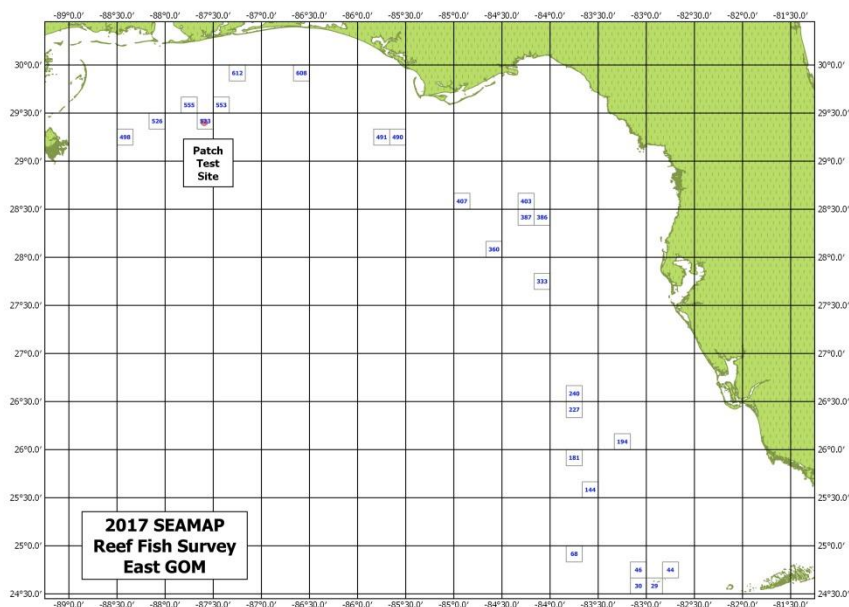


**GoMMAPPS seabird trip report**  
**1 – 17 June 2017**  
**SEAMAP summer reef fish survey**  
**NOAA ship *R/V Pisces*, R226**

*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 the 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 1 to 17 June 2017, two GoMMAPPS seabird observers accompanied the SEAMAP summer reef fish survey conducted aboard the *R/V Pisces* based at the NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service, Pascagoula, MS office. Jeff Gleason and Lisa Hug conducted counts of all birds detected within a 300 m strip transect while the ship was underway (Balance and Force 2016) between the standardized SEAMAP sampling stations (*Figure 1*). In addition, seabird observers also conducted seabird surveys during the time vessels were on station (Haney 2010). Observers counted seabirds for a total of ~173 hrs over 14 calendar days; much of the time/day was dedicated to point surveys of seabirds. Approximately 3–4 calendar days otherwise available and scheduled to be surveyed were lost due to weather, technical issues, or transiting outside the GoM. Survey time per day ranged from ~11–13.5 hrs.

This effort of the GoMMAPPS seabird survey project was extremely successful and provided information for decision-makers as we move forward. In general, spatial coverage for the *Pisces* was restricted to continental shelf waters off of the Florida coast from roughly Panama City to Key West (*Figure 1*). Observers detected ~20 species of pelagic, offshore, and coastal marine seabird species, as well as 3 species of delphinids, 3 species of sea turtles (mostly loggerheads), and various other biota.



**Figure 1.** Map of the anticipated reef fish sampling blocks in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico for the summer 2017 field season aboard the *Pisces*. Due to unanticipated mechanical issues not all blocks were sampled. Seabird observers boarded the vessel on 1 June near Panama City and we worked south beginning on 2 June. Although not all individual stations were sampled for SEAMAP purposes, GoMMAPPS seabird observers conducted transect surveys between sampling points within blocks, afternoon-evening transects between blocks, at sampling points within blocks, as well as some additional areas while transiting to mapping areas, and from the last block on 15 June to the eastern limit of the GoM.