

American Oystercatcher Working Group Annual Meeting

October 24-26, 2017
Sapelo Island, Georgia

Meeting Minutes

TUESDAY October 24

WELCOME; REVIEW OF AGENDA; MEETING LOGISTICS; INTRODUCTIONS – Tim Keyes (GADNR), Shiloh Schulte (Manomet)

- Tim – Welcome and intro to Sapelo
- Introductions – Shiloh Schulte, Kate Iaquinto, Beth Amendola, Todd Pover, Michelle Stantial, Ruth Boettcher, Pam Denmon, Alex Wilke, Zak Poulton, Jeremy Tarwater, Emarie Ayala, Dan Catlin, Kelsi Hunt, Dan Gibson, Walker Golder, Sara Schweitzer, Jon Altman, Lindsay Addison, Ted Simons, Shilo Felton, Nolan Schillerstrom, Tim Keyes, Abby Sterling, Bayard Nicklow, Kate Tweedy, Katie Higgins, Bob Sattelmeyer, Diana Churchill, Mary Lou Dickson, Joe Marchionno, Nick Vitale, Ezra Thomson, Beth Wright, Chris Farrell, Jessica Schulz, Sue Heath, Amanda Hackney, Lauren Gingerella, Scott Coleman, Felicia Sanders, Pat and Doris Leary, Bob Cooper, Chris Depkin, Caity Reiland-Smith

STATE UPDATES: high level overview of current AMOY related activities from Atlantic and Gulf Coast states

Massachusetts (Shiloh for Kathy Parsons, Mass Audubon):

- PPT available
- MA is northernmost significant 'grouping' of breeding AMOY on Atlantic Coast; 15-16% considered urban pairs; 1970 only 1 or 2 pairs in MA and now more than 150 pairs; pairs likely emigrating
- Relatively good 2017 productivity, lower number of pairs in 2017
- What is the predator situation on bigger islands like Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket? Not so much fox and coyote. Monomoy has coyote. Skunks on M.V., feral cats. Generally, not free of mammalian predators but variety and numbers are generally lower. Crows a problem on M.V. Peregrines observed around Boston Harbor; speculation on adult kills.

New York (Shiloh Schulte for Sue Elbin, NY City Audubon):

- Work in NY began in 2012, Sue Elbin heading up those efforts; working with various partners to expand AMOY work and engage them in AMOY W.G. activities;
- 2017 high nesting success, birds nesting in very urban areas, lots of activity. Hatching success was good but chick survival poor. Worked with managers to change management - provide shelter, mitigate chick loss. Apparently, food source is good with mussels on breakwater. Monitoring more than 60 pairs, including park service land.
- NY bands observed on Tybee Island, GA. Got partners in NY involved by starting banding program.

Connecticut (Beth Amendola, Audubon Connecticut):

- PPT available
- Started Audubon Alliance for Coastal Waterbirds; Long Island Sound and offshore islands;
- 129 sites used for nesting and foraging, and about 34 sites for nesting in 2017; 75% of breeding territories are on islands which may be very rocky; rest on barrier beaches; 63 breeding pairs; produced 63 fledglings; banding done by others; able to monitor pairs in which both are banded and have found much site fidelity;

- Would like to start banding program
- How did they define non-breeders? Breeding pairs based on actual nesting evidence. So number of 'non-breeders' could include breeders that were never confirmed.

New Jersey (Todd Pover, Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey):

- PPT available
- Barrier beach population is the only group regularly monitored; marsh birds monitored on a project by project basis.
- Breeding population doubled, almost tripled since 2003 to 134 pairs, number of sites doubled. Not a statewide assessment so don't know if this shows a shift from marshes to islands.
- Only banded about 20 birds each of last two years, opportunistically.
- Productivity in 2017 not very good, 0.19 chicks/pair, big drop compared to past couple years. Predators the biggest problem, lots of flooding too.
- Rooftop nesting documented 3 or 4 years ago. In 2017, monitor near Atlantic City saw AMOY flying from beach to rooftops – he and others documented as many as 10 pairs on casino rooves. Hatch success apparently fairly high, unsure about fledge success but likely low.
- PIPL data collection last year was done on phone based app. Tested for AMOY on M.V. – Michelle to report on this tomorrow. Hope for 2018 to do the same data collection for AMOY. Very successful.
- Christina Davis running state beach nesting bird program now. Continuing commitment to AMOY was unsure but level of monitoring did not change in 2017. Will remain the same in 2018 as well, but state interested in having partners do much of this work so that they can focus on other priority projects.

