

GoMMAPPS Seabird Vessel Trip Report
Winter MMC- Leg 1
8 - 22 January 2018
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 the species composition, distribution, and abundance of birds Gulf wide, 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 14 – 20 January 2018, two GoMMAPPS seabird observers accompanied the GoMMAPPS winter marine mammal cruise Leg 1 aboard the R/V *Gordon Gunter* based out of the NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service lab, Pascagoula, MS. Chris Haney and Dan Bauer conducted counts of all birds detected within a 300-m strip transect while the ship was underway (Ballance and Force 2016) (**Figure 1**). Observers counted seabirds for a total of ~41 hrs over 6 calendar days. Due to weather and mechanical issues the vessel did not depart port until 14 Jan, and returned early (~20 Jan) due to pending government shutdown. Total number of lost days-at-sea was roughly ~10 d. Daily survey time ranged from ~5.0-10.0 hrs, with ~6 hrs of observation effort on the first day while on transit from port (14 January).

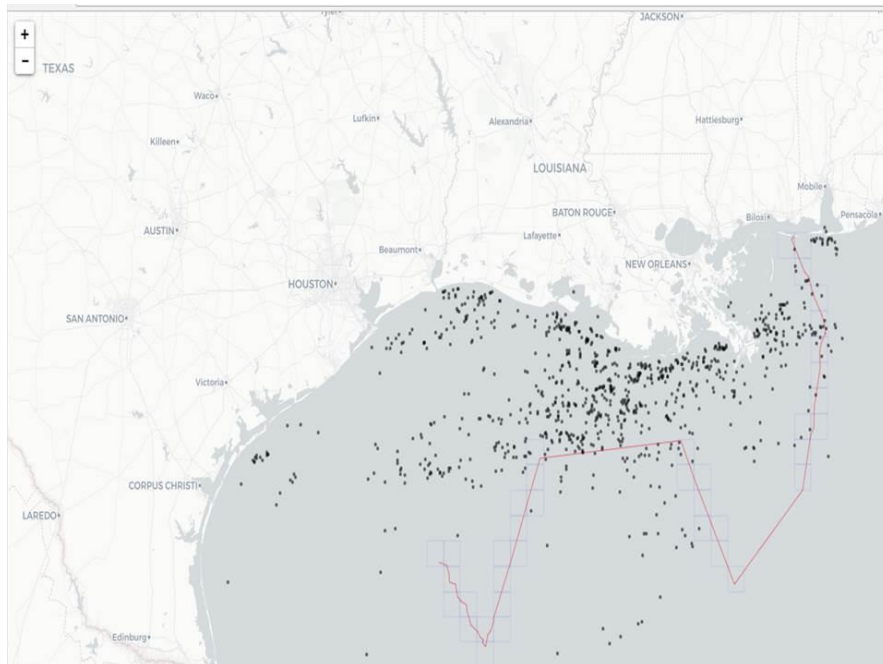


Figure 1. Map of the marine mammal track lines for the 2018 NOAA winter marine mammal cruise aboard the R/V *Gordon Gunter*. GoMMAPPS observers conducted strip transect surveys during only a subset (14-19 Jan) of the originally scheduled cruise dates for a variety of reasons, as well as transiting between track lines beginning on 14 January. **NOTE:** Leg 1 started on transit S-SW of Pascagoula, MS, and then worked generally to the west. Black dots on the map indicate locations of oil and gas platforms.

Though this GoMMAPPS seabird survey was dramatically shortened due to a number of reasons, it was considered a success, particularly given the dearth of seabird data available during the mid-winter period. In general, spatial coverage from the R/V *Gordon Gunter* during this leg of the marine mammal cruise was generally off the Shelf, in the Western and Central Planning Areas out to the EEZ (**Figure 1**). Observers detected 14 different species of pelagic and coastal marine birds (see list below). Even though total survey effort was depressed, both the total count and birds per day were both high compared to many of the vessel surveys to date. In total for this leg of the 2018 winter marine mammal cruise, sightings of ~1,155 individual birds were entered in the SEEBIRD database; ~231 birds/d or >28 birds/hr. Herring gulls and pomarine jaegers tended to be the most frequently detected species and both were generally widespread and abundant across the survey area.

SPECIES LIST

- herring gull¹
- laughing gull¹
- ring-billed gull¹
- Bonaparte's gull¹
- great black-backed gull¹
- brown pelican¹
- common loon¹
- double-crested cormorant¹
- northern gannet¹
- pomarine jaeger¹
- parasitic jaeger¹
- royal tern¹
- sooty tern¹
- red-necked phalarope¹

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- yellow-rumped warbler

¹ Both coastal and pelagic seabird representatives are included above the line and all other species (identified to species) are indicated below the line