



North Carolina Gill Net Fisheries Can Seriously Injure or Kill Migratory Birds



Brown Pelican



Surf Scoter

Gill nets used by fishermen unintentionally catch other animals. These catches can include birds, sea turtles, seagoing mammals, and fish. The trapped animals are called bycatch. Often these animals are seriously injured or killed. Bycatch of marine mammals, sea turtles and fish is managed at the federal level by the National Marine Fisheries Service. This fact sheet focuses on bycatch of migratory birds which are managed federally by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Bird bycatch in North Carolina occurs in both large and small mesh gill nets.



Northern Gannet

All the birds shown on the adjacent photographs are being caught and drowned in gill nets. These birds are protected species under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 (www.fws.gov/laws/lawsdigest/migtrea.html). The conservation of these birds including reduction of bycatch mortality is an important part of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service mission. Fishing gear that is lethal and non-selective is a real problem.



Hooded Merganser

Gill nets are a source of mortality for diving ducks such as ruddy ducks, goldeneye, mergansers, scaup, and canvasbacks plus many seabirds such as loons, grebes, and gannets according to a report by Doug Forsell, Biologist, USFWS, Chesapeake Bay Field Office (Mortality of Migratory Waterbirds in Mid-Atlantic Coastal Anchored Gillnets – access report from website). Migratory waterfowl bycatch primarily occurs in the fall and winter when these birds are wintering in North Carolina.

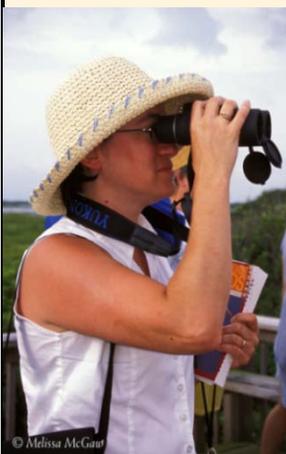


Canvasback

One of the goals of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the elimination of bycatch in fisheries. The Service is actively working in partnership with regional, national, and international organizations, states, tribes, industry, and environmental groups to meet this goal. As shown in Forsell’s study, large numbers of waterbirds are killed annually through gill net use. This is a serious conservation issue which can hinder the recovery of bird species, many of whose numbers are already low.



Red-breasted Merganser



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Almost \$3 billion dollars are spent on wildlife related activities such as recreational hunting, fishing, and bird watching every year in North Carolina (<http://www.census.gov/prod/2008pubs/fhw06-nat.pdf>). These monies contribute to the local economy in the coastal areas of North Carolina. Tourists, which are very important to the coastal economy, are attracted to areas rich in natural beauty and wildlife.



Red-throated Loon



Lesser Scaup.

Bird watching is a popular activity worldwide.