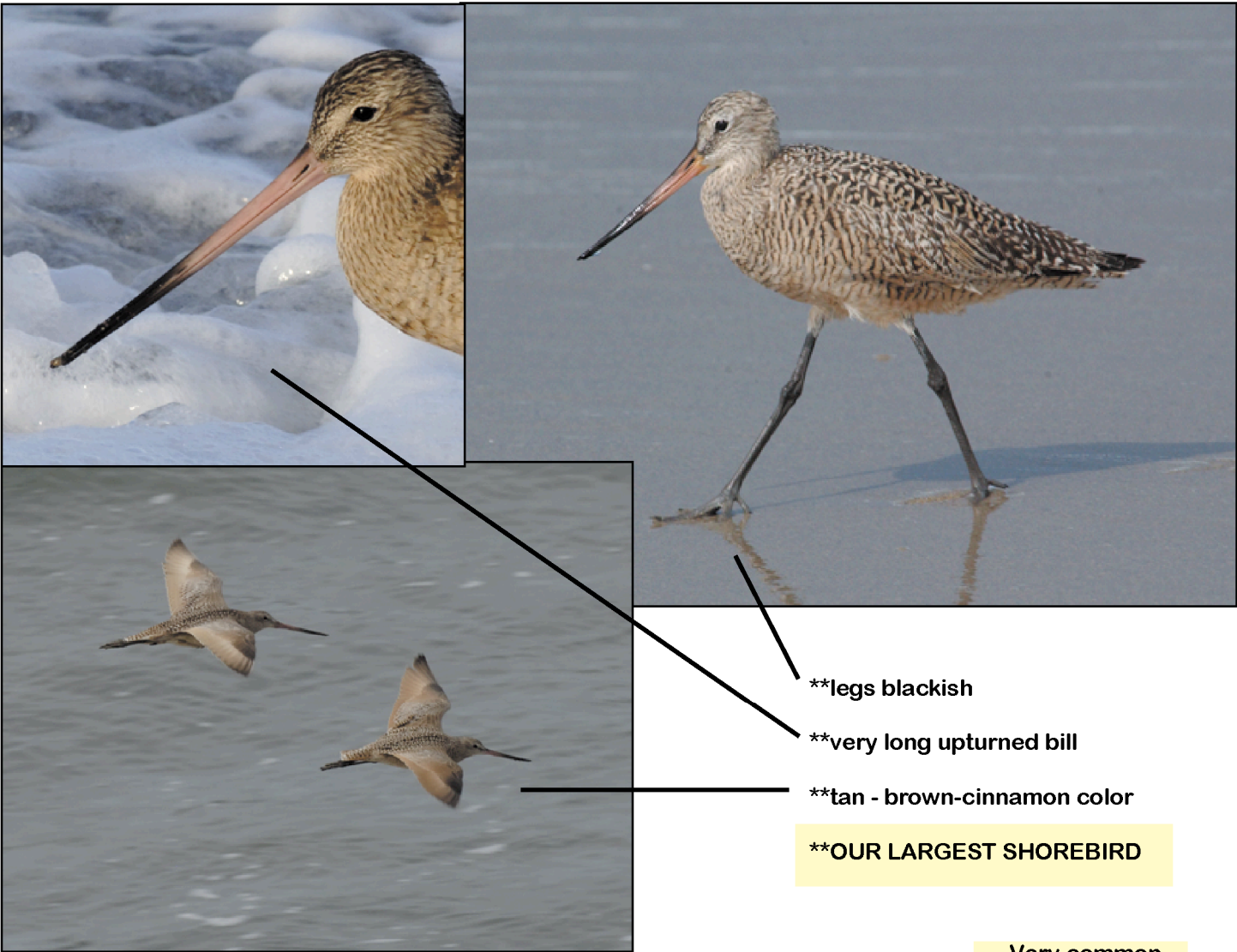
**Willet**  
**Catoptrophorus semiplamatus**

15 inches  
Long, straight bill.  
Common on beaches and marshes - uncommon inland.  
Usually solitary.  
Uniformly gray except slightly mottled Apr-Aug breeding colors.  
Broad wing stripe seen in flight is an easy way to confirm identification.

