



American Oystercatchers in the Boston Harbor Islands

Lyra Brennan, Director
& Beth Howard, Boston Crew Leader
Mass Audubon Coastal Waterbird Program



Boston Harbor Islands



- National and State Park
- 34 islands and peninsulas;
- High visitation
- Diversity of habitat from glacially-derived drumlins, including cobble beaches, bedrock outcrops
- Historical and archaeological significance



*I knew I'd find
you here*

AMOY Nesting Islands

Locations where AMOY have nested within the last decade in the Boston Harbor Islands

Legend

- ☆ Historically Mass Audubon
- ☆ Historically National Parks
- ☆ New Mass Audubon site

AMOY Nesting

- 19 known islands
- Historically:
 - 10 MAS
 - 8 NPS
 - 1 new
- Other partners
- Mainland sites



Banded birds throughout the harbor:

Y(4P):Y(4P)/X



Sarah: 2020 (fledged chicks), 2021, 2023, 2022

Button: 2024, 2025

Ragged: 2019



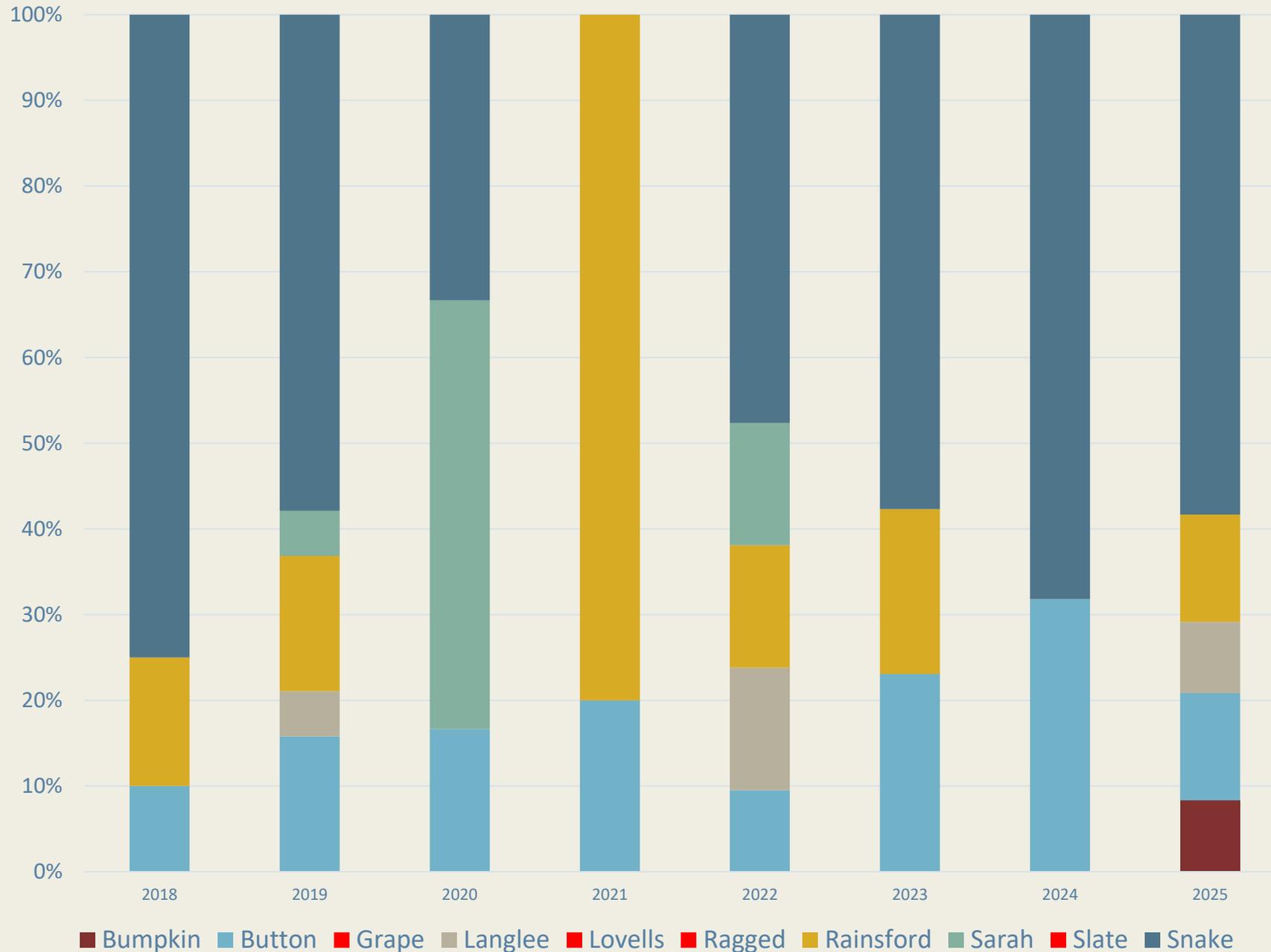
- Banded in 2015 on Monomoy, winters in NC
- Returned to breed in Boston 4 years later
- Tries something new each year!

