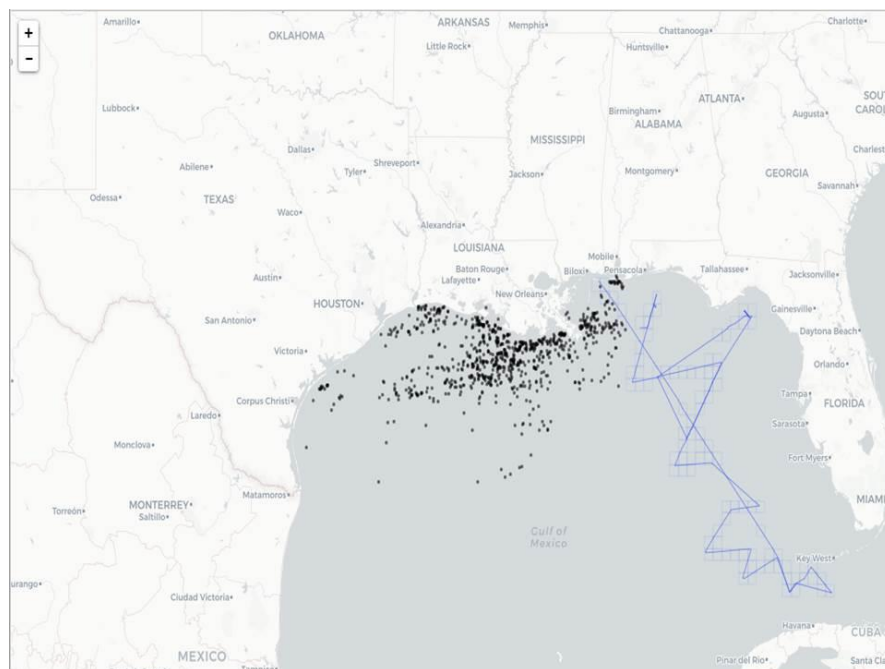


**GoMMAPPS Seabird Vessel Trip Report**  
**Winter MMC- Leg 4**  
**1 - 15 March 2018**  
**R/V GORDON GUNTER, R-336**

*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 1 – 15 March 2018, two GoMMAPPS seabird observers accompanied the GoMMAPPS winter marine mammal cruise Leg 3 aboard the R/V *Gordon Gunter* based out of the NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service lab, Pascagoula, MS. Chris Haney and Jon Andrew 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 ~157 hrs over 15 calendar days. Very little time (<5 hrs) that was scheduled to be surveyed was lost due to weather or other issues on this leg. Daily survey time ranged from ~6.0-12.0 hrs, with ~6.0 hrs of observation effort on the first afternoon while on transit from port (1 March).



**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 1 March and ending on the evening of 15 March. **NOTE:** Leg 4 started on transit to S-SE of Pascagoula, MS, to the Florida Keys and then worked generally to the north and west.

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 occurred both on and off the Florida Shelf, primarily in the Eastern Planning Area out to the EEZ (*Figure 1*). Observers detected 25 different species of pelagic and coastal marine birds (see list below). The total count and birds per day were at or exceeded the highest compared to all the vessel surveys to date. In total for this leg of the 2018 winter marine mammal cruise, sightings of ~5,738 individual birds were entered in the SEEBIRD database; ~382 birds/d or >36 birds/hr. Unlike earlier surveys, several species (herring gull, Audubon's shearwater, northern gannet, Bonaparte's gull, and sooty tern) were frequently detected and were both generally widespread and abundant across the survey area.

## SPECIES LIST

- herring gull<sup>1</sup>
- Bonaparte's gull<sup>1</sup>
- great black-backed gull<sup>1</sup>
- laughing gull<sup>1</sup>
- black tern<sup>1</sup>
- bridled tern<sup>1</sup>
- royal tern<sup>1</sup>
- sandwich tern<sup>1</sup>
- sooty tern<sup>1</sup>
- brown pelican<sup>1</sup>
- double-crested cormorant<sup>1</sup>
- common loon<sup>1</sup>
- northern gannet<sup>1</sup>
- brown booby<sup>1</sup>
- masked booby<sup>1</sup>
- magnificent frigatebird<sup>1</sup>
- pomarine jaeger<sup>1</sup>
- parasitic jaeger<sup>1</sup>
- Audubon's shearwater<sup>1</sup>
- great shearwater<sup>1</sup>
- band-rumped storm-petrel<sup>1</sup>
- Leach's storm-petrel<sup>1</sup>
- black-capped petrel<sup>1</sup>
- red-necked phalarope<sup>1</sup>
- red phalarope<sup>1</sup>

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- barn swallow
  - cliff swallow
  - tree swallow
  - blue-winged teal
  - American coot
  - great blue heron
  - great egret
  - little blue heron
  - least sandpiper
  - palm warbler
  - ruby-throated hummingbird

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