**SHOREBIRDS:**



**SHOREBIRDS:**



\*\*legs blackish

\*\*very long upturned bill

\*\*tan - brown-cinnamon color

**\*\*OUR LARGEST SHOREBIRD**

**Very common  
at Zuma Beach.**

**SHOREBIRDS - BIRDS SEEN  
MOSTLY ON THE SAND:**

**Marbled Godwit  
*Limosa fedoa***

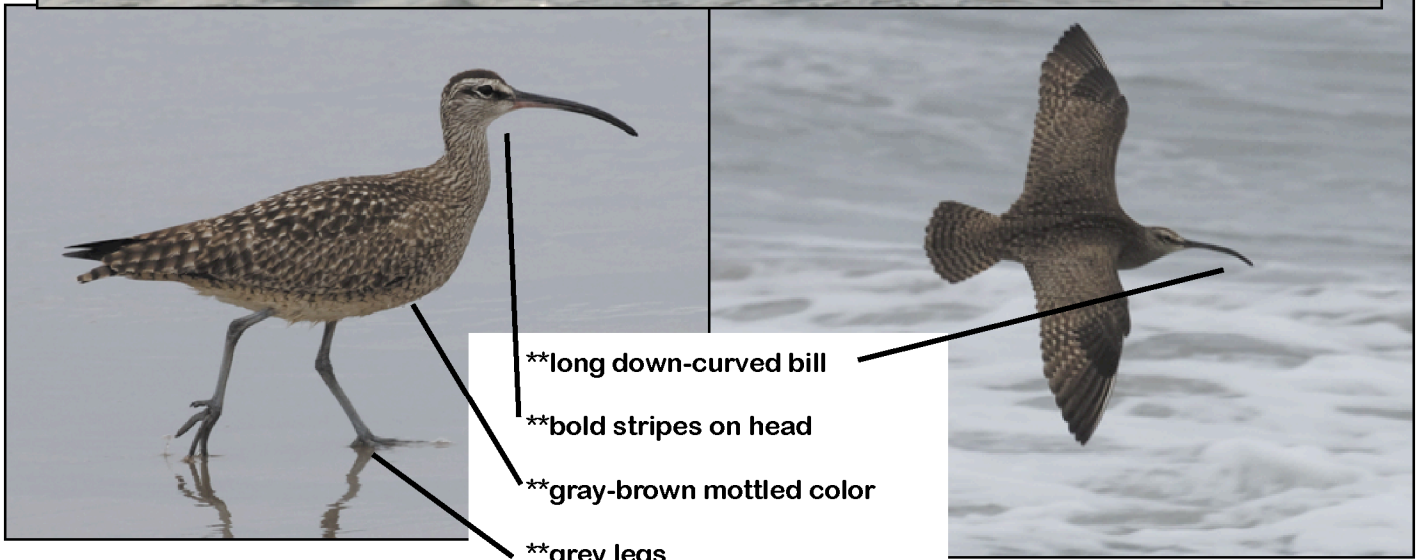
18 inches

Generally uncommon on sand beaches and mudflats, BUT  
**VERY COMMON AT ZUMA BEACH.**

Slightly larger than *Catoptrophorus*, and  
is distinguished by its cinnamon coloration and  
extremely long, upturned bill.

**SHOREBIRDS:**

**SHOREBIRDS:**



**UNCOMMON  
at Zuma Beach.**

**SHOREBIRDS - BIRDS SEEN  
MOSTLY ON THE SAND:**

**Whimbrel  
Numenius phaeopus**

17.5 inches

Uncommon in grassy marshes and tidal flats, and relatively uncommon at Zuma Beach.

