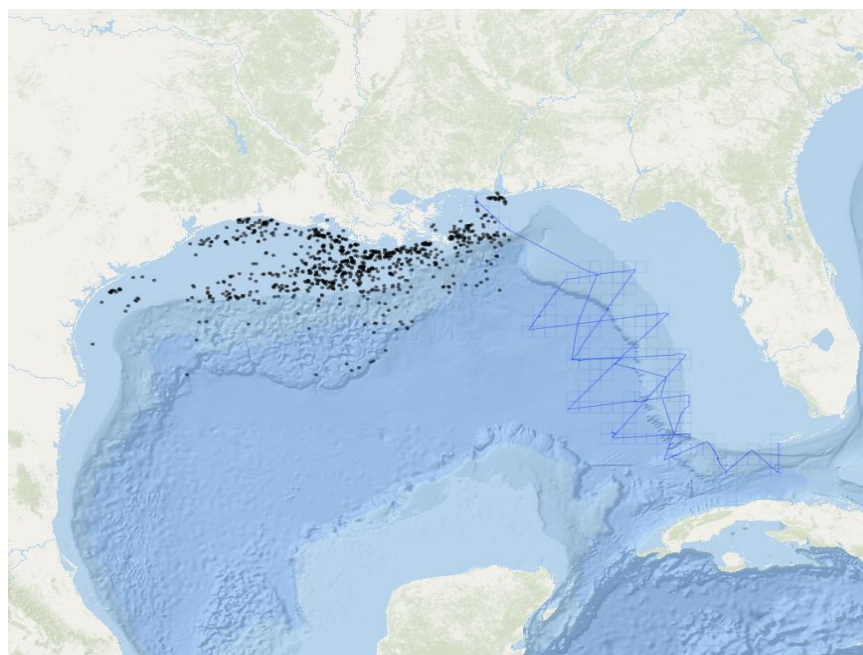


**GoMMAPPS Seabird Vessel Trip Report**  
**11 - 28 August 2018**  
**Fall Marine Mammal Cruise, Leg #1**  
**R/V PISCES**

*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 11 August – 28 August 2018, two GoMMAPPS seabird observers accompanied the GoMMAPPS marine mammal survey, Leg 1, aboard the *R/V Pisces* based at the NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service, Pascagoula, MS. Chris Haney and Dan Bauer 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 all seabirds for a total of ~204 hrs over 18 calendar days. No appreciable time was lost to inclement weather on this leg. Survey time was generally about 12 hrs/day, with ~3.5 hrs of additional observation effort while on transit from port (11 August) and 7hrs of effort on transit back to port (28 August).



**Figure 1.** Map of the marine mammal and seabird track lines for Leg 1 of the 2018 GoMMAPPS fall survey aboard the *R/V Pisces*. Observers conducted strip transect surveys during parts or all of the scheduled cruise dates, as well as on transit between track lines starting on 11 August and ending in early afternoon of 28 August. **NOTE:** blue track lines were completed during Leg 1 of the survey, which started at Key West, FL, and worked progressively N-NW before ending at Pascagoula, MS. Black dots on the map indicate locations of oil and gas platforms.

This GoMMAPPS seabird survey will provide key information for decision-makers. In general, spatial coverage by the *R/V Pisces* during this leg of the fall 2018 GoMMAPPS survey covered offshore and pelagic waters of the Eastern Planning Area on the west Florida continental shelf out to the EEZ (*Figure 1*). Several rare or casual species for the GoM were noted, including two white-tailed and two red-billed tropicbirds, and a first-year long-tailed jaeger. Most surprising were **15 black-capped petrels**; a species

[proposed](#) for listing under ESA. No previous GoMMAPPS (or any other) survey has ever recorded that many individuals of this species in the GoM. Offshore of the Florida Keys, both roseate terns and brown noddies were detected, each species infrequently encountered elsewhere in the GoM. Approximately 100 band-rumped storm-petrels were recorded, the highest-ever tallied for any GoMMAPPS seabird survey to date. Roughly 3,200 sooty terns were counted; the most abundant species, often occurring in large feeding flocks. Compared to later legs of the same *Pisces* MMC, Leg 1 of fall 2018 GoMMAPPS detected relatively few migrating passerines, shorebirds, waterfowl, or wading birds. Observers detected 38 total species (26 species of pelagic, offshore, and coastal marine birds; see <sup>1</sup> below), rather high diversity for the GoM. The total count and number of birds/day were in the upper range relative to other GoMMAPPS surveys conducted to date. In total for this leg, sightings of ~5,013 total birds (~4,728 seabirds; see List below) were entered in the SEEBIRD database, a detection rate of ~279 birds/d or ~25 birds/hr. No sea turtles were observed, but a number of marine mammals were detected.

## SPECIES LIST

- Audubon's shearwater<sup>1</sup>
- band-rumped storm-petrel<sup>1</sup>
- black-capped petrel<sup>1</sup>
- black tern<sup>1</sup>
- bridled tern<sup>1</sup>
- brown booby<sup>1</sup>
- brown noddy<sup>1</sup>
- brown pelican<sup>1</sup>
- common tern<sup>1</sup>
- Cory's shearwater<sup>1</sup>
- Forster's tern<sup>1</sup>
- great shearwater<sup>1</sup>
- herring gull<sup>1</sup>
- laughing gull<sup>1</sup>
- least tern<sup>1</sup>
- long-tailed jaeger<sup>1</sup>
- magnificent frigatebird<sup>1</sup>
- masked booby<sup>1</sup>
- pomarine jaeger<sup>1</sup>
- red-billed tropicbird<sup>1</sup>
- roseate tern<sup>1</sup>
- royal tern<sup>1</sup>
- sandwich tern<sup>1</sup>
- sooty tern<sup>1</sup>
- white-tailed tropicbird<sup>1</sup>
- Wilson's storm-petrel<sup>1</sup>

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- barn swallow
- black-bellied plover
- blue-winged teal
- bobolink
- cliff swallow
- Eurasian collared-dove
- great egret
- green heron
- little blue heron
- magnolia warbler
- mourning dove
- sanderling

<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