Maryland (Tami Pearl (not present), Assateague National Seashore):

- Monitoring AMOY <30 pairs, started to band chicks in 2017. 2017 24 pairs, 9 chicks fledged.

Virginia (Alex Wilke, The Nature Conservancy):

- PPT available
- Over 80% of VA AMOY breeding pairs occur on the seaside of Eastern Shore; this is the where the bulk of monitoring and active management happen for the species in the state; more limited monitoring along shorelines of Chesapeake Bay.
- 2017 productivity low; large wash out events in spring a factor; various predator issues at certain key sites
- Suspect PEFA predation of adults and possibly chicks at one site; curious as to what other states have seen or documented
- Testing drone technology for various monitoring activities for beach nesters; interested in hearing what others have learned or tested

North Carolina (Sara Schweitzer and Nick Jennings, NC Wildlife Resources Commission):

- PPT available
- 2017 was not a full coast survey year.
- Predation major issue at National Seashore, particularly coyote

Georgia (Tim Keyes, GA DNR):

- PPT available
- NFWF funded migration and winter band resighting; winter population seems to be stabilized around 800 birds

- Poor productivity in 2017, coons and coyote and tidal flooding; lost sand bar type islands in Hurricane Matthew; further damage by Irma
- NFWF funded technicians on St. Catherine's, Cumberland, Ossabaw to operate nest cameras. Cumberland coyote efficient. St. Catherine's hog issues. Commitment for predator control often limited until sea turtles are being impacted.
- Little St. Simons – coyote removed but without them there the coon population went up. Grace period after arrival of coyote since coons were lowered and coyote hadn't targeted birds yet. Then coyote became more effective, removed coyote and coons increased.
- Increase in high tide events over time since 1940s (9+ ft. tide events, normal tidal range is 6-8 ft) having an impact on coastal habitats. Generally thinking that there is a loss of habitat. Thoughts of building up some of these habitats? Explored these options (e.g. sand fencing, beach renourishment) but nothing feasible yet. Dredge spoil islands – one has been built and is working great for seabirds but not used by nesting shorebirds yet.
- Is this pattern of increasing occurrence of high tide events common along the Atlantic coast? Did not check other tide gauges.

Florida (Joe Marchionno and Janell Brush (not present), FL Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission):

- PPT available
- Florida beach nesting bird plan being implemented
- Increased staff to implement components of plan
- Reporting of 2017 data not completed due to delays from Irma
- Rooftop nesting is Pinellas County (St. Pete/Tampa area)
- Barge canal spoil sites – survival of chicks to 65 days is low. Camera work is shedding light on factors impacting fledged young. How do you know they are not just moving away? They are fledging about 32 days. In some areas, poor food is a problem after fledging but if they are surviving to 65 days then they should be self-sufficient. Telemetry done on Fisherman Island identified mink as predator of fledged young. How do siblings impact survival?
- Expanded winter survey range to St. Marks NWR
- Pat and Doris have been surveying for over a decade
- Examples of small sites (e.g. Gomez Key) losing elevation and going underwater. Some sites have historically been high enough and 'good' but overwash events are increasing as elevation decreases. How much does roost and rake restoration cost? What about the long-term feasibility of these projects for creating and maintaining habitat in such dynamic environments? This is an important question for these coastal species at a broad scale.
- Panhandle: high productivity at small sites. Larger sites have coon and/or coyote and no chicks are being produced. Don't have enough adults banded to know if pairs are shifting or colonizing some of these smaller sites.

Texas (Sue Heath, Gulf Coast Bird Observatory):

- PPT available
- 7 breeding seasons of monitoring; new record of finding hatched chicks on 21 Feb
- TX birds are not nesting on beaches, they are nesting on islands within bay system; best success on smaller islands with fewer neighbors, fewer nest on small sites connected to mainland at low tide; larger colonial waterbird islands also have pairs; occasional pair on "mainland" but rare
- Islands washing away – big problem. Volunteers working on small-scale habitat augmentation projects 'oystercatcher condo', most not still standing; lots of breakwaters being built for shoreline erosion; volunteers 'filled in' breakwater areas with shell to create habitat, one tropical storm and all shell was

washed out; thinking about the potential of using these breakwaters as habitat.