Islands Monitored by Mass Audubon

- Data from past eight years, ten islands
- 8-year productivity average: 0.99 chicks per pair
- Highest: 1.44
- Lowest: 0.26
- What happened in 2020 and 2021?
- MAS monitoring full prod vs NPS census



Percentage of Fledglings Produced Per Island Per Year

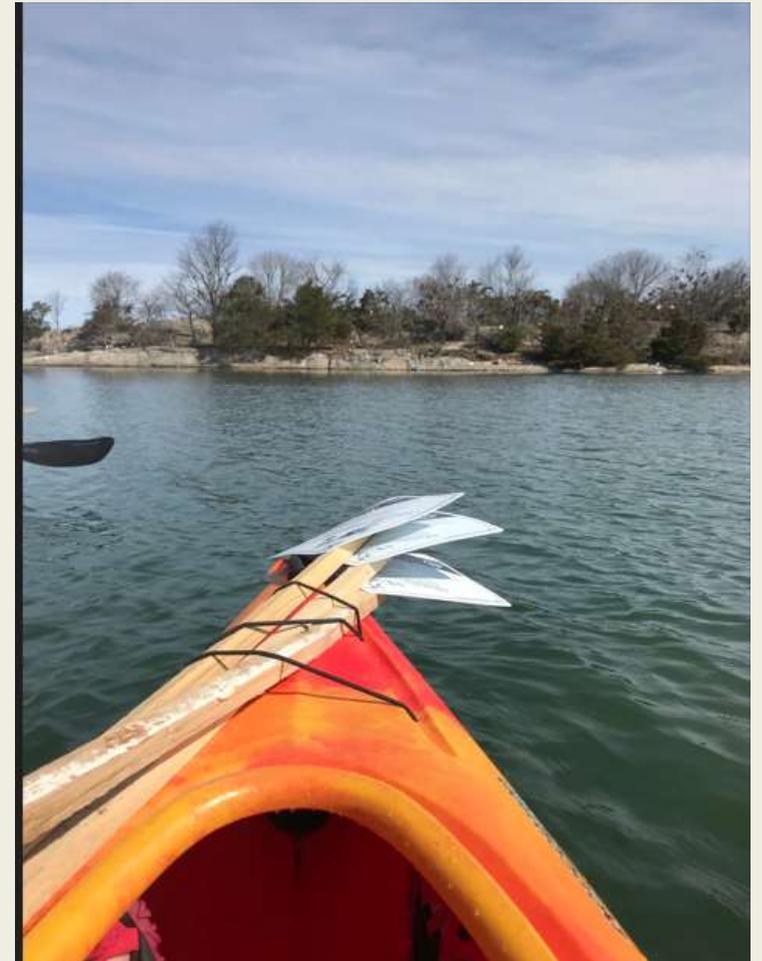


Productivity by Island

- 10 islands
- One typically produces over 50% of fledglings
- 1-2 more reliable producers
- Others, sporadic or rare

Over 41 pairs in the harbor in 2025

- Expanded partnership enables more data collection and access
- Lots of non-breeding birds
 - 6 Hingham Harbor
 - 14 Lovells
 - 4-6 Great Brewster
- New nesting and territorial non-nesting pairs
 - 3 → 6 Rainsford
 - 2 → 3 Calf
 - 2 → 4 Great Brewster
- New island/pair/success
 - Bumpkin (fledged 2)
 - Raccoon (no hatches/fledges)



Management

- Given what we've seen, what can we do to help:
 - Build resilience for existing pairs at productive sites
 - Support existing pairs to become productive at non-productive or potential sites
 - Habitat restoration?
 - Help new pairs establish productive territories
 - Think more broadly about habitat and threats:



Examine challenges

- Current pairs:
 - Tidal overwash
 - Predation
 - Disturbance
 - Fireworks/drone shows
- New pairs:
 - All of the above, plus...
 - ...available and appropriate habitat
 - Funding and resources
- Wading bird colonies and gulls





Assess what can be accomplished

- Short-term
 - Small-scale vegetation removal by hand
- Medium-term
 - Predator removal
 - Ownership and funding, predator species
- Long-term
 - Habitat management plans
 - Creation of new habitat?
 - Raised structures for nests?
 - Lots of creative thinking!

Manage population holistically

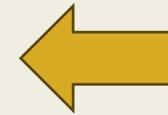
- Know your birds!
- Improve conditions at specific sites, BUT:
- View population as a shifting whole
- Create opportunities for successes to buffer losses
- Build capacity and resources into landowner management plans and regs;
- Create room for growth and expansion while supporting existing pairs





Thank you!

bhoward@massaudubon.org;
lbrennan@massaudubon.org



Shiloh's 2023 Isles of Shoals hatchling N35, who came to check out the harbor islands as a yearling in 2024, as part of a flock of young non-breeders.