

Days of Our Lives: Shorebird Soap Operas

Shorebirds are among a variety of animals known for their remarkable seasonal migrations between their southern winter homes and their summer breeding grounds. The migratory routes of birds are referred to as flyways. In North America, there are four main flyways: the Pacific, Central, Mississippi and Atlantic flyways. Flyways are general routes along which the majority of birds travel on their annual journeys. Most shorebirds require the presence of wetlands on both their wintering and breeding grounds. They also need wetlands in between during migration since their winter and summer homes are often thousands of miles apart. Wetland areas where shorebirds concentrate to feed and rest during their migratory journeys are called stopover sites or "staging" areas. When staging, shorebirds eat lots of protein-rich creatures called invertebrates to put on layers and layers of fat for energy to continue migrating. Some also molt their feathers (old worn-out feathers are replaced with fresh new ones). Because shorebirds are very dependent on wetlands, loss of wetland habitat is a major threat to their survival.

Like on TV soap operas, shorebirds face many perils during their lives. Play the game below with three or four of your friends to learn more about shorebird survival. You will need a die, a game piece for each player, and about forty dry beans that represent eggs. Start at the wintering grounds. Taking turns, roll the die and advance north along the flyway the number of spaces shown. If you land on a space with instructions, follow the instructions in the space. When each player gets to the breeding grounds, they get four eggs (beans). When each player leaves the breeding grounds and begins migrating south back to their winter home, each egg they have becomes a young shorebird. The winner of the game is the shorebird that has the most young left upon returning to the wintering grounds.