- Lots of help from Master Naturalists
- Ideas for building up the breakwaters – concrete, mesh that hardens
- TX coast subject to wind driven tides more so than lunar tides; flooding events associated with wind events – very important variable when considering factors impacting breeding season for these birds. Normal 1 ft tide with help of wind can result in 2-3 ft. tide which will put bulk of AMOY nesting habitat underwater. At what point do AMOY abandon a territory if it's not available? TX has relatively high rates of SLR.

STATE OF THE AMOY REPORT – S. Schulte

- PPT available
- Brief history of the WG – group has expanded in membership and geographic representation; 2008 beginning of NFWF funded AMOY Recovery Initiative using the business plan model; 10 year timeframe with 10 year goal.
- Considered population projections from 2009 under three scenarios: no new management, 50% of pop with increased fecundity and 100% with increased fecundity;
- Steering Committee overview; transitioning now to new Steering Committee – Welcome new committee members, Shilo Felton, Lindsay Addison, Pam Denmon, Tim Keyes. Thanks to previous committee members Ruth Boettcher, Felicia Sanders, Todd Pover and Alex Wilke. Alex will stay on to help with transition initially. Each year, committee will also include a representative from group who is hosting the next year's meeting.
- 2017 overall productivity not great compared to past few years; since 2009 average productivity has been 0.50 chicks/pair per year; past couple of years have been lower due to a variety of factors including predators and overwash; capacity for management has also varied over the years.
- 2018 survey will show what the population trend has been since 2003
- AFSI initiative – AMOY Recovery Initiative within NFWF has now been absorbed into the AFSI; funding for AMOYs now part of the larger picture introducing more competition within funding landscape.
- Even within the AFSI, there is still the idea of using focal species out of the entire suite of shorebird species. AMOY will likely continue to be on that list.
- Big topics – predator management and adapting/managing for climate change and SLR and associated habitat change and loss.
- Question – where is the discrepancy between the number of known breeding pairs and wintering population estimate? Group has asked this question for years.

WORKING GROUP INITIATIVES – UPDATES:

2017/2018 Winter Survey (S. Schulte)

- PPT available
- 2003, 2013 aerial surveys conducted
- Funding for 2018 survey in hand; planning in progress, survey windows identified; 6-11 Jan, 21-27 Jan (Gulf Coast); 3-10 Feb, 17-24 Feb, 1-9 March (Atlantic Coast); these dates may be on the late side
- Counts are from the plane but ground truthing also conducted at the same time
- Possibly will be doing post survey flights to estimate detection rates
- 2013 paper was not published but there are plans to do that; either alone or in combination with the 2018 survey
- Previous surveys do have error rates, +/-200 birds out of 11,000 or so. Reason for small error rates is that many of the flocks were photographed. Combined error of flock size estimates and flock detection.

- Looking for additional help in the plane and on the ground
- Shiloh will be reaching out to people for specific requests for assistance

International Cooperation (S. Schulte)

- Eduardo presented last year about his work on the west coast of Mexico with funding from Manomet; there was no 2017 budget but he continued his work with limited funding; working with local fisherman to survey islands off the coast, local knowledge already about where AMOY are nesting; numbers appeared to be very accurate, lead to engaging him to officially help with surveys.
- Southern Cone of S.A. – ORVs, predators, human disturbance; lots of work going on to address these similar threats that we deal with on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts of the U.S.
- WHSG meeting in Peru next month – there will be an informal session on oystercatchers that will hopefully help to extend efforts for international cooperation.

