



# Audubon Coastal Bird Survey

## Survey Procedures, Processes and List of Equipment



### **SURVEY GOAL**

The Audubon Coastal Bird Survey (ACBS) is providing scientists with valuable data for addressing conservation needs of coastal waterbirds along the Gulf Coast. ACBS was originally established through the Pascagoula River Audubon Center in response to the BP oil spill, and today continues to allow conservation planners to assess threats and identify targets for species of conservation concern that are experiencing population declines.

Frequent surveys during migratory and winter periods will not only be used to understand how waterbirds use coastal habitats locally and across the northern Gulf of Mexico, but also will be consistent with monitoring priorities developed by national waterbird and shorebird conservation plans. In addition, ACBS data aligns with International Shorebird Surveys, the primary tool for understanding migratory shorebird population trends in the Western Hemisphere.

# SURVEY PROTOCOL

## SITE SELECTION

- Locations are fixed, pre-defined routes (typically 1 mi) along beach-fronts.  
<http://bit.ly/Qi0eMB>

## FREQUENCY

- **FALL** (20 Aug – 30 Oct): 6 surveys at approximately 10-day intervals
  - Aug 25, Sep 5, Sep 15, Sep 25, Oct 5, Oct 15, Oct 25 ( $\pm 3$  days)
- **WINTER** (10 Jan – 20 Feb): 3 surveys at approximately 10-day intervals
  - Jan 15, Jan 25, Feb 5, Feb 15 ( $\pm 3$  days)
- **SPRING** (20 Mar – 30 May): 6 surveys at approximately 10-day intervals
  - Mar 25, Apr 5, Apr 15, Apr 25, May 5, May 15, May 25 ( $\pm 3$  days)
- If frequent surveys during migratory and winter periods are not possible, monthly survey intervals will still provide valuable data.
- **Optional additional monthly surveys** at other times of the year (Nov – Dec and June – July) will provide additional useful information on coastal waterbirds.

## TIMING

- Surveys should be conducted during **periods of low human traffic** (e.g. early morning). Try to be consistent with the time of day you conduct the survey.
- Try not to spend more than 2 hours surveying any one route and maintain consistency between surveys.



## WHAT TO RECORD

1. **Record ALL birds** that are seen within  $\frac{1}{4}$  mi of routes (including end points), focusing on shorebirds and waterbirds.
  - Avoid double-counting birds. When backtracking to your starting point, count new species seen and update counts if higher than on the first pass, but otherwise do not add birds to counts.
  - As necessary, estimate the number of birds in large congregations in groups of 5, 10, 25, etc.
  - Can't identify to species? Use the categories "tern sp.", "gull sp.", "peep sp.", "shorebird sp.", "Short /Long-billed Dowitcher", "white egret sp.", etc. In the notes section, mention which species you can rule out or other descriptive information. This often happens for birds that quickly fly by, or are distant, or are otherwise difficult to accurately identify. Try to photograph birds that you cannot confidently identify in the field and Audubon staff will assist with the identification.
  - Be aware that your presence can alter the normal behavior of birds: move slowly and pause to make observations.
2. Habitat conditions:
  - The amount of wrack, trash, and human disturbance on a scale of 0 (none) to 3 (lots)
    - Wrack:**
      - 0 = none
      - 1 = light; scattered along tide line
      - 2 = moderate; continuous, but light along high tide line
      - 3 = heavy; continuous and heavy along high tide line
    - Human activity:**
      - 0 = none
      - 1 = scattered; not affecting bird abundance
      - 2 = moderate, but birds have usable areas without humans
      - 3 = heavy; strongly affecting bird abundance
    - Garbage**
      - 0 = none
      - 1 = light; scattered mainly among wrack
      - 2 = moderate; heavy along wrack line
      - 3 = heavy; throughout beach
  - Tide conditions if known
3. General weather conditions (temperature, cloud cover, wind speed and direction)
4. The number of dead birds, identified by species, and with condition noted (fresh, scavenged, decomposed). Also report if no dead birds were found.
5. During the fall survey period, count some species by age: Sanderling, Brown Pelican, Black Skimmer, Laughing Gull, and Reddish Egret (and others if possible).

## DATA SUBMISSION

- Enter data to eBird ([www.ebird.org/iss](http://www.ebird.org/iss)), but retain your field forms.
  - Submitted data under predefined eBird “ACBS” hotspots. All non-bird information (habitat conditions, weather, and dead birds) can be reported in the “survey comments” section.
  - Any additional notes, such as bird age, breeding status, bird behaviors, etc, can be reported in the bird details/comments section.
- Report color-banded birds at:
  - Shorebirds: <http://bandedbirds.org>
  - All other birds: <http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/BBL/bblretrv/>
- Report oiled birds in eBird and:
  - Oiled birds: 1-866-557-1401
  - Oil products: 1-866-448-5816
- Report dead wildlife
  - Turtles: [http://www.sefsc.noaa.gov/species/turtles/stranding\\_coordinators.htm](http://www.sefsc.noaa.gov/species/turtles/stranding_coordinators.htm)
  - Marine mammals: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/health/networks.htm>

## EQUIPMENT CHECKLIST

- Binoculars / Spotting Scope
- Bird identification guides
- Data sheets or notebook
- Clip board or forms holder (i.e., loose sheet holder)
- Volunteer shirts, hat, and/or vest (identifying yourself as a legitimate monitoring Audubon volunteer)
- Digital camera
- GPS device (optional)
- Personal safety equipment (sunscreen, gloves, goggles), when necessary

# POINTS OF CONTACT

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