

GoMMAPPS seabird trip report
21 July – 5 August 2017
Marine Mammal Surveys
NOAA ship *R/V GORDON GUNTER*, R-336

Summary: The Gulf of Mexico (GoM) region is critical in affording key breeding, staging, and wintering habitats for North America's avifauna. Yet limited information is available to characterize species composition, distribution, and abundance of birds Gulfwide, particularly given the large number of platforms (in the Central and Western Planning Areas), and cumulative level of oil and gas activity in the northern GoM region (2012, 2013). The Gulf of Mexico Marine Assessment Program for Protected Species (GoMMAPPS) Seabird Project anticipates being the most spatially and temporally extensive avian research effort ever conducted in the northern GoM. The GoMMAPPS Seabird Project will document the distribution, abundance, and diversity of birds so as to better inform regulatory decisions that influence the conservation of migratory avian resources (Seabird Science Plan 2016).

From 21 July – 5 August 2017, two GoMMAPPS seabird observers accompanied the GoMMAPPS marine mammal cruise on Leg 2 aboard the *R/V Gordon Gunter* based at the NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service, Pascagoula, MS. Chris Haney and Jeff Gleason conducted counts of all birds detected within a 300-m strip transect while the ship was underway (Balance and Force 2016) (**Figure 1**). Observers counted seabirds for a total of ~180 hrs over 15 calendar days. Approximately 0.5-1 calendar days otherwise available and scheduled to be surveyed were lost due to weather. Survey time per day ranged from ~9.5-13.5 hrs with ~3.5 hrs of observation effort on the first afternoon while on transit from port (21 July).

This effort as part of the GoMMAPPS seabird survey project was extremely successful and provided information for decision-makers. In general, spatial coverage for the *R/V Gordon Gunter* was widespread from the western portion of the Eastern Planning Area through much of the Central Planning Area and out to the EEZ (**Figure 1**). Observers detected ≥ 24 species of pelagic, offshore, and coastal marine seabird species, as well as a number of migrating passerines, shorebirds, and wading birds. Species diversity, total count of birds, and birds per day all far exceeded expectations.

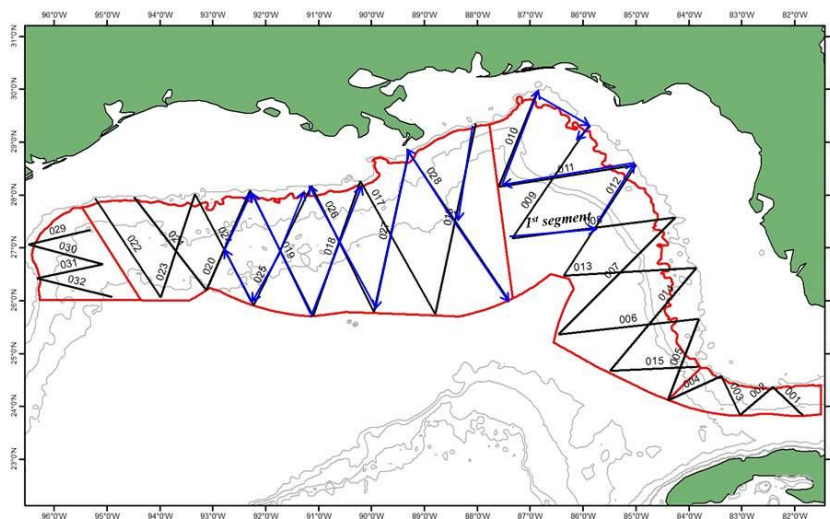


Figure 1. Map of the planned marine mammal transect segments for the 3 legs of the marine mammal survey aboard the *R/V Gordon Gunter*. Legs indicated in blue are those completed during Leg 2 of the survey. Leg 2 started in the east and worked west. GoMMAPPS seabird observers conducted transect surveys during parts of or all of all dates, as well as while transiting to between transects beginning on 21 July and ending on evening of 4 Aug. NOTE: arrow lengths and arrow directions may not exactly represent the actual course by date.