

Timucuan Shorebird Partnership Meeting Notes

26 Oct 2017 | 10:00am-1:00pm

Ribault Club, Jacksonville FL

In attendance: Gian Basili (USFWS); Brandon Volbrecht (DEP), Shea Armstrong (FWC), Emma LaClerc (FWC), Michelle Waterman (DEP), Meghan Harris (DEP), Donna Bear (Jax Zoo), Chris Farrell (Audubon), Richard Timm, Myranda Parker (NAVASTA Mayport), Jean Olbert (FWC), Jolie Schlieper (COJ-Huguenot), Hailey Garcia (COJ), Emily Bernardini (COJ), Fara Ilami (FWC), Jean Rolke (Audubon), Michelle Vandeventer (FWC), Megan Wallrichs (FWC), Blair Hayman (FWC)

Shorebird Program Update (Blair Hayman; FWC-North Central Regional Species Conservation Biologist):

- 2016-2017 FWC & Audubon implements FL BNB Plan funded through NFWF grant from Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund (allows FWC and Audubon to hire additional staff).
- Reiteration of what the Partnership is: It's everyone! FWC, FDEP, Local Municipalities (City of Jacksonville), NGOS (e.g. Audubon), Citizens/Volunteers!
- BNB Plan follows more of a business model than FWC's Species Action Plans: measurable outcomes with specific metrics & goals (does not replace SAPs)
- Overall Plan goal: Increase statewide populations of five focal species by 10% over 10 years (AMOY, SNPL, LETE, BLSK, WIPL) through six strategies:
 - Reduce human disturbance
 - Habitat management
 - Predation mgmt.
 - Addressing mgmt. info needs
 - Improve conservation regulations
 - Ensuring effective monitoring
- Increased staffing capacity is a great step forward, but will still rely heavily on partners to meet Plan objectives!
- GEBF not perpetual funding (currently 4 years, but may get renewed for 4 more)—need to identify permanent funding for long term conservation of shorebirds

MOTUS Network in north Florida (Gian Basili presenting for Cindy Fury; USFWS):

- MOTUS: a network of researchers using automated telemetry receiving stations to study movements of small flying animals (birds, bats, insects!) on local, regional, and hemispheric scales
- Started in 2012, now managed by Bird Studies Canada (since 2014)
- By end of 2016, 325 receiving stations across 3 continents
- Why important: can aid in identifying limiting factors of movement, and help in planning conservation.
- Just a few questions MOTUS can help answer:
 - Breeding & post-breeding dispersal

- Overwintering ecology
- Need a transmitting device (nanotags), receiving stations, data management
 - All tags operate on single frequency but with 10000s of unique tags (through different pulse & burst rates)—approx. \$225 tag
 - Receiving stations are small towers that are continuously listening (15-20km range with directional antenna)—ranges from \$2.5-8k/station (depends on structure, power source, antenna #)
 - Data can be sent (cellularly) or downloaded on-site; *data management is impt*
- Initial “fence” of MOTUS towers in North Florida set up by Cornell for a thrush movement study
- Florida doesn’t have many despite how important FL is for migratory birds
- Even though we don’t have many towers, there are many species/individuals that are already outfitted with tags
- USFWS wants to expand network in Florida starting with NWRs
- USFWS plans for expansion of 9 more stations across Florida
- Smithsonian wants to install 13 sites from Nassau → Ponce Inlet asap for a Kirtland’s warbler study
 - Chris F: Are you looking for property owners to say yes/installation sites or is the infrastructure already in place and you are looking for help more on the data management side of things?? – Gian: Smithsonian has the money for this program, USFWS will subsidize some of the cost so most of the infrastructure is or will be taken care of.
- Benefits:
 - Collaborative coordinated efforts
- Cindy Fury is main Contact for Motus effort (Tallahassee), but can also contact Gian (Jax office)
- Shea asked: Are these towers going to continue to be put up on project by project basis or is there going to be a larger strategic plan to look at information needs? Gian: Yes. The refuges were all gung-ho and went ahead—time & funding was right, but future installation will hopefully involve more strategic implementations.