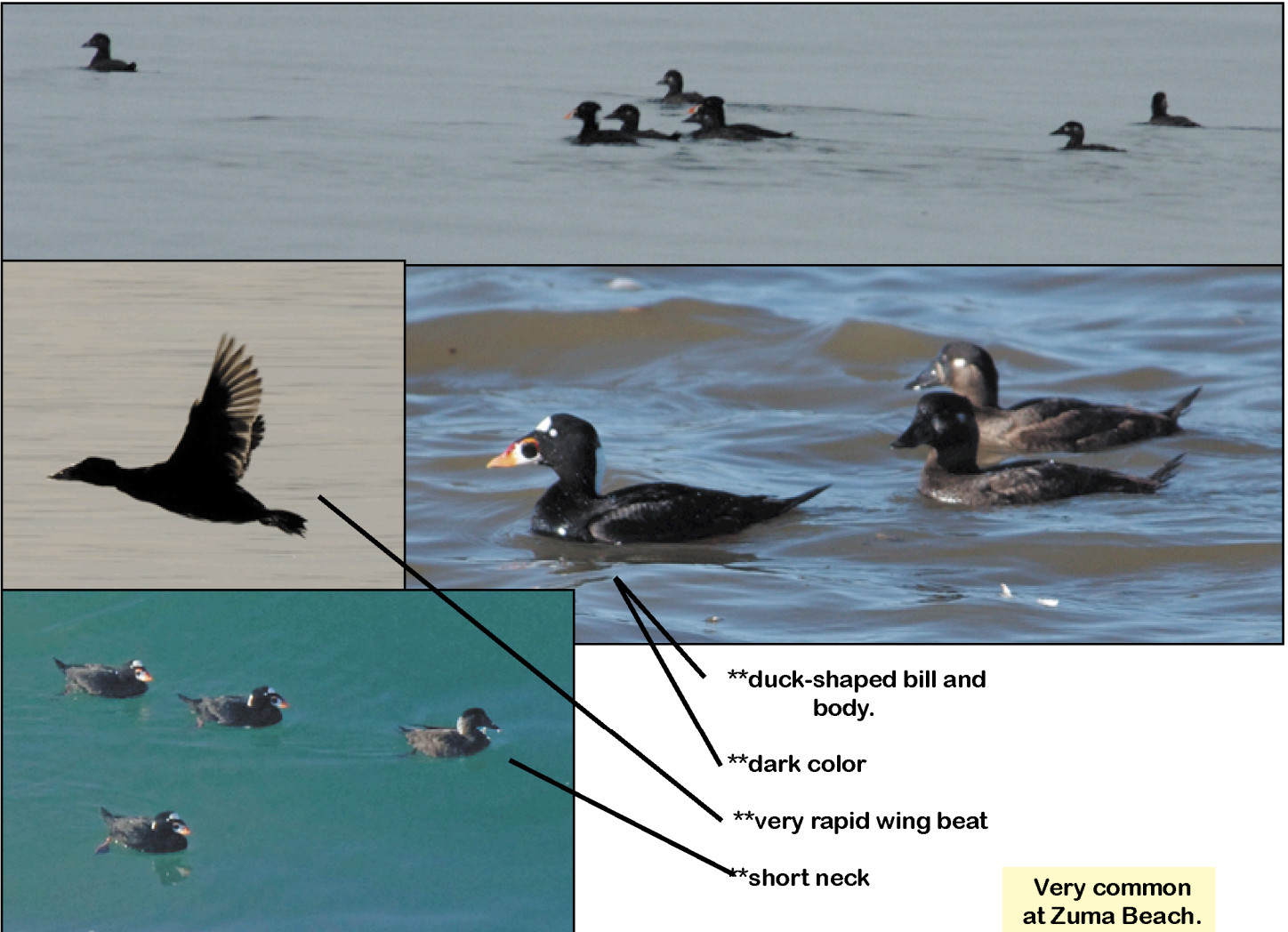
Very rare inland.

A large bird with shorer legs than Catoptrophorus and Limosa.

Most distinguishable feature is long  
DOWN-curved bill.

**SHOREBIRDS:**

**WATERFOWL:**



\*\*duck-shaped bill and body.

\*\*dark color

\*\*very rapid wing beat

\*\*short neck

Very common  
at Zuma Beach.

**WATERFOWL - BIRDS SEEN  
MOSTLY ON THE WATER:**

**Surf Scoter  
*Melanitta perspicillata***

20 inches

Common along the coast - rare inland.

