

# 2013 Atlantic and Gulf Coast American Oystercatcher Working Group Annual Meeting

9-12 December 2013

The Blockade Runner  
Wrightsville Beach, NC

Tuesday December 10, 2013

## State of the Recovery Initiative – Shiloh Schulte

- Initiative background: 2008 business plan completed. Actionable plan. Goals - 30% pop. increase over 10 years; 0.5 chicks/pair/yr; coordinated mgt. and conservation.
- Vital signs
  - Avg. 0.52 since start of recovery initiative (2009); up from 0.30 before initiative began (2002-2008).
  - Coordinated management; transfer of information; BMPs
  - 800 miles of coastline managed; ~40% of breeding population
  - 30+ partners in group representing every atlantic and gulf coast state except NH (no nesting AMOY); 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Mexico AMOY working group.
- 2013 AMOY productivity – INCOMPLETE DATA
  - 298 chicks; 698 pairs; 0.45 chicks/pair
  - Expect this to increase as data is completed.
- Overall, effort through initiative and working group appears to be translating to on the ground impact on AMOY reproductive success.
- Question – Hurricane Sandy in the NE – impacts?
  - Devastation in some areas; creation of habitat in others; birds attracted to ‘new’ areas in some cases without protection. Mixed bag from birds’ perspective.
  - Where beaches could move naturally, net benefit. Other areas disappeared entirely.

## 2013 Range wide aerial survey – Shiloh Schulte

- First repeat survey since 2003. 2003 timeframe Nov through February. 2003 estimate 10,971 +/-298
- 2013 survey changes/similarities
  - 2 Jan – 18 Feb.
  - Complete survey of winter range in US
  - Simultaneous Atlantic and Gulf coast surveys – although didn’t completely work out in this respect
  - Survey window +/- 2 hours from high tide
  - 9000 miles of coastline and 100 hours of flight time over 6 weeks

- Survey coverage was almost identical to 2003
- Started in SC and moved towards Gulf and north to NE simultaneously
- Detection rates calculated from ground counts; separated into large and small flocks
  - Large flocks: 1.00, n=25
  - Small flocks: 0.78, n=35, SE = 0.012
  - Birds within flocks: 0.90, n=111, SE=0.004 (this detection rate did not change with size of flock)
- Results :
  - 2003: 10971 +/- 298
  - 2009: 10,100 +/- 345 (model, not aerial survey)
  - 2013: 11,284 +/-313
  - NEW BENCHMARK
  - State by state differences, mixed trends. Suggest that 2003 survey probably did catch birds before they had moved or while they were moving for winter locations.
- What would prediction (model) for 2013 be using known productivity rates?
  - Would have been about 10,500.
- Aimed for as many similarities as possible between 2003 and 2013 surveys to have less issues to standardize. Resolution of error estimates better in 2013 because of larger sample size of ground counts and photo counts.
- Moving results to manuscript form and will solicit input from group to make it as inclusive as a process as possible.

### **Integrated Shorebird Management – Felicia Sanders and Alex Wilke**

- Presented updated tables and figures from last year’s meeting summarizing the extent to which AMOY conservation efforts impact other beach nesting species.
- Solicited group’s input on how continuing the effort to quantify, refine and report this information could be helpful. Or has the usefulness of the exercise been realized already with the effort to produce some hard numbers and encourage a ‘way of thinking’ for future project and funding proposal development?
- T. Simons suggested a possible link with this type of information and part of a possible symposium on AMOY work at the 2015 Waterbirds meeting. Possibly a presentation of case studies illustrating the impact that AMOY conservation efforts have had on a wide variety of species and how members of the group have leveraged their AMOY work for funding and support for projects impacting lots of other species.
- General agreement that this would be a great way to use this type of information and communicate the successes of the group in this respect to the broader conservation community. Alex, Felicia, Ted et al. will follow up.

### **Multi-pass Surveys – Nathan Hostetter**

- Powerpoint available
- Estimating abundance - Pilot study.

