

## American Oystercatcher 2019 State and Country Updates

### Massachusetts

#### Nantucket Conservation Foundation

*Karen Beattie*

NCF is doing nest monitoring and protection for all AMOYs on our properties (in 2019, we had 22 pairs total). All of our nesting pairs are fenced, posted, vehicles are excluded and they are monitored at least 2x per week. We are also attempting to band as many chicks as possible from our nests and also those monitored by our Nantucket, Tuckernuck and Muskeget partners (Town of Nantucket, Tuckernuck Land Trust, Mass Audubon, The Trustees). In 2019, we banded a total of 29 chicks.

#### Colonial Waterbird Program, Mass Audubon

*Kathy Parsons*

#### Overview

Mass Audubon's Coastal Waterbird Program protected threatened coastal birds through management and education at 177 sites along 125 miles of the Massachusetts coastline. Forty-three staff members contributed to these efforts including two full-time staff, 8 sanctuary staff, 23 seasonal staff, and 10 trainees. In addition, two AmeriCorps teams and more than 100 volunteers provided essential support to the program. The Coastal Waterbird Program installed protective fencing and signage, monitored nesting activity, provided educational opportunities for beachgoers, and supported land owners and local communities in coastal habitat protection.

#### Nesting

American Oystercatcher abundance in Massachusetts increased to approximately 211 nesting pairs in 2019, compared to 205 in 2018. Fifty pairs were documented breeding on Mass Audubon-protected sites, approximately 24% of the state population. Oystercatchers were successful hatching 54% of all eggs laid. Attributed factors of egg mortality (% of failed eggs) were as follows: 32% predation; 33% overwash; 5% inviable. Fledging rate at Mass Audubon-managed sites was less in 2019 compared to 2018 (0.78 chicks fledged/pair and 1.02 chicks fledged/pair, respectively). Average range of statewide fledging was 0.74-0.87 fledged/pair. Estimated annual productivity to maintain a stable oystercatcher population is 0.35 fledged chicks/pair. The Coastal Waterbird Program protected nineteen pairs of nesting oystercatchers on ten islands in Boston Harbor in 2019. The urban oystercatchers fledged approximately 0.95 fledglings/pair. Our field crew and education specialists provided outreach programs to hundreds of visitors to the harbor islands. In all, a record 35 pairs of oystercatchers nested in Boston Harbor.

#### Banded Oystercatchers

Shorebird monitors resighted 11 uniquely banded AMOY during the weeks of nesting (i.e. prior to staging). All of these were confirmed breeding birds; seven were paired with each other and four were paired with unbanded birds. The following yellow-banded birds were observed: YE(YF5), YE(60), YE(70), YE(52), YE(AE7), MFR(NX), MFR(MR), Y(4P), YE(W7), YE(CK), YE(J3).

#### Activities Conducted

- We installed fencing and signage as a disturbance management technique for nesting coastal waterbirds at 93 beaches. All sites were fenced with symbolic fencing and regulatory/educational signs

were posted on fences to prevent human disturbance to nesting and foraging areas. Mass Audubon monitored 177 beaches; 44 of these beaches were utilized by American Oystercatcher pairs and 31 had actively nesting pairs. We submitted AMOY state census forms for 59 sites that have had nesting activity within the past three years. Mass Audubon state-wide and sanctuary-based staff engaged in extensive educational efforts including beach conversations, hand-out materials, and public presentations.

- We worked cooperatively with USDA-APHIS to secure appropriate permits and contract with a qualified professional to conduct predator control activities to protect oystercatchers and plovers at two Mass Audubon-owned sites.
- We maintained records of AMOY breeding locations, reproductive success (where possible) and factors affecting nest loss at all oystercatcher nesting sites that occur on Mass Audubon monitored properties. Average productivity during the 2019 nesting season was 0.78 young fledged per pair (48 pairs with fledging data).

#### New Activities in 2020

The Coastal Waterbird Program will pursue a strategic effort in 2020 to reduce adverse impacts from human disturbance to breeding and staging American Oystercatchers (AMOY) in Massachusetts. The activities proposed include 1) conducting on-the-ground management to implement AFSI disturbance reduction BMPs at 60 nesting sites managed by Mass Audubon's Coastal Waterbird Program, 2) training beach managers from partner organizations in implementing BMPs at an additional 150 sites, 3) expanding monitoring, human disturbance reduction and protection efforts in 2 areas supporting 40% of the state population where protection and monitoring is minimal, and management objectives have not been developed, 4) developing and adding a new, AMOY specific module to the state's online annual census data management system, and 5) extending nesting season protections and disturbance reduction practices to benefit migrating AMOY at 100 sites throughout the state. In all, 200 pairs of breeding and staging AMOY will benefit from the project. In addition, we hope to partner with Manomet and Biodiversity Works to implement a chick banding project in Boston Harbor.