Common from the surfline outward at Zuma Beach.

A diving duck.

Heavy, triangular, duck-shaped bill.

At a distance, can be distinguished from other waterfowl:

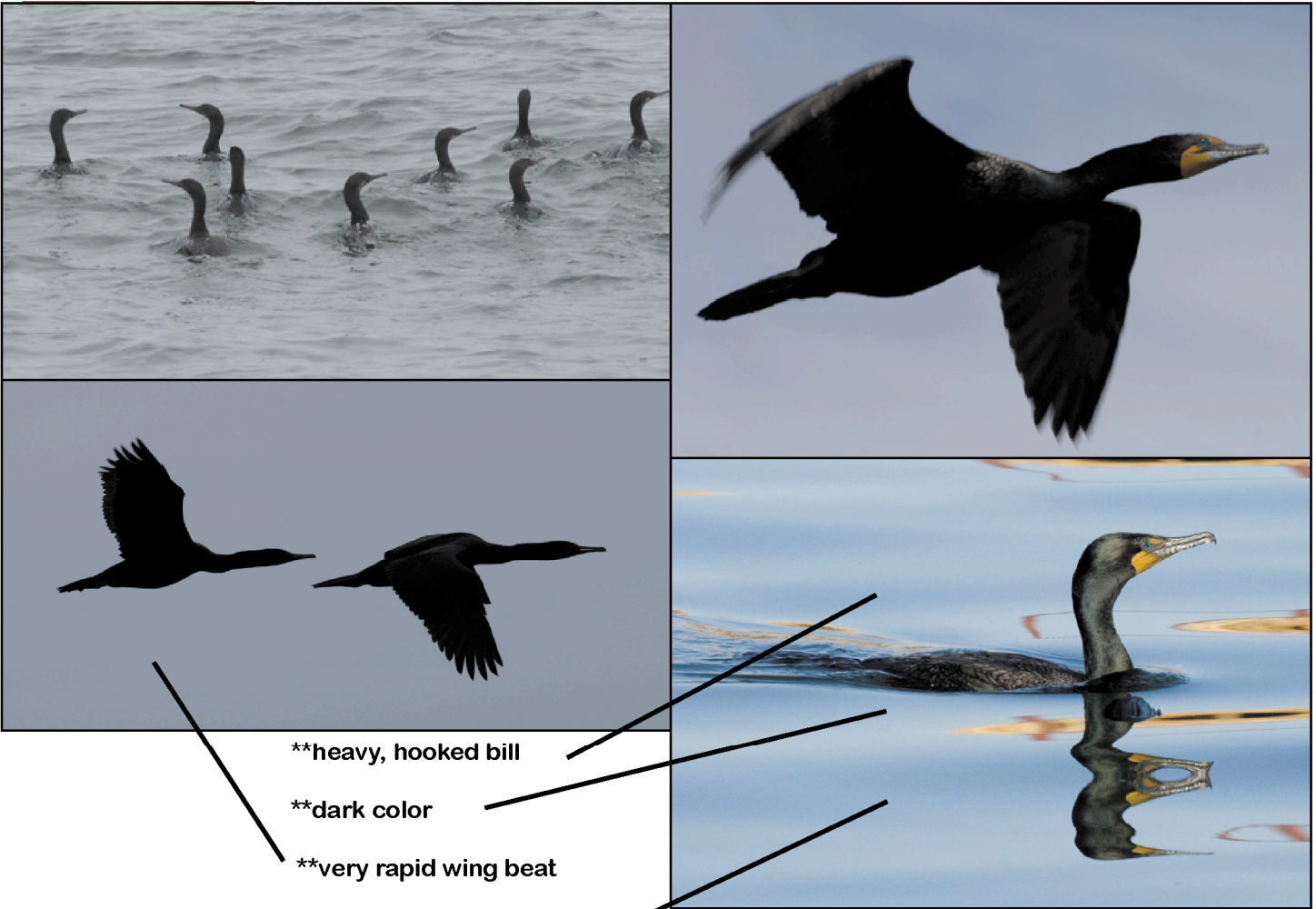
--Short neck

--Chubby, squat body.