Critical Wildlife Areas (Michelle Vandeventer; FWC-statewide CWA coordinator):

- FWC is authorized by FAC to establish CWAs, but with landowner concurrence
- Purpose: protect important concentrations of wildlife during critical life stages (breeding/migration/hibernation) by minimizing human disturbance (close areas to public access)
- 1977-93: 22 CWAs established
- 2016: 13 new CWAs, 5 existing CWAs re-established (improve and/or expand boundaries)
- Port Orange going back up for approval at Dec 2016 Commission meeting (there were landowner issues before)
- In North Central region:
 - Withlacoochee-new (only one for bats!)
 - Nassau Sound: re-established (originally est 1977)
 - Huguenot/Ft George inlet- existing (est 1986)
 - Amelia Island-existing (est 1981)

- Enforcement: 1st year posted—education focused; warning—still in system helps build case; citation—an appeal to show in court.

Law enforcement update (Blair Hayman/Michelle Vandeventer; FWC):

- Working statewide to formalize a patrol system at CWAS
- A bit of a cultural change of entering in time so even if they are doing the patrols in our important areas it just may not be recorded properly
- Need to push the reporting
- Would be most helpful to have a Captain on board as a “shorebird sponsor”
- A lot of logistics to figure out, but making progress
- Reaching out to local LE too, not just FWC LE
- Michelle gives CWA presentations to new FWC DLE recruits
- Want to train all local/area LE—work on for next pre-season
 - Michelle Waterman suggests reaching out to Nassau Co to set up shorebird training for their LE—Blair, Chris, Jean O. and Michelle W. will talk offline to set this up for next season

BREAK

Gian showed MOTUS animations of red knot & thrush migrations

Review of Season & Upcoming Needs (everyone):

- Large gap north of Amelia Island CWA south of Ft Clinch—mainly due to little to no nesting activity
- Richard Timm asked “Do you want general birder info that they get about possible nesting
 - Blair: YES, especially in areas we might be missing nesting activity. If a birder wants to volunteer to monitor those gaps during count windows (especially early season windows) that would be even better.
- Brandon Volbrecht: main beach-Fort Clinch route needs to be deleted. *Will connect with Emma LeClerc to work that out.*
 - Satler Rd/14th street would be most probable for any rooftop nesting in Nassau County
- Jolie (COJ; Huguenot Memorial Park):
 - Change in naturalist position mid-season so the estimated adult numbers might be lower than actual (interns were more conservative in their estimates than Jolie or previous naturalist)
 - Provided handout with past few years #'s and total
 - Post-Irma:
 - Vegetation along riverside dying (should not affect shorebirds)
 - Some dune loss, but not anything like after Matthew
 - One dune shifted and changes vehicle access (prevents total drive around)
 - Hoping that salt water inundation will kill off some of the crow-foot grass and make herbicide treatment more effective
 - Blair Hayman: Will habitat mod shift nesting area and create more conflict with drivers? Jolie: They thought that might occur last year after Matthew as well, but birds were faithful to original nesting area. Time will tell.