- Challenges for doing similar range wide survey for AMOYs during the BREEDING SEASON
- What is our “N”? Individuals, pairs, territories, nests? And at what scale? State, regional? Need to ID these metrics first.
- Example of survey area:
  - South Core Banks surveyed 9 May and 16 May; Almost only half of number of birds counted on second survey
  - Compared results for individuals counted, pairs counted and territories counted as well. Similar variation.
  - Knew number of pairs for South Core Banks from productivity monitoring. None of the metrics accurately represented the actual number of breeding pairs. Underestimate in all cases.
- Two options:
  - N-mixture models. Abundance and detection probability.
  - Spatial models. Density and detection probability.
- Expanding study:
  - Incorporate resighting data
  - Record effort
  - Covariate data – if you don’t think detection probability is constant, then WHY?
- Discussion topics
  - What’s our metric of interest?
  - How can we standardize our data collection
  - Spatial extent
  - Time and effort
- One of the most important questions - What’s our objective?
- Other comments:
  - Tidal height – what’s easier? Standardize survey tide stage or record it as a covariate?
  - Predation an important covariate.
  - Spatial extent and picking out low density pairs across huge areas

### **Cape Lookout Draft ORV Mgt Plan/Cape Hatteras Buffer Study – Michael Rikard and Britta Muiznieks**

- M. Rikard:
- 2013 Summary
  - Powerpoint available
- Cape Lookout ORV mgt plan being developed since 2007/2008. Draft near completion. Life of plan typically 20 years.
- Incorporating flexibility is key when writing long standing management plans since conditions change over time.
- Selected AMOY as an indicator species for their adaptive mgt strategies. Widespread throughout park.

- Id'd indicators for AMOY – breeding population size, nest survival, chicks fledged per pair and mammalian predation (identified minor and moderate impact thresholds for each indicator)
  - Actions identified for when moderate threshold broken for 2 consecutive years. Eg. increased education, trash management, predator control, etc.
  - Further actions identified for continued triggering of thresholds, eg. reducing permits issued for vehicles, increase species buffer sizes, etc.
  - All allows for flexibility
  - Huge differences between visitation at Hatteras and Lookout results in different mgt strategies for both parks.
  - Question – where did the threshold triggers come from in the plan? T. Simons – Monitoring data translated into management, population modeling etc. all guided the development of the triggers. Defensible information based on years of data. Emphasizes importance of peer reviewed literature so that the data is out there. This approach integrates a variety of sources of information into the solution and provides a variety of management prescriptions for managers to use.
  - Question – what is the public process like? How does park respond to public input? Important to know that some of the major stakeholders have already seen some of the plan information before it is released for public input and communication is open.
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- Britta – Cape Hatteras
  - Powerpoint available

### **Breeding season survey update – Ruth Boettcher**

- 3<sup>rd</sup> year of discussions surrounding a range wide breeding season survey effort
- What are the working group objectives for this effort?
- First some input from the field of doing the multi-pass surveys – good, bad and ugly.
  - Lindsay Addison:
    - Complication of ‘pretending’ to be naïve observers in the case where logistically naïve observers aren’t available to conduct surveys. Having a separate group of people doing surveys raises cost of conducting survey significantly.
  - Sara Schweitzer:
    - Early discussions talked about the goals of the survey – pairs or nests or ?. Their end goal was documenting each nesting territory – ensure that that is defined consistently between groups conducting surveys. Consider different behaviors of pairs and definition of ‘territorial’. Comments very important on datasheets to help interpret data after the fact.
    - Be very specific about identifying the plots to be surveyed – don’t make them too big. Put enough time into defining these areas before the survey is conducted. Entails working with people familiar with site when determining

how big the plots should be. Then assigned people to survey each plot after they were all identified.

- Shortest time period possible.
- Comments
  - Consider plots that may have already been established in area for other projects like ISS surveys.
  - Other reasons to collect this info other than just knowing how many AMOYs there are. Location of pairs can be important for assessing future projects etc. Brings up the dilemma of surveying large areas that might have low density or areas where you might not expect AMOYs. The idea of selected repeated surveys in varying habitats and density should get at this problem.
  - Planning up front is extremely important.
  - Discussion about path forward to making a rangewide breeding survey a reality to be continued via side conversations.

