

Northeast Region Division of Migratory Birds

Fiscal Year 2013 Accomplishments



Surf Scoter: Bill Hubick

The Division of Migratory Birds (DMB) in the Northeast Region maintained a swift pace in moving bird conservation forward within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and with its many partners. The DMB's team of dedicated biologists and examiners provided leadership in developing initiatives and plans, progressing the science of bird conservation, and enabling the public to enjoy migratory birds.

Conserving Migratory Birds: Populations Branch

Conserving birds means understanding and managing populations and focusing on species of highest concern. Much of our work is directly involved in developing and working in large conservation partnership initiatives that conserve priority bird populations through research, monitoring, biological planning, and outreach.

Atlantic Flyway Shorebird Conservation Business Strategy

DMB staff, in partnership with Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences and many other partners, published the first ever Atlantic Flyway Shorebird Conservation Business Strategy in June 2013. The strategy aims to initiate coordinated conservation at a flyway scale to reverse shorebird population declines and

maintain shorebirds into the future. The document draws on expertise of over 50 international shorebird scientists, managers, and conservationists from government agencies, NGOs, universities, and the public, who were assembled by DMB for an intensive multi-day working meeting at the National Conservation Training Center. In addition, two workshops were held with Caribbean and South American biologists to ensure full engagement and input from all parts of the flyway. Concrete actions are identified to address fundamental threats that shorebirds face flyway-wide, from habitat loss to hunting. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation is currently reviewing the Strategy for adoption as a formal Keystone Initiative.

5th International Partners in Flight Conference

R5 Division of Migratory Birds staff made significant contributions to the 5th International Partners in Flight (PIF) Conference by planning and leading geographic-based work sessions to develop conservation business plans focusing on neotropical migratory birds of high conservation concern. Todd Fearer and Randy Dettmers co-lead the Central and South American Highlands geographic focal group, focusing on Cerulean, Golden-winged and Canada Warblers. Becky Keller served as facilitator and leader for the Caribbean Islands geographic work group. Species in this group included Bicknell's Thrush, Cape May Warbler, Prairie Warbler, and Louisiana Waterthrush. Deb Reynolds also participated in this group, providing guidance on communications and human dimensions aspects of conservation strategies as well as co-leading a special session on Human Dimensions. Conference participants and others unable to attend the PIF Conference will continue to work together to develop a comprehensive Conservation Business Plan for North American migrants.

Tracking Offshore Occurrence of Common Terns and American Oystercatchers with VHF Arrays

DMB is coordinating a pilot study, in partnership with the University of Massachusetts and funded by the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), to track the offshore movements of Common Tern and American Oystercatcher throughout Nantucket Sound, Massachusetts using NanoTags and an array of automated radio telemetry stations. The study objective is to test and refine NanoTag technology for tracking offshore flights, including improving detection ranges and analytical methods used to model the data, in order to assist BOEM and partners to determine the potential effects of offshore wind development. During the summer of 2013, we captured a total of 73 Common Tern and 14 American Oystercatcher from nesting areas on Monomoy NWR and Nantucket and constructed an array of eight automated radio telemetry stations, including a receiving antenna on a passenger ferry, to track their movements around-the-clock. These stations recorded over 1.6 million detections of the terns and oystercatchers, and over 5,000 detections of seabirds that were NanoTagged by researchers in the Gulf of Maine that passed through Nantucket Sound during fall migration. We anticipate that results of this pilot work will provide baseline information on the movements of terns and oystercatchers throughout eastern Nantucket Sound and help to evaluate the feasibility of expanding this technology to additional areas of the U.S. Atlantic.

Prioritizing Information Needs to Support Management Decisions for Priority Sea Duck Species

DMB staff have been working with state, federal and provincial partners representing the Atlantic, Mississippi



William Majoros

Cape May Warbler

and Pacific Flyways in an effort to engage the harvest management community and determine priority information needs to support decision-making for sea ducks. Formed in 2012 by the Sea Duck Joint Venture, the Harvest Management Subcommittee is conducting population assessments for 5 priority sea duck species and contrasting estimates of sustainable take levels with current harvest levels. Focal species and populations were selected based on the Sea Duck Joint Venture Strategic Plan, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, their regional significance as game birds, and their overall conservation concern. The assessments are being conducted to identify and prioritize key areas of uncertainty that can be addressed through the Sea Duck Joint Venture's research and monitoring programs. Regulatory implications of the assessments, if any, will be considered through the administrative processes set by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Canadian Wildlife Service and the 3 relevant Flyway Councils.