**WATERFOWL:**



**WATERFOWL:**



- \*\*heavy, hooked bill
- \*\*dark color
- \*\*very rapid wing beat
- \*\*long, black,thick neck

Very common  
at Zuma Beach.

**WATERFOWL - BIRDS SEEN  
MOSTLY ON THE WATER:**

**Brandt's Cormorant  
*Phalacrocorax penicillatus***

Length 34 inches.  
Black body color - long straight neck.  
Very rapid wing beat.  
A diving predator that feeds on large fish.  
Flies in long, irregular lines.  
Common on the ocean from Alaska to Mexico.  
Common flying, swimming and diving  
at Zuma Beach.

**WATERFOWL:**

**WATERFOWL:**



- \*\*heavy, straight bill**
- \*\*dark color**
- \*\*very rapid wing beat**
- \*\*white criss-cross pattern on back.**

**NOTE: LOONS ARE NOT VERY ABUNDANT AT ZUMA BEACH.**



- \*\*heavy, slightly upturned bill**
- \*\*dark color; light gray throat.**
- \*\*very rapid wing beat.**

**WATERFOWL - BIRDS SEEN MOSTLY ON THE WATER:**

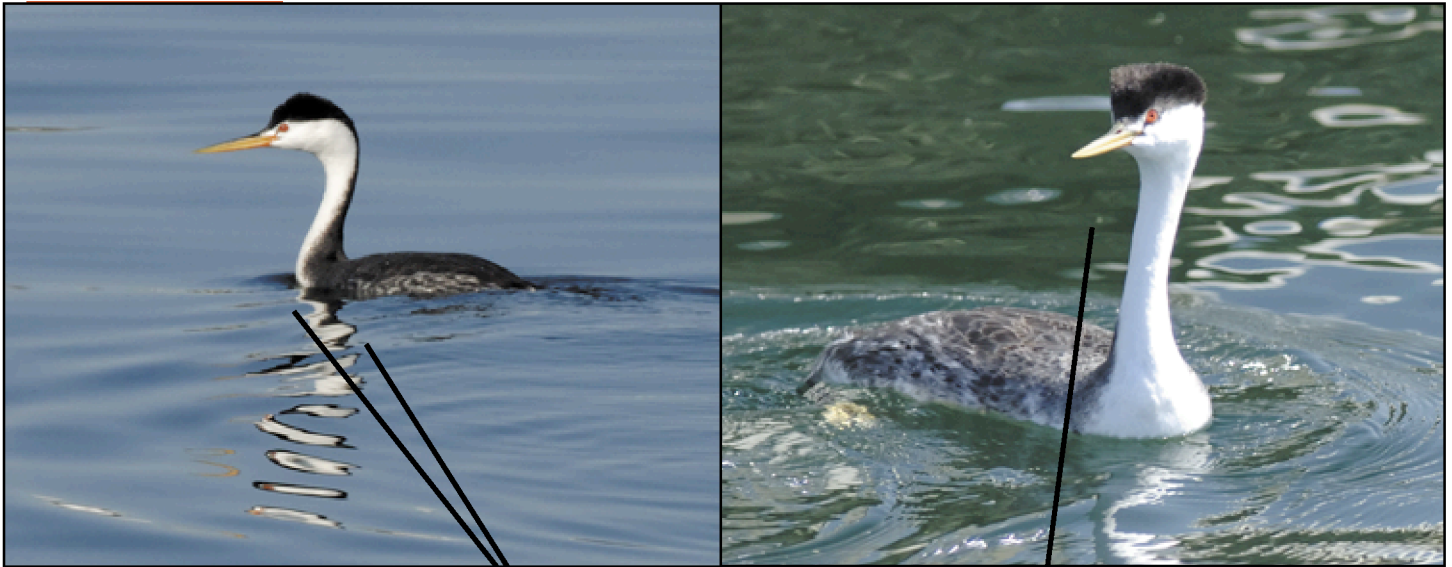
**Pacific Loon  
*Gavia pacifica***

**Red-throated Loon  
*Gavia stellata***

25 inches.  
A diving bird.  
Thick neck, straight bill with no hook at the end.  
Common along the pacific coast.  
Both species are about the same size, except note that the bill of *Gavia stellata* is thinner and turned upward slightly.  
Study the face and head to see the difference between *Gavia* and *Phalacrocorax*.

