

GoMMAPPS Seabird Vessel Trip Report
Winter MMC- Leg 2
26 January - 8 February 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 26 January – 8 February 2018, two GoMMAPPS seabird observers accompanied the GoMMAPPS winter marine mammal cruise Leg 2 aboard the R/V *Gordon Gunter* based out of the NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service lab, Pascagoula, MS. Matt Love and Jim Panaccione 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 ~140.5 hrs over 14 calendar days. Only ~5.5 hrs of survey effort was lost over 3 calendar days due to weather and IT-related issues (lost SCS connection with ship). Daily survey time ranged from ~8.0-11.0 hrs, with ~8 hrs of observation effort on the first day while on transit from port (26 January).

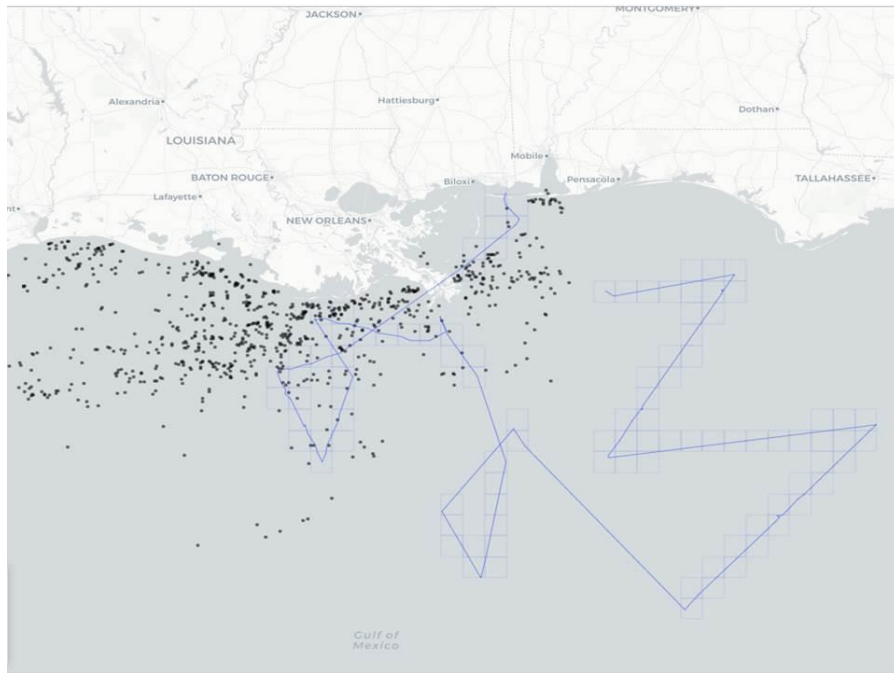


Figure 1. Map of the marine mammal track lines for the 2018 NOAA winter marine mammal cruise aboard the R/V *Gordon Gunter*. GoMMAPPS observers conducted strip transect surveys during parts or all of the scheduled cruise dates, as well as transiting between track lines beginning on 12 February and ending on the evening of 26 February. **NOTE:** Leg 2 started on transit to W-SW of Pascagoula, MS, and then worked generally out and back to the east. Black dots on the map indicate locations of oil and gas platforms.

This GoMMAPPS seabird survey was successful and will provide valuable information for decision-makers, 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 primarily on the continental shelf, but with some forays in deeper waters in the Central and Eastern Planning Areas (**Figure 1**). Observers detected 16 different species of pelagic and coastal marine birds (see list below). The total count and birds per day were both within the observed ranges compared to all other vessel surveys to date. In total for this leg of the 2018 winter marine mammal cruise, sightings of ~752 individual birds were entered in the SEEBIRD database; ~54 birds/d or >5 birds/hr. Herring gulls and northern gannets 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
- brown pelican¹
- brown booby¹
- common loon¹
- double-crested cormorant¹
- northern gannet¹
- pomarine jaeger¹
- royal tern¹
- Caspian tern¹
- bridled tern¹
- sooty tern¹
- Audubon's shearwater¹
- great shearwater¹

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- purple martin
- tree swallow

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