Habitat Branch, Joint Ventures:

The Atlantic Coast Joint Venture (ACJV) and Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture (AMJV) are partnerships focused on the conservation of habitat for native birds in the Atlantic Flyway and Appalachian Mountains, respectively. The ACJV stretches from Maine south to Puerto Rico, and the partnership consists of the 17 states and commonwealths from Maine south to Puerto Rico; the AMJV covers the Appalachian portions of 11 states and commonwealths, from southern New York to northeastern Alabama. Both partnerships also work with key federal and regional habitat conservation agencies and organizations in their joint venture areas. The ACJV and AMJV focus on the conservation of habitats for all birds consistent with major national and continental bird conservation plans and the North American Bird Conservation Initiative.

Thirty-one North American Wetland Conservation Acts (NAWCA) Funded in the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture

Atlantic Coast Joint Venture partners protected or conserved well over 65,000 acres of habitat in fifteen states and commonwealths in Fiscal Year 2013 including thirty-one approved North American Wetland Conservation Act standard and small grants for a total of \$16.7 million in grant funds matched by \$50.3 million in partner funds.

Atlantic Marine Assessment Program for Protected Species (AMAPPS)

The purpose of this multi-agency (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [FWS], National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration [NOAA], Bureau of Ocean Energy Management and U.S. Navy) project is to gather baseline information on the distribution and density of marine birds (FWS), turtles and mammals (NOAA) in the marine environment. The Division of Migratory Bird Management (FWS) is in the 4th year of aerial seabird surveys. During these surveys all seabirds encountered as well as sea turtles and marine mammals are counted. In September (2013), USFWS flew a full coast survey with four air crews with personnel from the Division of Migratory Bird Management (R5 & HQ) and the Coastal Program (R5). Data from this effort will give the USFWS and partners in marine conservation better scientific information about the distribution and abundance of seabirds in the offshore environment. These data also are being provided to other researchers to aid in modeling the exposure component of risk; risk analyses will be used for regulatory planning when reviewing potential alternative energy leases along the Atlantic Coast.

Forest Management Guidelines for Cerulean Warblers

The AMJV worked with partners to develop a new Forest Management Guidelines for improving the condition of Appalachian hardwood forests for Cerulean Warbler. This species' population has plummeted by nearly 70% over the last half century, with the loss and degradation of large areas of mature deciduous forest contributing to those declines. These new guidelines provide land managers with recommendations for conserving and enhancing habitat. The guide is based largely on the Cooperative Cerulean Warbler Forest Management Project in the states of Ohio, West Virginia, Tennessee, and Kentucky which provides partner organizations with resources to assist wildlife managers and biologists in timber management decision-making.

American Black Duck Energetic Study

ACJV staff are working with Black Duck Joint Venture (BDJV) and Ducks Unlimited (DU) staff to develop energetic supply and demand curves to better define habitat goals for American Black Duck along the Atlantic Coast. Using results from three field studies funded by the BDJV and DU, we have developed spatially-explicit models of

energy supply, currently thought to be the major factor limiting wintering Black Duck populations, for the Mid-Atlantic and southern New England coasts. Using information on individual's, metabolic requirements in combination with migration chronology, we can estimate total non-breeding season demands. Initial results suggest that supply is barely meeting demands in southern New England and exceeds demand in the Mid-Atlantic region. We are currently evaluating several simplifying assumptions we made during our initial analyses and are incorporating competition for similar food resources by other waterfowl species. The results of these analyses will be incorporated into a decision support tool to strategically guide partner conservation actions for American Black Duck.

Permits Branch

The objective of the Permits Branch is to enable the public to collect, possess and otherwise take migratory birds for a variety of purposes. Permit examiners and DMB biologists use the best available science and expertise to make permitting decisions that consider the risks and benefits of proposed activities. This fiscal year, the Permits Branch aggressively worked on reducing the response time for issuing permits. The examiners collectively issued almost 75% of all migratory birds permits within 30 days of receipt of a completed application, a great achievement for the three dedicated examiners. Examiners issued 1,892 migratory bird permits including 970 depredation permits for land owners, authorizing take of migratory birds causing damage or loss to property or health hazards. The Northeast Region has approximately 600 registrants in the National Resident Canada Goose Registration website which was developed to enable landowners to better control the damage caused by resident Canada Geese.

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