

## American Oystercatcher Working Group Meeting Minutes

August 11, 2015

College of the Atlantic – Bar Harbor, ME

### Welcome and Introductions

### American Oystercatcher WG 2015 summary and announcements – Shiloh Schulte

- Too early in the season for full summary of field work; requested each location to give a brief summary of AMOY activities
- Sue Heath – TX
  - First grant for AMOY in 2011, yearly monitoring since then, about 50 pairs, upper coast. Island nesters, no beach nesters. Challenges – overwash and wind driven tides, human disturbance. Restoration efforts – veg removal, shell placement. BLSK management heavy in TX and these efforts also benefit AMOY. Recent efforts to alleviate plastics pollution from fishing activities – clean ups, receptacles, etc. Volunteer watchers to keep an eye on nesting areas, training video for what to do. Looking at how AMOY are using intertidal reefs. Note about heavy rain in June 2015 that resulted in high water levels and islands being flooded. Nesting season ended in early May as opposed to more typical end in late June.
- Jess Schulz – LA
  - No coordinated effort for monitoring, variety of surveys once per year for pair locations. Few pairs and very spread out in remote areas. Thinking about ramping up effort for monitoring by piggy-backing with other efforts in many cases. Challenges – coastal erosion.
- Janelle Brush – FL
  - Volunteer shorebird alliance – newsletter, monitoring protocols for volunteers for posting, stewardship activities and non-breeding activities. AMOY nest everywhere in the state, even rooftops. Monitoring at varying levels depending on where in the state and the groups doing the monitoring, core areas monitored with Janelle's crew. Good idea of coverage for overall distribution in the state. Lots of work in the non-breeding season, presenting on this at symposium. Banding program – effort depends on funding.
- Troy Wilson (reporting for Tim Keyes) – GA
  - Access challenges on 14 barrier islands – 10 are only accessible by boat. Tim and crew get out to islands and marsh islands for monitoring. Roughly 135 pairs monitored – effort in past several years to monitor most if not all pairs in the state. Predator management on certain islands dependent on funding. GA Shorebird Alliance created with annual meetings.
- Felicia Sanders – SC
  - Lots of monitoring, banding, resighting, management over the past 15 years. Took a break for a while and recent renewed funding has allowed for monitoring again. Lots of sites have high levels of human disturbance and focus recently has been for managing that.
  - Felicia recently received Governor's Award for efforts to protect coastal nesting birds!!
- Sarah Schweitzer and Lindsay Addison – NC
  - Challenges – human disturbance a main threat throughout the coast. Audubon works towards southern area of the state, Sarah and her crew work towards northern area, all in coordination. Intertidal areas are public trust lands, need to maintain access to these areas for the public, limitation for monitoring human disturbance. Vehicle free areas on national seashores. Posting and stewardship activities. Audubon monitors about 50-70

pairs of AMOY. Banding chicks and sometimes adults. Some non-breeding surveys with resighting roosts. ISS surveys gives some information for AMOY. Lots of collaboration across the board with NCSU, national seashores, parks, etc. Looking at overwash and erosion as factors impacting AMOY nesting habitat, oyster shell weir project (to be presented at symposium). Dredge spoil islands and partnership with Corps. Controversy with bill in National Defense Act is an opportunity to get mitigation funding to build up some of these islands. Predator control – coyote on almost all barrier islands now, effort to get more coordinated predator control. Asking about ideas for coordinated database for storing AMOY monitoring data.

- Alex Wilke, Ruth Boettcher, Pam Denmon – VA
  - Continued monitoring for pairs and productivity throughout state since 2002. Monitoring and management efforts coordinated among many partners, facilitated by informal group dedicated to coastal avian management (VA Coast Avian Partnership). Widespread predator management along barrier islands. Challenges include predators on barrier islands, increasing human disturbance and access issues on islands, habitat loss along Chesapeake Bay shorelines and within seaside marshes. Continued banding program since 2003 – presenting analysis of 10 years of mark-recapture data at symposium.
- Todd Pover – NJ
  - 400+ pairs, monitor and manage about 1/4 of those pairs along the barrier islands; most birds in marsh are not monitored, many nest on state and federal lands but not monitored for visitor issues. Islands this past year had good productivity at 0.5+ chicks/pair; doesn't seem like flooding was bad this year. Nonbreeding monitoring since 2001 – focusing on staging phase, also doing this with PIPL and coordinating the efforts.
- Shiloh Schulte – NY
  - Surprising number of AMOY nesting along heavily developed beaches presumably because of good food sources on jetties but high chick loss; NY has developed new protocols for management and monitoring.
- Shiloh Schulte – CT
  - Audubon CT working with AMOY, as part of overall Audubon effort which is ramping up along all Audubon Atlantic and Gulf coast sites for coastal beach nesting species.
- Kate Iaquinto and Shiloh Schulte – MA
  - MassAudubon. Disturbance mgt, some predator mgt, working with towns and communities. 169 pairs with 0.77-0.96 productivity in 2014. This year 180 pairs with same productivity. Monomoy – manage three islands, overwash and predation main challenges. Wondering about how often pairs fledge more than one chick in consecutive years and specifically young birds or first time breeders.
- Shiloh Schulte – ME
  - 8 nesting pairs, one or two islands in southern part of the state.