- FWC and Huguenot need to coordinate some vegetation management activities for next pre-season. Make sure that Jolie has Florida Forest Service contact information to request burn assistance.
 - Blair: We (FWC Regional Operations) can help purchase herbicide & man power & coordination with Florida Forest Service
 - Gian asked about predator control at Huguenot. Jolie: Have looked for trapper in past. But they never saw coyote tracks after she started. Tried to discourage avian predation by reducing perches. One possum wandering around
 - 45 flight capable SATE, 1 nesting pair SATE
- Blair Hayman/Megan Wallrichs (FWC; Regional Operations):
 - South Amelia River oyster rakes
 - Fledged 3 chicks total
 - Post-Irma:
 - rakes are super degraded, much smaller
 - will be surprised if they are able to support nesting next season
 - Questioning possibility/feasibility of oyster rake restoration (a little beyond the scope of this meeting)—on the radar for post-storm funding but feedback from GTM-NERR is that so far previous efforts haven't been that successful.
 - Chris suggested there may be more opportunity in restoration efforts with change in managers in aquatic preserve
 - Miranda Parker (Mayport):
 - No beach nesting for years
 - Nesting on rooftop (~ 5 nests) but abandoned after few months. 10 chicks-but gone in August
 - Post-Irma:
 - dunes almost totally diminished
 - No re-nourishment until 2020 unless another hurricane comes through to wipe-out rest of dunes
 - Michelle Waterman/Meghan Harris (DEP; Talbot Islands):
 - Little Talbot:
 - 30 WIPL: 25 chicks
 - 2 AMOY: 5 fledged, 3 banded (FWC)
 - Amelia
 - BLSK & LETE highly predated by LAGU, 2 fledged on Amelia
 - 10 WIPL nests
 - Coyote & LAGU predation heavy on Amelia (has always been an issue, but seems to be growing by the year)
 - Big Talbot Islands:
 - 4 least terns
 - 6 WIPL nests; 1 chick fledged
 - Post Irma:
 - S end of LTI is completely flat (overwash flat)
 - Amelia lost a lot of dune (at both parks actually)

- N end of LTI (CWA) is totally flat.
 - Nor'easter & king tides causing sound side flooding at Amelia killing off a lot of vegetation – more habitat? May have to expand posting area next year.
 - Blair: Will Amelia stay dry next year?! Michelle--Maybe? Maybe not?
- Brandon Volbrecht (DEP;Ft Clinch):
 - Thank you to Pat Leary for his surveying efforts this year!
 - Positive note: beach re-nourishment on northern tip on Cumberland sound b/w Matthew and Irma to increase nesting area, but birds still nested where they did before, so Irma shouldn't have too much effect on available nesting area
 - There was an issue with Russian thistle after re-nourishment, but has been washed away with Irma
 - 12 pairs WIPL: 14 egg clutches (2 re-nests): 12 fledglings
 - WILL nest only lasted 3-4 days.
 - Coyote/mink tracks and photos also a lot of snakes
 - Next year maybe some camera work to catch predator activity
 - LETE:
 - 16 pairs split b/w two sites;
 - 8 egg clutches (7;1);
 - Both colonies abandoned: 1 overwash and LAGU predation on other

LAGU Predation Discussion (Megan Wallrichs; FWC-Asst Regional Species Conservation Biologist):

- Megan presented a quick summary of gull predation work that has been done in other parts of the US (mainly in the North East)
- Overall: Least Terns in our region are not faring well and it may be due to LAGU predation. Partners are asking "What can we do?"
- Megan presented non-lethal and lethal methods that result in varying degrees of success in other regions with Gull/Tern conflict and opened the floor for discussion.
- Overall consensus is that this is not going to be an immediate process and we need to build a case based on evidence.
- Currently the Panhandle is serving as a proof of concept for many predator management activities.
- Questions/Discussion brought up for consideration:
 - Identifying the WHO: opportunistic gulls or a few bad actors? (Possible color marking studies)
 - Habitat/vegetation management at Huguenot MP?
 - Choosing a focal area (consider staff/volunteer time & resources, distance from LAGU)
 - Timing of predation events (early vs later in nesting season)
 - Anecdotal evidence of LAGU foraging patterns (morning, afternoon, or evening?)
 - Comment: Are the Timucuan region LETE populations significant in the overall population picture?
 - Comments: If we want to meet the goal of the Beach-Nesting-Bird Plan (increase population of focal species by 10% over 10 years) and Species Action Plan, it doesn't seem plausible to "give-up" on our area when this region has historically

hosted significant LETE numbers as there is likely not enough habitat to support that goal if we exclude our region.

- Reports of decreased LAGU breeding pairs in the last few years may affect decisions.