#### **AMOYWG meeting to occur with 2015 Waterbird Society meeting, a proposal – Ted Simons**

- Bar Harbor Maine is the location for 2015 meeting, College of the Atlantic.
- Week of August 11<sup>th</sup> 2015. Travel Monday, Tuesday night welcome reception. We could have the facility for our meeting on Tuesday prior to the start of the Waterbirds meeting.
- Potential of publishing some of the presentations or a symposium as a Special Publications selection in Waterbirds. Not necessarily an 'enhanced BNA account' with lots of papers about AMOY biology – more a theme that has broad interest with the shorebird and waterbird community. 6-15 contributions would be part of the Special Publication.
- Other potential topics – co-occurrence analysis, sea level rise, energy development, environmental ed, rangewide surveys, etc, etc.
- Would need to make a decision soon and start developing committees.
- Great opportunity to invite in international colleagues – enough lead time and joint meeting make it the perfect opportunity. Eg. Bruno Ens, as plenary speaker possibly.
- General response from the AMOY group is that YES this is a great idea. Preferred scenario would be to have AMOY meeting on Tuesday, then joint welcome reception with Waterbirds on Tuesday night then a symposium during the actual Waterbirds meeting which would begin on Wednesday.
- Will need at least three committees
  - Meeting logistics
  - Symposium program
  - International liaison
- Ted will follow up and solicit level of interest for participation in these committees and continue communication via list serve.

#### **Communicating science through social media – Neil McCoy**

- Powerpoint available

### **Social media and AMOY working group – Todd Pover and Neil McCoy**

- Currently maintain 2-3 posts/week for their projects in NJ; they have noticed a difference in enthusiasm for their projects; started including social media hits for grant writing purposes and tracking purposes for public engagement.
- Proposed having a Facebook page for the Working Group – we could lead the way in this arena.
- Could complement what we are doing. NJ group would be willing to maintain the daily functioning of the page.
- Drawbacks – forum for negative feedback, opposing groups, how do we set the tone, how to react quickly enough, how to develop objectives for what the page says about our group and what it does
- Not only communicating science but many other things to the public.
- Don't want this to overshadow our webpage but can link it.
- Would be another outlet for WG members to highlight their work. Would require more in depth engagement from the group.
- Idea of having a 'business card' for the Working Group to hand out the information with QR code or QR codes printed on the signs (MassAudubon and Hatteras doing this).
- Concerns about content.
- Balance important
- Easy to block negative input and users
- Pre-loaded responses to quickly respond to a particular set of predictable comments.
- What are we wanting to accomplish as a group with having a facebook page? That will guide what people send for input.
- Couple things to still think about. Revisit during wrap up.
- Neil – AMOY are a great candidate for a Facebook page, it will broaden the exposure of AMOY to a broad audience.

Wednesday December 11, 2013

### **AMOY along the Georgia Coast – Abby Sterling**

- Powerpoint available
- Question about difference of impact of coyotes on AMOY vs. WIPL
  - Samples sizes different; AMOY nests appeared to be more out in the open; part of it may be visual cues. May be able to assign a risk element to each nest and eventually get at this question. Coyotes were targeting WIPL as well as AMOY though.
- Other beach nesters?

- LETE and Willet. Did WIPL or AMOY nests near colonies survive better? Electric fencing around LETE colony; colonies overwashed. BLSK and LETE on L.S.S. but predation wasn't serious issue and had fence in one year.
- Landscape model – GIS inputs, what kind of layers did you use?
  - Preliminary and landcover is fairly rough. Digitized it using aerial photography and on the ground knowledge of site. RTK data for nests. 6ft x 6ft cell size. Will get LIDAR from state.
- Influence/intensity of predators in any given year could influence the importance of the habitat characteristics.