**WATERFOWL:**

**WATERFOWL:**



Very common  
at Zuma Beach.

\*\*long, thin, graceful neck

\*\*white neck with black  
stripe down the back

\*\*straight yellow bill

\*\*bright red eyes

**WATERFOWL - BIRDS SEEN  
MOSTLY ON THE WATER:**

**Western Grebe  
*Aechmophorus occidentalis***

25 inches.

Common on lakes, bays and open ocean.

Dives for fish.

Often found in large groups.

Can be distinguished from *Phalacrocorax*  
by its more slender white neck  
with black stripe down the back.

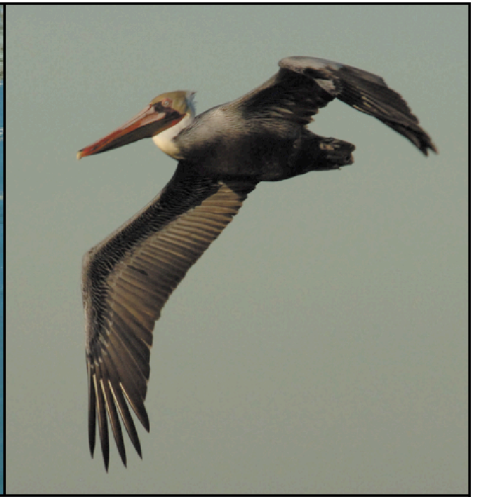
Bill straight and yellow.

Common at Zuma Beach,  
from the surf line outward.

**WATERFOWL:**



**WATERFOWL:**



- \*\*long bill and pouch
- \*\*flies in formation
- \*\*brown or silvery color
- \*\*feeds by plunge-diving
- \*\*rarely seen on the sand



Very common at Zuma Beach.

**WATERFOWL - BIRDS SEEN MOSTLY ON THE WATER:**

**Brown Pelican  
Pelecanus occidentalis**

51 inch length; 79 inch wingspan.  
Flies in lines - one of the best gliding birds on earth.  
Common on open ocean, in bays and lagoons along the Pacific coast.  
Juveniles have brown heads, adults have white or yellow-white heads.  
Very common at Zuma Beach and in Zuma Lagoon.

**WATERFOWL:**

**GULLS & TERNS:**



**JUVENILES**



**ADULTS**



- \*\*juveniles**  
- brown or gray mottled, spotted colors.
- \*\*juveniles** - may be as large as adults.
- \*\*dark bill** - heavy and thick.

- \*\* adult colors** occur after 3 yrs
- \*\*white head & belly; black on backside.**
- \*\*heavy, thick bill** is yellow w. red spot.



Very common at Zuma Beach. **LARGEST OF GULL FAMILY.**

**GULLS AND TERNS:**

**Western Gull  
Larus occidentalis**

25 inch length  
Common along the west coast but rare just a few miles inland.  
The largest and most stocky of the gulls at Zuma beach.  
Heavy, thick-tipped bill.

**GULLS & TERNS:**

**GULLS & TERNS:**



**JUVENILES**



**ADULTS**

Very common at Zuma Beach.



Larus occidentalis (big white bird) with juvenile Larus heermanni (foreground) and adult L. heermanni (back, right).

\*\*juveniles uniformly dark brown-black.

\*\*juveniles - pale pink beak



\*\* adults - red beak.

\*\*adults uniformly slate or charcoal gray w. white head.

**GULLS AND TERNS:**

**Heerman's Gull  
Larus heermanni**

19 inch length

Common on open beaches and on open ocean near shore.

Dark, unpatterned colors.

Much smaller and more petite than the bigger Larus occidenalis.