Banding database (Lindsay Addison)

- PPT available
- Database has two ‘sides’ – public and member (password protected). Techs or dedicated volunteers can request direct access to the database, thereby easing the burden on Lindsay for managing entries from the public side and facilitating data entry for those techs/volunteers.
- Eventually there will be a country option in the database for out of country resights
- Please review Lindsay’s email about “Quirky” bands if you haven’t already; things to be on the lookout for as you are resighting and banding
- Stats from database about public entries into the database highlights public participation; idea was presented that we could set up some sort of prize or reward program for public resights (categories); would need to consider guidelines for resighters to prevent excessive disturbance.
- Please see Lindsay’s slide about facilitating data checking to make her life easier!

PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSIONS:

Causes of nest loss in American Oystercatchers; an analysis of video-monitored nests – Ted Simons

- Comment on the incredible plasticity of oystercatchers and ability to adapt; don’t underestimate their ability to adapt with rapidly changing landscapes
- PPT available
- Impacts of coyote could be intense and a new predator dynamic for AMOY into the future
- Ted will be retiring at the end of this academic year; webpage has been maintained through his lab and he is happy to do this on his own time if the WG would like; Neil McCoy is back at NCSU and Ted is interested in possibly engaging him with possible future updates to website; Ted will also continue to do the list serve and help maintain banding activities out of his lab. Will post 4,000+nest records accumulated through his students’ work over the years at NCSU on the website and this could serve as a template for future database management; information could be a template for possible adjunct to the banding database.

Are American Oystercatchers a good umbrella species for Wilson’s Plover? – Abby Sterling

- PPT available
- Nest site selection and nest success of AMOY and WIPL, how does AMOY management also benefit WIPL?
- GA plagued with low productivity for AMOY

- Habitat features and how they influence reproductive success; include WIPL to see how management efforts might benefit them as well
- Large scale habitat features more informative than small scale for predicting nesting
- Not much overlap between predictive habitat features for nest location
- Diverged even further for nest success
- WIPL models more informative than AMOY
- Predators could be acting independent of habitat features, implications for management decisions
- Additive risk of predation and overwash events may be too much for birds to handle and succeed
- Are AMOY an effective surrogate for WIPL? In many ways yes, but spatial overlap of nesting areas is not great
- Any aggressive behavior between AMOY and WIPL? Unsure since AMOY numbers are so low.
- Project looked at success to hatching; often if AMOY can hatch out, they have a good chance of raising chicks successfully.

Integrating mark-resight, census, and photograph data to more effectively monitor non-breeding American oystercatcher populations – Dan Gibson

- PPT available

WEDNESDAY October 25

PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSIONS (CONT.):

Uncovering American Oystercatcher population dynamics, using a collaborative banding data base – Shilo Felton

- PPT available

Nanotagging and MOTUS tracking of Oystercatchers on the Texas coast – Sue Heath

- PPT available
- 14 towers to go up spanning Texas coast
- How are AMOY using the Texas coast?
- Limited detections from 30 AMOY banded; could be because of flight height and possibly they need to fly higher to be detected by towers; but unsure why it's not working better.
- How does data upload process work? Data uploaded to MOTUS, then it gets processed automatically and you receive a chart showing if you had detections or not. If people haven't registered their tags then the hit doesn't come back.
- Tags cost \$215 a piece. Putting up a tower depends on configuration. If you have power and no need for solar panel that facilitates and keeps cost down. Can purchase either put together or components to assemble. Sue's set up was about \$2000/tower.
- How long do tags last? Depends on burst interval. For example, 10s interval could last a year.
- Fee for every deployed tag; minimum \$1500/year for 20 tags. Set up towers and get discount on tags.

Results and output from 2016 future priorities exercise – presentation and discussion, T. Pover and A. Wilke

- PPT available
- Presented revised WG Position Paper – now “Statement of Purpose” and solicited additional input; recommendation to add back in WG accomplishments; otherwise new Statement of Purpose looking good, more of a static document that refers to website and other sources for more dynamic content; TP and AW to make minor revisions based on meeting input, then to be finalized by Steering Committee and posted on website
- Presented overview of exercise from 2016 meeting to identify potential priority initiatives for WG going forward; framed discussion as having the objective of identifying items for new Steering Committee “Work Plan” (items for the S.C. to help move forward over the next year);
- Reviewed ideas that were ranked as High, Med and Low at last year’s meeting
- Discussed topics and narrowed in on several to be included in SC Work plan:
- 1) Range-wide mapping of important AMOY areas, in part has been started by Audubon NC as an internal exercise, need to review status and evaluate how the info can be used, what is the product and who is the audience, could possibly be used for mapping hotspots for tourism and eco-tour guides to reference; consistent messaging from WG could be created to go along with information, combine with other AFSI initiatives for signage; Ruth Boettcher, Lindsay Addison, Amanda Hackney may be able to be on sub-committee;
- 2) Full-life cycle management: examine connections between nesting and wintering areas, pursue projects through Southern Wings, GIS Story map?, Communications strategy;
- 3) Survey Standards: have worked on but never completed; needs revision, can use model from PIPL group of gathering up all data sheets and protocols and comparing
- Steering committee will discuss these during their first call and refine as needed; also will add others as needed.

