



Monitoring Population Changes Over Time for Select Species of
LOUISIANA'S NESTING SHOREBIRDS

PROJECT STATUS

Project Year: 2005-Present
Status: Ongoing
Category: Migratory Bird
Location: Coastal Louisiana
Project Partners: Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, National Audubon Society, Conservian Coastal Bird Conservation, Numerous Volunteers

BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM ADDRESSED

Louisiana's barrier islands and headland beaches serve many important ecologically, culturally, and economically significant functions. One of the most important ecological function these beaches provide is that they serve as breeding and rearing habitats for a number of nesting shorebird species. Suited specifically to use these sandy shores, tens of thousands of birds annually use these habitats to raise their young.

Many of these species including Wilson's Plover, Snowy Plover, and Least Tern are considered migratory birds. They arrive in late winter to early spring each year to begin courtship and establish breeding territories. By late April and early May the breeding season has begun with a whole suite of birds located across all of Louisiana's barrier island and headland beaches.

Since much of this habitat has been negatively affected by land loss over time, concerns have grown over the impact these changes may present to nesting shorebirds. Shoreline erosion, sea level rise, conversion to beach front homes, and the occasional overtopping by storm surge all have impacted these habitats and the birds that



depend on them for survival. Add to that our lack of information and understanding on numbers and distribution of these birds and a paltry understanding of their life history requirements has caused substantial challenges for those tasked with management of these resources.





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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Beginning in 2005 and continuing to present time, the BTNEP Program has conducted numerous ground surveys designed to define population levels and distribution of a select suite of species of shorebirds. Most of the bird species that are a focus of these surveys are considered solitary nesters usually meaning there is some distance between breeding pairs. Wilson's Plover, Snowy Plover, and American Oystercatcher are examples of solitary nesters. This contrasts against those considered colonial nesters where birds nest adjacent to each other, sometimes no more than just two to three feet away from other pairs. Least Tern are considered colonial nesters.

These surveys represent the first ground surveys ever initiated here in Louisiana. In 2005 and again in 2010 and 2015, the BTNEP program and its partners have gathered data for a select suite of ground-nesting shorebirds and seabirds. These surveys covered much of the entire coastal reaches of Louisiana from Mississippi to Texas. Additionally, the BTNEP program has conducted surveys twice annually from 2010 through present for the entire Caminada Headland, an area spanning 13 miles including Elmer's Island and all of Fourchon Beach.

These datasets are in the process of being analyzed and a report written that presents the status and trends that the data represent. This information will help coastal engineers and bird biologist better understand the population size and the distribution of these birds. The data also provide a great baseline of information from which to compare future data to define trends associated with these species of shorebirds and seabirds.



CCMP ACTION ITEMS ADDRESSED

EM = Ecological Management

EM-15: Protection and Enhancement of Native Biological Resources