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Status and distribution of the American Oystercatcher *Haematopus palliatus*

International Shorebird Working Group Oystercatcher Conservation Workshop

La Rochelle, France October 2007

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Taxonomic Status

- Generally recognized as separate species from Haematopus ostralegus
- Six subspecies have been described, of which two or five are currently recognized
- The race galapagensis, endemic to the Galapagos islands, may be a separate species



•Regularly hybridizes with *H. bachmani*, and hybrids are known with *H. ater*

H. palliatus subspecies





- *palliatus* Atlantic and Caribbean coasts North America, Central America, South America to southern Brazil; West Indies, and Pacific Central America
- *durnfordi* Argentina (and Uruguay?)
- frazari W. Mexico
- galapagensis Galapagos Is.
- *pitanay* W. South America to Chiloe Island, Chile





Subspecies morphology

- palliatus has white in inner primaries; absent from frazari and galapagensis
- reduced or lacking in pitanay; variable in durnfordi







Breast markings are variable

- In general, frazari, galapagensis and durnfordi have mottled breasts
- palliatus and pitanay show a clean breast demarcation
- galapagensis is the darkest race with the largest feet
- Plumage is generally more variable than summarized in the literature



Population estimates palliatus

Individuals Distribution Season Coasts E & S 11,000 Non-breeding USA Mexico Breeding 500 Caribbean Breeding 550 Non-breeding 550 1751-2450 Central Breeding 275-600 Non-breeding America Breeding 200 N South America Brazil Breeding 6500 palliatus total 21,326

Global population estimates

Subspecies	Distribution	Individuals	
palliatus	Coasts E & S USA, E Mexico, Central America, Caribbean, N & E South America	21,000	
frazari	Gulf of California & W Mexico	350	
pitanay	W South America (Colombia to SC Chile)	10,000-15,000	
durnfordi	SE South America (S Brazil to SC Argentina)	10,000-15,000	
galapagensis	Galapagos Islands	300	
All subspecies	(Minimum total estimate)	41,650	

2002 Winter Roost Survey

- Aerial surveys November 2002 -February 2003
- Stratified sampling, 239 blocks
- High tide +/- 2 hours survey window
- Detection rates calculated from digital photographs and ground truth surveys
 - Detection rate 0.73 for flocks
 <50 birds
 - Detection rate 1.0 for flocks <u>></u>
 50 birds
- Winter population estimate 10,971 <u>+</u>
 298 birds
- Double counting a possible confounding factor inflating counts

Brown et al. 2005. Journal of Wildlife Management 69:1538-1545



	Estimate	S.E.	
Ground photo	8,354	0	
Aerial count	2,460	148	
Barrier beach count	157	35	
Total	10,971	298	



Central America Population Estimates

- Undertaken as part of "Rangewide Waterbirds" project funded by USFWS-NMBCA and coordinated by BirdLife International on behalf of Waterbird Conservation Council
- Central American estimates led by Oliver Komar of SalvaNATURA, and presented at IV NAOC in Veracruz, Mexico, Oct 2006.
- Estimates derived through consultation with c. 50 ornithologists and consensus sought through validation workshops.









Population Estimates



American Oystercatcher (Haematopus palliatus)

	Breeding		Wintering	
	Minimum	Maximum	Minimum	Maximum
Belize			250	500
Costa Rica	500	1000		
El Salvador	51	250		
Guatemala			0	50
Honduras				
Nicaragua			25	50
Panama	1200	1200		
Central America	1751	2450	275	600









Survey Data: Río Grande do Sul



- Parque Nacional da Lagoa do Peixe: Surveys by Carmem Elisa Fedrizzi & Caio José Carlos
- High Counts: 760 birds along 220 km (Apr 05); 821 birds along 141 km (May 05)



Survey Data: Buenos Aires Province



- Blanco *et al.* (2006) Waterbirds
 29(3): 381-390
- 57 transects, average density of 6.6 ± 21.9 indiv/km
- Not recorded freshwater marshes or shorelines with cliffs.
- Average densities: 9.8 indiv/km in saltmarshes, 8.8 in sandy beaches, and 2.2 in sandy beaches with restinga patches
- Few localities with high counts:



Neotropical Waterbird Census Data: Argentina, Chile, Uruguay

NWC Count Data 1990-2006



Movements

- Only *H. palliatus* in the latitudinal extremes of range are truly migratory. Most are short distance, partial migrants, but fall migration movements of 2000 km have been documented.
- In the USA, most oystercatchers breeding north of New Jersey move south for the winter, although a few move north.

 In southern Santa Cruz province, Argentina, birds are only present in the breeding season



Habitats: diverse, but strictly coastal



Feeding

- Food: almost exclusively shellfish and other marine invertebrates that inhabit intertidal areas.
- Foraging microhabitat: restricted to intertidal sand or mud flats, oyster or mussel reefs or shoals; less commonly, rocky shorelines



Breeding

- Age at first breeding 3-5 years (n=9, mean 3.89 years, S.D. 1.05 years) eastern USA
- Often show strong mate and nest site fidelity
- Clutch size 2-4, in shallow scrape
- Incubation period c.27 days
- Precocial chicks, c.35 days to develop flight capability, young fed by adults up to 6 weeks after fledging



Conservation Status

- Globally: Least Concern (IUCN 2007)
- US and Canada: Species of High Concern
- El Salvador: Endangered
- Guatemala: Near Threatened
- Brazil: Considered Vulnerable in São Paulo state



Threats

- Loss of habitat from coastal development
- Disturbance, from human recreational activities
- Elevated predation from predators associated with human activities
- Contamination of primary food sources by non-point pollution and/or oil spills
- Effects of global climate change, especially predicted rises in sea-level
- Competition for food
- Hunting







Factors affecting productivity and survival



Factors affecting productivity and survival

- Chick mortality
 - Causes of pre-fledging American Oystercatcher chick mortality in coastal North Carolina in 2005 and 2006 where source of mortality could be determined (N=25).
 - Source of mortality could not be determined for 55% of chick deaths (N=32).







Recommended Conservation Actions

- Identify key breeding and wintering sites
- Clarify taxonomy
- Protect and manage key habitats
 - Study and monitor population fecundity and survival
- Create and maintain new habitat
- Raise public awareness, especially regarding disturbance
- Control populations of nest predators

Ramón Moller Jensen

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Other ISWG Meeting Highlights

International Wader Study Group Annual Conference 2007





28th Sept - 01st Oct 2007 La Rochelle, FRANCE

Co-organized by University of La Rochelle and LPO





Phylogeny of Oystercatchers

Allan J. Baker & Erika S. Tavares

Using biometric data for sex discrimination is unreliable when sexual dimorphisms are environment-dependent: Eurasian Oystercatchers as an example

Martijn van de Pol¹, Kees Oosterbeek², Anne Rutten³, Bruno Ens² & Simon Verhulst³

Consequences of a major habitat change on survival and distribution of wintering Eurasian Oystercatchers

Olivier Duriez¹, Stein A. Saether², Bruno J. Ens³ & Rémi Choquet⁴

Sex-specific foraging strategy of the African Black Oystercatcher Haematopus moquini in the Eastern Cape, South Africa

S. Kohler & S. Jaquemet

Black Oystercatcher regional ecological assessment: breeding biology, demographics, productivity, interseasonal movements, and threats in British Columbia and Alaska

David F. Tessler¹, Verena A. Gill², Michael I. Goldstein³, Brian Guzzetti^{4, 3}, Richard B. Lanctot⁵, Julie Morse⁴, Sandra Talbot⁵, Mike Tetreau⁶ & Caleb Speigel⁷.

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