#### Business Plan update/Overview of Status of Recovery Effort – Shiloh Schulte

- PPT available
- Evidence of declining population and low reproductive rates drove development of business plan
- Three population projections guiding plan
- Average 0.56 productivity after start of campaign.
- Population estimates from big surveys suggest that population is at least not decreasing. If you consider modeling projections from 2008 then it suggests that it is actually increasing.

#### Transfer of color band data to the BBL and banding database update – Lindsay Addison and Jo Lutmerding

- PPT available.

- Current data agreement outlines a rolling 3 year timeframe for submitting band/recapture data to BBL, on an opt-in basis.
- Briefing on the data-sharing policies from the BBL from Jo.
- Questions for Jo
  - Would data sent from BBL be a mirror of the data that is currently on the AMOY website? And is this part of the banding permit process?
    - This will depend on the group and what is decided by the individual data owners that agree to roll data over to the BBL. Currently, it's not required that resights are reported to the BBL. The database table accommodates that information but it is not required.
    - Some of the fields from the AMOY database won't go into the BBL since there aren't enough fields in the BBL database; not an exact mirror.
- Ted Simons – remember that we are a pilot effort in this process. Will need to feel our way through some of the details. Represents our commitment to open process and leadership in this area.
- At this point, the WG is in the initial phases and no one has opted in yet to transfer data. But our database has that agreement already as part of it.
- Rolling three year data submission would be 1999-2012. Then yearly after that.
- What about editing records – how will the databases talk to each other? Right now there is not a process but there will be something worked out.
- Lindsay will follow up with email about the process and will be requesting responses from as few groups possible from the individual states (i.e. please try to coordinate your response within your own state with all parties involved in the database):
  - Are you in or out?
  - What are the names of the permittees that you've been banding under? Resights will need to be associated with a permit number to be merged into BBL database; will be submitted either under a single permit or under the permit associated with each bird's capture record. \*\*After some discussion, the group seemed to come to the consensus that resight records should be submitted with the permit number under which the bird was originally banded.
- Question from Lindsay – how is current method of ordering bands working? Coordinating codes, etc.
  - Overall seems that the group is happy with coordinating codes on a state by state basis with someone coordinating orders within each state.
  - One suggestion from Lindsay might be to add to the website which codes have been ordered from which color. Similar to historical band information that's on the database. Would just require submitting those database to Shilo Felton AND keeping that information updated.

#### Next steps towards finalizing the special issue in Waterbirds – Pam Denmon

- 14 first drafts in with at least one more on the way, maybe another
- Process will be exactly like submitting to Waterbirds: anonymous reviewers; committee will assign reviewers to each piece; reviewers will receive same form as they would for Waterbirds journal; reviewers will have 1-2 months to review. Committee will respond to authors with results. We are paying for volume, about \$15,000. At this point, not asking authors to pay the page charges. Providing a bit of latitude with the format of the papers apart from a typical scientific paper. Stay tuned.

#### Summary of 2015 repeated AMOY survey effort - Ruth Boettcher

- PPT available

- Review of original 2013 pilot effort in NC and VA.
- Opportunity over the next 2-3 years for states to further participate in this work to evaluate detection issues with these surveys. No funding is available at this point but states can participate as funding and resources allow.
- Review of 2015 objectives and pilot effort.
- Goal is to get some measure of how well these surveys work for detecting oystercatchers that can guide future survey efforts – not that this is the way that things will be done all the time.
- Next steps for 2016
  - Key issues
    - Observer variability – has it been evaluated how that might impact the results? Some are better at detecting AMOY and nesting behavior than others.
    - What we learn from this exercise will not only help move closer to a rangewide breeding season survey but it will help individual states when they are developing their own survey efforts for their own purposes.
- Separate meeting to be held sometime this week to discuss 2016 effort – Ruth to provide update from that meeting.
- Sara Schweitzer – iPlover example of data collection. Could we use that model to facilitate data collection. Any way that we can move to more coordinated data collection would be good.
  - Several noted that USGS and USFWS also requested AMOY and LETS data from refuges to be submitted via the iPlover process in 2015.
- How long do we anticipate this effort to continue? Last year talked about this being a 2-3 year effort made up of what people can do without funding and trying to get good representation across the range.