Central American Oystercatcher migration – S. Schulte/L. Addison

- PPT available
- Gulf of Fonseca January 2017 surveys, 200,000+ shorebirds estimated, 248 AMOY estimated
- First report of banded AMOY outside U.S. from Mexico
- Summary of 11 U.S. banded birds found outside U.S.
- Lindsay provided summary of some of the resight histories
- Will talk at WHSG in Peru about getting this information out about international resights
- Online BNA account needs to be updated with new distribution information

Nest Story: Utilizing our Mobile Devices for Data Collection – Michelle Stantial

- Developing this over the past 2 seasons for PIPL and extended it to AMOY last season
- Impetus was to improve communication between collaborators in NJ
- 2015 – Nest Story was piloted, 2017 - 3 groups of beta testers in NJ, NY, MA (Martha’s Vineyard).
- For collecting data in the field but also for entry in the office; data collection platform not just field use
- Each tech would have own username and password
- Can click between AMOY/PIPL and eventually colonial waterbirds at any point while in the app
- Records all time, tide and weather from you location – tide information is calculated based on what tide station you tell it to use
- Michelle demoed the app; basic functions for nest checks. Other features include photo documentation (i.e. tracks, visitor activity, etc), random field notes
- Can monitor in real time what “missions” are happening. Provides lots of ways to view stats for

activities, missions, etc.

- Pre-existing databases? How to merge or integrate? You can create templates so that data is exported in the format that you need. For example, template already exists to create file meant to be uploaded into decision support tool for PIPL exclusions.
- We can do the same thing with our existing AMOY banding/resighting database.
- Data stored at NestStory headquarters in Ithaca, NY. Separate users have separate accounts.
- Costs associated with it? No projection at this point. Will depend in part on how many users want access since that will impact the overall cost.
- Overwhelming enthusiasm for this tool!

Award presented to Pat and Doris Leary

- Ted Simons presented the 2nd Annual American Oystercatcher Working Group Award for Significant Achievement to Pat and Doris Leary for their tremendous contributions to AMOY conservation. Pam Denmon held the award for the previous year for her work editing the recently published Waterbirds Special Publication focusing on oystercatchers.

Predator management BMP update – Alex Wilke on behalf of Sarah Karpanty (VA Tech)

- Alex updated the group on the NFWF funded project - Coordinated Predation Management for Temperate Breeding Shorebirds in the Atlantic Flyway: November 2016 - February 2018
- Lead by USFWS (Caleb Speigel and Pam Loring) and VA Tech (Sarah Karpanty, Kelsi Hunt, Kayla Davis) with a team of advisors from APHIS (Noel Myers), TNC (Alex Wilke) and Manomet (Shiloh Schulte).
- MAIN GOAL: Consolidate and disseminate knowledge and information about predation management that benefit AFSI focal breeding shorebirds, and improve range-wide coordination of predation management
- FOCAL SPECIES: American Oystercatcher, Piping Plover, Wilson's Plover, Snowy Plover
- COMPONENTS: "Best Management Practices" Guidance document -- aims to consolidate information on management practices from FL to ME; Extensive Lit Review; survey of practitioners; Listing of current & past management practices; Demonstration project integration
- DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS: MA - Managing Shorebird Predators Amidst the Beach-going Public; RI - Predator management to increase shorebird breeding productivity on a barrier beach in RI; NC - Removal of mammalian predators as threats to nesting success of American Oystercatchers and Wilson's Plovers on Masonboro Island, North Carolina; SC - Predator Control at Botany Bay Plantation, South Carolina; GA - Predator exclusions for Wilson's Plover nests in Georgia; FL - Use of Conditioned Taste Aversion to Decrease Shorebird Egg Predation by Fish Crows
- Templates created for data entry and metrics to be used (both for birds and predator management techniques)
- Demo project findings will be integrated into the final draft of the BMPs as "case studies".
- Draft products expected to be presented at the January PIPL meeting in WV.