#### **Texas AMOY Work – Sue Heath**

- Powerpoint available.
- Tide range in study areas? Tide range doesn't matter – it's only about 1ft. In that system, what drives overwash is storm events that push water into the bays from the Gulf and pushes the tides up for long periods of time. Individual wind events can push water up too.
- Few wintering birds in TX – why? TX birds are there but not necessarily flocked up like on Atlantic Coast. Biggest flock they have seen is 28 birds. Maintain territories all year. Do not see Atlantic coasts birds in TX during the winter.
- Predators on islands? 2008 Hurricane Ike may have washed predators on islands away and predator levels are now building up again. Eg. fire ants are coming back. Suspected rattle snake egg depredation last year. Occasional coon but islands are so small that they can't support larger mammals.

#### **Texas AMOY and LAGUs – Amanda Anderson**

- Powerpoint available
- Increased self-maintenance in presence of gulls – could be displacement activity?
- TABs in one big bin – have you thought of developing behavioral profile for each bird or pair since they are impacting each other's behaviors. Can't assume that each TAB is an independent data point.

#### **Florida Shorebird Alliance and AMOY update – Naomi Avissar**

- Powerpoint available

#### **North Carolina Satellite Tagging Study – Lindsay Addison**

- Powerpoint available
- Economics of gear and tracking? \$3200 per unit plus \$800-1000 for 1 yr data transmission. Open source GPS option would have lower start-up costs but you have to be within 200 yards of the bird to download data. About \$4K per bird.

### **Mass Audubon Program Update – Kathy Parsons**

- Powerpoint available

### **Discussion/Feedback on triangle bands**

- Report from Leary's is that reading the triangle bands has been far superior to the flags, and is generally acceptable.
- Don't forget the ability to use cameras while resighting. Don't necessarily need a high quality, expensive camera. Ted et al. tested \$300 cameras (Canon SX50) with 50x optical zoom. Good results.
- Can use your smart phone and scope as well. Products to attach your phone to your scope and digiscope that way. Can be difficult to switch between using the scope solo and the attachment with the phone.

### **Audubon's Atlantic Flyway Coastal Project – Walker Golder**

- Powerpoint available.
- Is there another component regarding passerines? Yes – forest, grasslands, marsh programs. Includes more than just coastal birds.

### **AMOY Working Group: mission and path forward – Shiloh Schulte**

- Steering Committee accomplishments over the past year
  - Integrated species management project
  - Breeding season survey pilot study
  - NC Local meeting committee for 2013 meeting
  - Winter aerial survey logistics
  - Flag/color band issue resolved
- Each year should present new opportunities for new input and new members for the committee
- Other ideas:
  - More coordinated data gathering and input beyond Google Docs?
- AMOY Business Plan
  - Results pre and post implementation of the Business Plan. Able to demonstrate successes and progress since increased support for AMOY conservation; increase in birds managed and conserved, productivity and ultimately population increase. Ultimate goal is 30% increase over 10 years. Data suggest that this is an achievable goal if the group's progress continues as it has been.
  - Where will the support come from in the future? (NFWF primary funding agency for plan since its development)
- Integration with Atlantic Flyway Shorebird Business Plan/Initiative



- AMOY is one part of the broader shorebird flyway plan.
- Will mean that the extent to which this group can frame our work to leverage the goals of the shorebird business plan and move it forward is even more important.
- Meeting in January – next step in planning process moving the actions to the ground level. Shiloh and others will report back to group as to how we can position ourselves to best take advantage of the Flyway Plan.
- Plan is available for review on Manomet’s website.
- Potential projects/proposals from WG members should not only consider AMOY business plan but also Flyway Plan.
- How does Audubon Flyway coastal project dovetail with the Shorebird Flyway Plan?
  - Audubon work is incorporated into the flyway plan; hand in glove; not exclusive initiatives; all working towards shorebird and other coastal bird protection; Audubon is focusing on other coastal birds not just shorebirds.
  - Is there concern about confusion between these two initiatives in the public eye? Public eye in these cases would be foundations. Don’t necessarily see the Flyway Plan as a topic for the general public – don’t envision any confusion. Common goal, shared vision, different strengths.
- Need to be thinking about alternative sources of funding for the long term. Thinking big about funding sources as a group.
- Are there plans for the group to put in proposals for Hurricane Sandy funds? Not for the group as a whole. VA north to NE states eligible. A focus on oystercatchers or from a WG perspective might be difficult to fit into the RFP. Hurricane Sandy funding criteria are on NFWF’s website and there should be a clear connection to increasing human community resiliency as well. DOI is also part of the decision process. Need to build resiliency for coastal communities that were impacted by Hurricane Sandy and a variety of ways to do that. Projects need to have a clear connection to the human community resiliency piece.
- Key Initiatives for Upcoming Year – 2014
  - Ruth seeking additional help with breeding season survey effort.
  - Alex and Felicia will carry forward integrated shorebird/waterbird management project and explore the feasibility of including a GIS component.
  - More structured productivity database other than Google Docs.
  - 2015 meeting – possible products about successes and efforts of the group over the past decade. Eg. review/synthesis management and conservation strategies.
  - Forming committee and plans for 2014 meeting site.
  - Summary of NFWF funded projects and what has been accomplished and lessons learned. Also another way to summarize the accomplishments of the group, although not totally inclusive since this is only one funding source. Also would want to incorporate match and unreported match to capture the entire amount of support for these projects, not just NFWF support.