#### NFWF/Atlantic Flyway Shorebird Conservation funding and next steps – Shiloh Schulte

- PPT available
- Currently in implementation phase of Flyway Initiative
- Work going forward from NFWF's perspective will be guided by this business plan.
- AMOY recovery effort is one component of the Flyway Initiative
- Todd Pover question – Is the list of 180 sites (listed in business plan as a goal) for implementing predator mgt (or other actions) available somewhere or just a goal/metric?? Not sure exactly. There is likely a list of priority sites that was developed as part of the plan but whether that matches with 180 or not is unknown.
- Brad Andres – Flyway plan is being cited in NAWCA proposals.
- Lots of opportunities to think about how we branch out and think about shorebird conservation.
- Question – how can we stay up to speed with the next steps of the RFP process? RFP cycle is tied to AMOY cycle so watch NFWF website or go off of regular proposal schedule and cycle.
  - Time will tell what the broader funding situation will look like over time and how much of the plan NFWF can actually support. This will in part dictate the RFP process.
- Question about repeated survey effort and will that effort align with the priorities in the plan? If the situation presents itself that having a better survey for breeding pairs is an objective that gets at a larger goal of a proposal the idea might be competitive. Would have to be framed in the right context with appropriate goals and objectives.

#### Presentations from partners working with AMOY in Mexico – moderated by Shilo Felton

- Goal of expanding our partnerships within the AMOY range; NCSU received funding to bring international partners to this week's meeting; 4 people here today to represent their work in international locations.

- Miriam Janeth del Rocio Lerma Lizarraga –
  - PPT available
  - Sinaloa
  - Banding oystercatchers but mostly working with nonbreeding birds.
  - Working with fisherman who know locations of oystercatchers; provided informational pamphlets, binoculars, scopes, maps, etc. to collect information.
  - Question – did fisherman volunteer? Six communities, constant communication to get the information. They have the forms to complete.
  - Overlap between nonbreeding sites with breeding sites. Do the fisherman notice disturbance to these sites? Some islands are really hard to get to, others are visited heavily, just depends. Fisherman can provide some of this information. Building a volunteer base to support the conservation of these species.
  - Link with similar efforts for example in Florida to use volunteer base to collect information.
  - Link with lots of outreach and stewardship efforts along US Atlantic and Gulf Coasts
- Jose Alfredo Castillo Guerrero –
  - PPT available
  - Sinaloa
  - Banding chicks opportunistically; trouble capturing adults to band.
  - Breeding surveys started 3 years ago (Apr – Jun), hoping to maintain long-term effort
  - Main research interest with seabirds; recently started looking at oystercatchers
  - Nonbreeding surveys started last year – same effort Miriam mentioned.
  - Community training for AMOY monitoring – same effort Miriam mentioned. 7 groups with varying levels of interest and participation.
  - What does the population look like at your sites based on breeding surveys – seems stable but too early to tell. Two main islands for breeding that support 50+ pairs each; each island is 4-5 km.
  - What are they eating mostly in these areas? Do not know at this point. Oysters, clams (seasonally).
  - Link here to assist with adult capture techniques.
- Eduardo Palacios Castro –
  - PPT available
  - Referencing the high density site that Miriam and Alfredo mentioned; it's a special place for breeding AMOY; exception to the rule as far as nesting density in the area; probably due to limited habitat available overall. 50% of frazari population in the Sinaloa area; less than 3,000 total estimated.
  - Eduardo's work – network of researchers in NW MX that began with Snowy Plover initiative
  - 12 of 17 MX WHSRN sites are in NW MX. Few oystercatchers south of NAY to the border.
  - 2009 conservation plan developed with guidance from Manomet and Miradi process. "Mexican" American Oystercatcher – population size about 2,300 individuals; listed as endangered in 2010.
  - Monitoring project led by Point Blue – sampling units sampled annually for shorebirds
  - Last several years have been bad years for seabirds and oystercatchers; need better information on ecology of oystercatchers and breeding success. Could be that productivity and recruitment is very low across the board.
  - Question – what is it about Sinaloa in general that results in more AMOY? Predator free islands and foraging flats. Suspect that the habitat is still limited.

