

American Oystercatcher 2019 State and Country Updates

Florida

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

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Breeding Season

In July 2019 we released the annual monitoring report [Florida Shorebird Alliance Monitoring Data at Work](#). The report summarizes how the Florida Shorebird Alliance monitoring data is used to measure progress toward conservation goals, identify information gaps, and adaptively manage for the long-term recovery of shorebird and seabird populations. The [Florida Shorebird Alliance](#) monitors follow the [Breeding Bird Protocol for Florida's Shorebirds and Seabirds](#) and enter their data in the [Florida Shorebird Database](#). In 2019 we monitored 215 breeding pairs of AMOY at 46 ground-nesting sites and on 8 rooftops (*data is still preliminary*). The top 5 nesting sites in the state are St. Marks NWR, Tolomato River, Cross Florida Barge Canal Spoil Islands, Tampa Bay 2D, and Lanark Reef. Statewide *preliminary* productivity was 0.32 fledglings/pair. This value will be refined as data entry/QC has been finished. The most productive site was the Tolomato River with 0.68 fledglings/pair (17 fledges produced this season). Preliminary data indicate that prey availability adjacent to historical nesting locations (brood rearing areas) is an emerging threat to chick growth and survival. This can potentially be linked to local oyster declines and habitat loss.

Banded Birds

In 2019 we banded 15 AMOY adults and 53 chicks. However, a total of 275 AMOY were banded in Florida during the past 12 years (2008 to present). Florida has attracted nesting AMOY from throughout their range, with nesting birds that were banded in Massachusetts, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina. Our largest site for immigration of birds into the breeding population is the Tolomato River and other rivers along the Atlantic Coast.

Nonbreeding Season

We work closely with partners to monitor key areas used by wintering AMOY. The most important wintering area for AMOY is along the Nature Coast (including Cedar Keys NWR and St. Marks NWR). Other concentrations of wintering oystercatchers occur in NE FL and SW FL. We recently updated the *FWC Monitoring Protocol for Nonbreeding Shorebirds and Seabirds*. The updated protocol includes a variety of guidance documents aimed at improving data collection, including the optional field to assess AMOY age (HY vs AHY). In addition, the protocol includes a resighting protocol for banded birds as well as predator tracking information and identification guides. This Nonbreeding protocol is currently available upon request. We are working on a survival analysis of wintering oystercatchers in the Nature Coast of Florida.

Predation Management

The most common cause of known AMOY nest failure statewide in 2019 was overwash followed by predation. We follow guidance to predation management that optimizes the path for a data-driven and adaptive predation management approach. This process emphasizes the reduction of uncertainties and facilitates the implementation of targeted predator- and site-specific predation management actions. The process is outlined in Figure 9 in the annual report [Florida Shorebird Alliance Monitoring Data at Work](#).

FWC Shorebird Program staff are working on a predation management portfolio. The portfolio chapters are best management practices (BMP) and/or guidance documents (depending on topic) for predators specific to Florida's coastal habitat. The portfolio is meant to parallel but expand upon the Atlantic Flyway Shorebird Initiative Predation Management BMPs. Guidance will include information on tracking predation issues associated with each predator species, detailed information on predator behavior, history and known impacts from the species, permitting requirements, and research needs or data gaps. The portfolio is designed to be predator and site specific with recommended predator management actions (e.g., removal vs aversion) specific to the situation. Lastly, the predator portfolio is a living document that will develop over time as we learn more about the effectiveness of predation management options through literature review and via implementation of predation management in Florida in association with the shorebird program.

The University of Florida graduate student, Nick Vitale, defended his thesis entitled *Habitat change, predators, and disturbance: factors influencing productivity of American oystercatchers (Haematopus palliatus) nesting in Florida's Big Bend*. Nick and team met with managers from the Cross Florida Greenway State Recreation and Conservation Area (Barge Canal) to provide high-priority adaptive management recommendations based on the results of Nick's project. We drafted a site-specific management plan and associated FAQs as a resource for managers as they move forward with a vegetation management strategy (to reduce predator presence) to benefit nesting American Oystercatchers. We are working on a monitoring strategy to enable us to evaluate the success of management actions on AMOY reproductive outcomes.

Habitat Restoration/Enhancement

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation and Audubon staff continue to develop and refine habitat creation and restoration projects to benefit shorebirds and seabirds. The Deepwater Horizon (DWH) Project Portal contains drafts of numerous projects that are eligible for funding over the next 15 years. One critical component of developing these projects is to ensure coordination and communication with partners as well as engage important new partners.

FWC shorebird program staff revised projects in the master list of Potential Deepwater Horizon Projects and collaborated with partners on the development of new projects for the NRDA Restoration Plan #2 funding opportunity for habitat restoration projects. A high priority project that was recently updated is the *Enhancement of Gomez Key, near Cedar Key, FL, to benefit breeding American oystercatchers*.