

Audubon Coastal Bird Survey

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Suggestions for a FAQ? Contact Erik Johnson, ACBS Coordinator and Director of Bird Conservation for Audubon Louisiana, at ejohnson@audubon.org

When do I conduct surveys?

ACBS has three survey pulses: fall, winter, and spring. Fall surveys occur between 20 August and 30 October. Winter surveys occur between 10 January and 20 February. Spring surveys occur between 20 March and 30 May.

How do I choose a survey route?

Contact Erik Johnson (ejohnson@audubon.org) to discuss route selection.

What is a survey route?

Most survey routes are linear 1-mile segments of beach. In most cases, routes are walked in both directions, meaning a 2-mile walk per survey. Some routes are a little shorter or longer.

How often should I survey my route?

Most routes should be surveyed every 10 days, on the “5’s”, meaning August 25, September 5, September 15, and so on. However, there are lots of factors that make surveying on these precise dates impractical, so survey dates are flexible by ± 3 days, meaning “windows” of August 22–28, September 2–8, September 12–18, and so on.

What birds should I count?

Focus your surveys on coastal waterbirds, like sandpipers, gulls, terns, and pelicans, but count everything you see and hear within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of your route, including down the beach from the start and end points. This includes flying birds.

Why should I categorize and count birds by their age?

There are a handful of species that we recommend all observers become proficient in aging as juveniles or adults from August to October: Brown Pelican, Laughing Gull, Black Skimmer, Reddish Egret, and Sanderling. Many other species can be readily aged in fall, but often require better views and additional expertise. By winter, many first-year birds have replaced their distinct juvenile feathers with adult-like feathers, making them much more difficult to age in winter and spring.

Collecting data using age categories, will allow us to assess reproductive success during the previous summer, as well as age-specific habitat use.

What if I cannot identify a bird I see?

Still count these! It is acceptable to count unidentified birds in more broad taxonomic groups, like “tern sp.”, “gull sp.”, “large shorebird sp.”, “medium shorebird sp.”, “small shorebird sp.”, “peep sp.”, “Western/Semipalmated Sandpiper”, “yellowlegs sp.”, or “dowitcher sp.”.

Also use your ears! The two dowitchers, two yellowlegs, and various other shorebirds and peeps all make distinct calls that will aid in identification.

What do I do if I see a color-banded bird?

It is very exciting to find a color-banded bird as this provides clues to research about migration and survivorship. Carefully determine the band colors, the location of the colors on the legs, and determine whether there are “flags” or lettering on the bands. Beware that colors can fade over time. It is best to try to get a photo of the bands for confirmation.

Report the sighting of shorebirds (sandpipers, plovers, and allies) to <http://bandedbirds.org>. Other banded birds should be reported to the Bird Banding Laboratory <http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbl/bblretrv/>.

Detailed overviews of assessing birds for bands can be found at:
<http://www.whsrn.org/news/article/birding-banded-shorebirds-basics> and
<http://www.flshorebirdalliance.org/resources-pages/bands.html>.

What do I do if I see a dead bird?

For your safety, do not handle or collect any part of the bird. Record in your datasheet the species and its condition, whether it is banded, its age/sex, and any other information you believe is pertinent. You can call your state wildlife agency or beach management agency to determine what the appropriate steps are for them to collect the bird.

What information should I record during my surveys in addition to birds?

Assess the amount of wrack, human disturbance, and trash on a scale of 0 (none) to 3 (lots). It is also useful to record the names of surveyors, weather conditions, and tidal information. If you know the last high or low tide time for your area, record this and whether the tide is rising or falling. Beware that many sites, especially in the western Gulf, have tidal cycles heavily influenced by winds, such that it is best to record the tidal systems that you observe while doing counts.

If my route is a straight line on the beach, and I walk back along it to my car, do I still count birds?

Only count new birds if you return along your survey path. This means if you see a species you didn't see on the way out, count it. If you only saw 5 Brown Pelicans on the way out, and 80 on the way back, count 80 Brown Pelicans for your transect (not 85).

What do I do with the survey data?

All data should be immediately submitted to eBird, and ideally through the International Shorebird Survey portal: www.ebird.org/iss. Any extraneous information collected (see "What information should I record during my surveys in addition to birds?") should be submitted under the "comments" section in eBird.

Why should I submit the data to the eBird International Shorebird Survey portal?

Entering data through this portal allows shorebird researchers to quickly query and access your data, providing them with the ability to track population changes across the western hemisphere.

What if I submitted ACBS data to eBird in the past, but not through the International Shorebird Survey portal?

This is not a problem. You do not need to go back and resubmit your data. Biologists that work within the eBird database will resolve these issues.

What if a species I saw is not an option in the eBird data submission list?

First, make sure this is actually what you saw. The eBird lists are set up to filter out rare and unusual species for the location and date for your submission. Check the eBird maps or bar charts to make sure that the species is expected for that region and season: <http://ebird.org/ebird/eBirdReports?cmd=Start>. If this species is indeed rare, then it is best to provide eBird a detailed description or even a photo of your sighting.

If you are confident that this is what you saw, click “Add Species” and type your species. Note that some eBird lists do not include broader taxonomic groups like “tern sp.,” “gull sp.,” and so on, so you would have to type this in as if they were a rare species.