- Question - Does high density result in higher chick death because of adults killing chicks, assuming chicks hatch? Flooding is main cause of failure but need more work to know what's going on.
- Link here with techniques for monitoring nests to determine factors impacting reproductive success – cameras, monitoring protocols, etc.
- Jose Alfredo Alvarez Cerda –
  - PPT available
  - Laguna Madre, Tamaulipas
  - Similar to Laguna Madre are in TX
  - 2 years of surveys in three regions – AMOY average 61
  - Also use fisherman from the community
  - Link here with Sinaloa project using fisherman to gather information
  - Question – are they checking for bands? They have not seen bands.
  - Small number of oystercatchers – does this imply that not many birds are moving from TX to the south? Sue – adults stay put but don't know where the young birds go.
  - Question – how much area did the survey sites actually cover? Variable.

#### Discussion – opportunities and needs for international cooperation and collaboration – All

- What are the most productive areas or areas of most need for cooperation/collaboration?
  - Eg. what does human disturbance look like in their areas?
    - All over the place – livestock, introduced species, mammalian predators, extensive use by fisherman. Pacific side is ATV use by tourists, and fisherman traveling between fishing camps. Most of pairs are using islands so they avoid the sandy beaches. Driving on beach? Yes. Dogs, yes, both feral and leashed.
    - Just starting with convincing managers about importance of reducing disturbance. Have started working with communities specifically about human disturbance. Link here with the same type of disturbance in areas like NC and ideas of what works and what doesn't.
- B. Andres – 2009 conservation plan that Eduardo presented has already done a great job at laying out challenges, threats, etc. That will set the stage for developing a Pacific Flyway Conservation Plan.
- Gulf of Mexico coast – still don't have an idea of the number of AMOY along those coastlines. Link here with efforts for widespread survey efforts. Standardized protocols, etc. BMPs already developed by the AMOY Working Group. Requires a certain level of working management to begin with. Shiloh to follow up with the AMOY WG BMPs – specifically to update them, look into getting Spanish translations and make them available on the WG website.
- Who owns the high density island in Sinaloa? Federally owned. Big need to educate them and get them on board with the AMOY conservation. Funds? Not many.
- Eduardo – simple things like signs and stewardship monitoring are not being done. What are the limiting factors for implementing these things? Most sites are technically protected areas but management is limited. Laws are incomplete. Laws are there to some extent but not the next step of enforcing them. Would the laws even be enforced? Environmental law enforced by a separate agency – environmental police. Complex jurisdictions and politics.
- Enforcement of environmental laws more focused on things like sea turtles and whales.
- Disturbance issues are seasonal too – i.e. spring break. Are there resources in the government to put people on the ground for stewardship efforts? Some precedent here with blue-footed boobies and dealing with seasonal activities like spring break disturbance. Could rangers make a difference? Where do we go from here? If CONANP sees cooperation and leverage from partnerships and cooperative efforts, they might be more likely to consider allowing certain things in terms of protection and stewardship.

- Also need to prioritize high-level discussions within the enforcement and policy agencies. To some extent already have some buy in from locals with the fisherman programs.
- FLOODING – question to Eduardo about any cooperation with groups like the Corps to build up nest sites with dredge spoil? Don't know if there is opportunity here but might be a productive thing to look into. Seems like habitat is limited in some of these areas in general – ways of generating new habitats seems to be a logical area of potential. Several links here with these efforts in the U.S. to guide evaluation of this.

#### International collaboration wrap up – see Shiloh's Slide for final version

- Join Listserv
- Connect with Brazil shorebird group
- Disseminate and translate current BMPs
  - Promote and integrate regional action plans
- Higher level discussion between U.S./Mexico governments on policy/priorities (critical habitat)
  - Regional/local focused efforts
  - Letter of support from U.S. AMOY Working Group
- Working Group website – extend to include section on international cooperators/partners (Shilo)
  - Translate at least introductory material on website (Manomet)
- Include international AMOY workshops at WHSG meeting
- Possibly hosting one of the AMOY Working Group meetings closer to Mexico or in Mexico/Central America for easier travel for Mexican participants (poll working group)
- Extending ISS through Mexico
- Mark-resight studies/database (Lindsay)
- Explore joint research and management grants between US/Mexico partners
- Identify research needs and recruit international exchange students. (Brad) Develop/encourage exchange student/intern programs

#### WORKING GROUP ACTION ITEMS

- Breeding season survey participation
- Survey design changes and communication
- Poll Working Group on BBL migration
- Finalize the special issue of Waterbirds
- Update AMOYs BMPs
- Band inventory on website

#### OTHER TOPICS TO ADDRESS

- Management areas/actions not currently implemented
  - Include initial summary with field season data
- What questions can we answer with the AMOY banding database?
- Identify current research questions/data gaps
- 2016 meeting location – Shiloh to follow up