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Least Terns Leave Buck Island

St. Croix, US Virgin Islands – Buck Island Reef National Monument is announcing that the Least Terns have left West Beach. All of West Beach is open to the public again.

Buck Island Reef National Monument is one of fifteen known nesting sites on St. Croix for the least tern, *Sterna antillarum antillarum*, a locally protected migratory sea bird. Unfortunately, the nesting colony was not successful this year. Park biologists only saw three chicks this season. This is likely due to people entering the closed nesting area and disturbing the nesting birds. The least terns arrived on Buck Island in late April and for eight (8) weeks tried to nest. Initially there were 20 adult birds, and by late May those numbers had swelled to between 75 and 100 birds.



Photo courtesy Solvin Zankl

The least tern nesting area on Buck Island Reef National Monument is unique to the Virgin Islands. It is the only area where the birds have no threat from vehicles, dogs, and other non-native predators. The only danger to the terns nesting success seems to be from human disturbance and dogs and other non-native animals. All least terns are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and are listed as Territorially Endangered by the U.S. Virgin Islands, and are protected locally by the Virgin Islands Endangered and Indigenous Species Act.

Thank you to everyone who obeyed the temporary beach closure and refrained from walking, wading, and swimming in the closed off nesting area. Hopefully we will have better nesting success next season.

For more information about Least Terns, visit the webpage created by Gulf Islands National Seashore: <https://www.nps.gov/guis/learn/nature/leastterns.htm>

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