**GULLS & TERNS:**



**GULLS & TERNS:**



**\*\* yellow beak w. black ring around.**

**\*\*white w. slate gray back; black wing tips.**

**\*\*bright yellow legs.**

**Very common at Zuma Beach.**

**GULLS AND TERNS:  
Ring-billed Gull  
*Larus delawarensis***

17.5 inch length  
Common on all bodies of water - ocean, lakes, rivers, agricultural areas, city parking lots, etc.  
Another white headed gull.  
Smaller than *Larus occidentalis* and *Larus heermanni*

**GULLS & TERNS:**

**GULLS & TERNS:**



The most common tern at Zuma Beach.

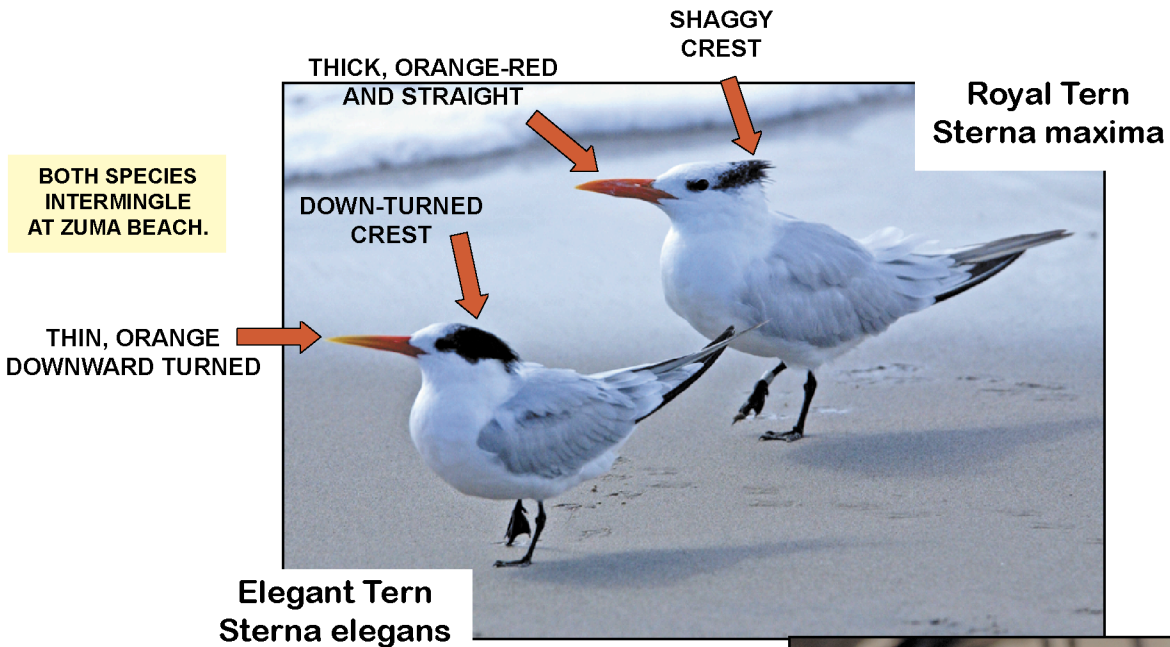
- \*\* orange slender bill with slight downward turn.
- \*\*white body, with black hood & drooping crest

**GULLS AND TERNS:  
Elegant Tern  
*Sterna elegans***

17 inch length  
Common on open coastal waters especially on inlets of bays, lagoons and along sandy beaches like Zuma Beach. Very similar to *Sterna maxima* (next page) but with longer, thinner bill and drooping black crest down back of neck.

**GULLS & TERNS:**

**GULLS & TERNS:**



**ROYAL TERN FACTS:**

- \*\* orange -red bill, thick and straight.
- \*\*white body, with black shaggy crest.
- \*\*similar in flight to Sterna elegans, so look at the beak and crest.



**Common, but not an abundant tern at Zuma Beach.**

**GULLS AND TERNS:**

**Royal Tern  
Sterna maxima**

20 inch length  
 Common in places around the open coastline of southern California, and along sandy beaches like Zuma Beach.  
 Very similar to Sterna elegans (previous page) but with shorter, straight and thicker bill.  
 Shaggy crest does NOT go down back of neck.