**Working Group Webpage update – Tracey Borneman**

- Google analytic reports stats behind website. Last year: 3826 visits to web site and 58 new visits. New items on web site: tracking project for example. Web site could link to proposed facebook web site or current NJ facebook site. The gallery has not been updated so please send new photos. There are no habitat photos, so please send those! States are encouraged to update their state descriptions with current projects and goals. Publications should be current but let Tracy know if there are publications missing. The web site can be a great way to keep track of projects.
- Banding docs : historical banding information needs to stay updated. If you are switching band styles, for example to triangle bands, then update your old style in the historical banding description.
- Send Tracy pictures from the meeting for meeting gallery.
- Tracy will put up presentations from meeting so presenters please let her know if there are changes to your presentation.

#### **AMOY banding database update – Lindsay Addison**

- There is a private and public side. Private: log in and add data. Public side: enter band data then records go to a quarantine table. Once data is checked for accuracy then goes to "production table." Seasonal techs can have personal login that allows them "private side" privileges. Then log in capability is deleted after field season.
- Web site was launched 2012 but MA and FL data were not entered. Both now in database! Currently 33,165 records in database. 412 records submitted by the public since Feb. Database stores photos of resights and this can be a great tool to follow plumage and eye changes of known age birds. Public side allows users to see where their bird has been, where it was banded, etc. Lindsey is checking historical band data to verify resighting records. Very helpful for her to have each state make certain their banding data is detailed with notes of where underlines, dots, etc. are on band codes. Please report only what you see even if you know full combination of color bands placed on bird but bands have been lost. If you want to see public reports of your banded AMOY, you need to do a search. Lindsay is working toward emailing bander when public reports a resighting of your bird. Lindsay working towards producing polygons for "sites." Currently you need to do that yourself. If interested in recording genealogy, add parent 1, parent 2, sibling, etc. in "other" column. Only need to add once. Can also add sex of bird and then we can extrapolate to sex mates. Don't forget to enter all banding data in BBL database even if you send to AMOY database.

#### **Updates/Wrap-up/2014 Meeting Location – Shiloh Schulte**

- Reminder order triangle bands soon for spring season. Note some states are sharing colors and some states have multiple entities and projects banding so colors and projects within states need to coordinate. Shiloh offers to coordinate color and codes that have been ordered and then used. He will probably use google docs with multiple tabs for each color. On each tab he

will block off what has been ordered and what has been used so you can order knowing what is already out there.

- Research needs
- Is there a need to share research questions that have not been answered but are high priority? Such as winter disturbance/foraging. Could put these ideas on AMOY web site. This could be a resource for grad students to develop projects. Also could be a good way to think about long term projects that are not appropriate for one grad student, such as nest site fidelity and sea level rise or sub-adult survival rates.
- Sue Heath offered to host 2014 meeting in Galveston, TX. This area has hotels, restaurants and is close to her AMOY study site. Perhaps last week of Oct. She will seek input on dates.