

Gulf of Mexico Marine Assessment Program for Protected Species (GoMMAPPS): Seabird Surveys in the Northern Gulf of Mexico

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Abstract

The coastal and pelagic waters of the Gulf of Mexico (GoM) are critically important to many species of seabirds from North America, the Caribbean, and western Europe, during some point in their annual life-cycle. The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) are interested in acquiring seabird data to inform both O&G Development and Offshore Wind Energy Development, National Environmental Policy Act (1969) analyses, Oil Spill Risk Analysis (OSRA) models, and to inform future consultations. Historically, the GoM has received limited attention from a seabird research and monitoring perspective when compared to regions in the U.S. like the Atlantic or Pacific coasts. As such, prior to the DWH Oil Spill and GoMMAPPS, limited information was available for seabirds regarding seasonal and spatial distribution or species composition and abundance in offshore waters of the GoM. GoMMAPPS seabird aerial and vessel surveys were initiated in summer 2017 and all surveys were completed in winter 2020. During 2018 (summer and winter), 2019 (winter-only), and 2020 (winter-only), aerial seabird surveys covered ~72,000 km². During spring 2017 through late summer of 2019, vessel seabird surveys logged >2,300 hrs observation effort spanning 293 Days-At-Sea covering >41,000 km². Aerial seabird surveys documented ~52 species of birds (23 seabird species). Vessel seabird surveys documented ~77 species of birds (44 seabird species). GoMMAPPS seabird aerial and vessel survey data were made publicly available through NOAA NCEI on or about 22 April 2022.