**GULLS & TERNS:**



## GULLS & TERNS:



TWO ADULTS SHOWING BREEDING  
COLORS ON CHANNEL MARKER AT  
MARINA DEL REY



NON-BREEDING ADULT  
COLORS AT ZUMA BEACH

**VERY RARE  
at Zuma Beach.**

**\*\* bill is black except in  
breeding adults with red and  
black tips.**

**\*\* white head, white neck, with  
black eye patch, except  
adults with breeding colors.**

**\*\*red legs at all stages**

**\*\*smaller and much more rare  
than other tern species at  
Zuma Beach.**

## GULLS AND TERNS:

### **Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri***

13 inch length

Common on open water and  
inland marshes and tidal creeks.  
White with isolated black eye patch,  
except for breeding adults which show  
black skull cap.  
Adults have completely white belly .  
White wings and white tipped wings  
visible in flight.

## GULLS & TERNS:

## HERONS & EGRETS:



wading in Malibu Lagoon



in flight over Zuma Beach

Solitary and  
NOT ABUNDANT  
at Zuma Beach.

\*\* very large, with long neck  
(coiled back in flight).

\*\* yellow bill.

\*\*black legs.

\*\* seen perhaps only once  
a day at Zuma Beach.

(BIRDS SEEN MOSTLY FLYING OVER HEAD  
AT ZUMA BEACH or  
WADING IN ZUMA LAGOON)

### Great Egret *Ardea alba*

39 inch length; 51 inch wingspan  
Common in shallow water marshes  
on the coast and inland.

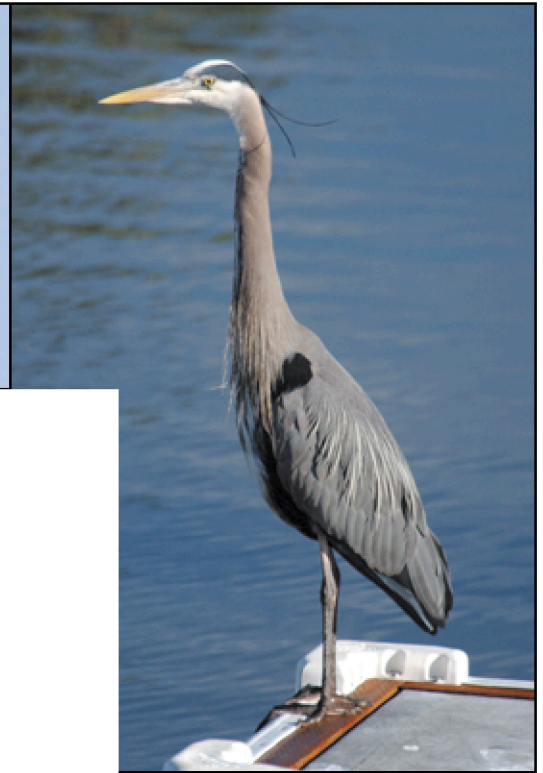
Pure, bright white.

Yellow beak and black legs.

When seen at Zuma Beach, they  
are flying overhead and easily  
identified by large size and  
bright white color.

## HERONS & EGRETS:

**HERONS & EGRETS:**



on dock, Long Beach CA



in flight over Zuma Beach

- \*\* blue-gray color
- \*\* very large
- \*\*broad,wide wings seen in flight.

**UNCOMMON at  
Zuma Beach**

**(BIRDS SEEN MOSTLY FLYING OVER HEAD  
AT ZUMA BEACH or  
WADING IN ZUMA LAGOON)**

**Great Blue Heron  
Ardea herodias**

46 inch length; 72 inch wingspan  
Uncommon but widespread.  
Rarely flies above Zuma Beach  
When seen at Zuma Beach, they  
are flying overhead and easily  
identified by large size and  
gray color.

**HERONS & EGRETS:**



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FOR YOUR FIELD NOTES, ADDITIONS AND CORRECTIONS:**