Discussion: Coordinating and funding predator management across the range

- Predator problems are not going away. What is the most efficient way for managers to get together to develop proposals for funding. Bigger groups with larger partners might be more attractive for funders.
- Examples of bigger efforts so that it's not bit by bit.
- Example of fund set up on a state by state basis to fund programs within a state. Interesting model but might not work in all cases.

Review of AMOY recovery initiative at the ten year mark. Opportunities for future funding and integration with NFWF/AFSI – Facilitated discussion, Shiloh Schulte

- NFWF Initiatives – Atlantic Flyway Shorebird Initiative; AMOY initiative is now absorbed into the broader AFSI. AMOY retained as a focal species within the business plan.
- Focal species allows applicants to tie in multi-species funding with just a handful of target species thereby allowing for better ways to leverage proposals.
- No RFP yet for next funding cycle.
- Important to note that NFWF not the only mechanism for funding within the group.
- Details of next RFP? No details yet. Note that proposals that do not directly fit the RFP may be funded, at least according to some experience of WG members.
- Importance of partners and getting creative about leveraging the ability of certain partners to funnel or manage money. Ability to work across agencies and state lines.
- GULF COAST: different set of funding mechanisms and opportunities. NFWF \$2.5 billion over the next 10 years to fund projects in the gulf, under several different initiatives. Lots of emphasis on building structures or building up land.
- Gulf Coast Avian Monitoring Network: what are the impacts of restoration activities on bird populations; how to monitor into the future; may be opportunities to link Atlantic coast initiatives with Gulf Coast projects; lots of money, competitive landscape, in competition with people studying fish, shellfish, etc. Not just birds. NFWF doesn't seem to be interested in funding AMOY on the gulf because there are not enough birds. WIPL and AMOY don't overlap so that makes it more difficult to overlap project objectives in a proposal.
- Has NFWF had a focus on colonial waterbirds? Yes, in the gulf – herons, egrets, spoonbills, skimmers. Could combine objectives with AMOY in the gulf and colonial waterbirds.
- RESTORE Act projects – aware of any efforts to coordinate needs and efforts? Specific outcomes and requirements inhibits this to some extent. Gulf Coast Avian Monitoring Network is more specifically trying to find ways to fund long term monitoring and management actions. Slow process.
- Possibility of group to approach private funders and leverage the WG reputation to get support for larger, longer term funding applications.

Population level effects of American Oystercatcher management: Evaluating spatial and temporal trends in the distribution of breeding pairs and productivity (Preliminary findings based on contributed data from AMOYWG partners). – Shilo Felton

- PPT available

2018 meeting location and wrap up

- 2018 Meeting – either Florida or Gulf Coast somewhere
- Jess Schulz will investigate possibility of meeting in LA
- If Gulf Coast doesn't work, then Florida will work
- Proposed session for next meeting: discussion on changing policies for protecting oystercatcher habitat; state and federal agencies often have a tough time getting involved in those processes; becoming more and more important with certain proposals for coastal development
- Other announcements: Walker and Sara co-chairs of Habitat Working Group for AFSI. Sub-committee for human disturbance submitted a proposal to develop common signage for shorebirds; would fund a graphic designer to do that; also proposed to do a small study this summer to investigate perching use of different types and shapes of signs. Sara is collecting samples of signs to test so let her know or bring them to her at the PIPL meeting. This effort could fit nicely into mapping and “zoning” initiative.
- Different initiatives and databases for collecting and archiving information on multiple levels – need

for coordinating these efforts with biologists and coming to a consensus about what the next steps are for making things more unified. Associated with NA Wildlife Association in Norfolk, Workshop on Monday March 26th at VA Marine Science Center and Aquarium – Sara S. and Ruth B. for more details.