

SCIENCE NOTES



Applied science for informed decision making

June 27, 2013

Welcome to the June 2013 edition of *BOEM Science Notes*.

We hope to keep our community of stakeholders informed on our ongoing research as it is taking place in the field. Each *Science Note* will feature a BOEM study or other item of interest. As always, thank you for your continued interest in our programs.

Sincerely,

Robert LaBelle
Science Advisor to the BOEM Director and Acting Chief Environmental Officer

Largest survey of marine protected species on east coast begins 4th year

Science team includes BOEM marine biologist

How are the various species of whales, dolphins and porpoise distributed along the Atlantic coast? How many are there? How many species of sea birds and sea turtles co-exist with them and where are they generally found? What is important to their survival?

That's what teams of marine scientists will try to learn when they head out to sea this summer on the largest survey of Atlantic marine protected species on the east coast. From July through September, they will be studying whales, porpoise, dolphins, turtles, seals and seabirds from Maine to Florida to learn more about their population sizes and migratory patterns.

The research is part of a five year study developed and funded by the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Additional support for the marine mammal research comes from the Navy while the sea scallop fishing industry is lending support for the sea turtle work through their research set aside program.



Bottlenose Dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) seen from the Henry B. Bigelow July 2011. (Photo credit: Allison Henry/NOAA/NEFSC.)



Called the Atlantic Marine Assessment Program for Protected Species, or AMAPPS, a key objective of the study is to help fill critical data gaps on the population size, behavior and spatial distribution of protected species. In consultation with federal partners, BOEM will use the data to help assess the potential impacts to protected resources in relation to the development of offshore energy projects. The data will also help in the design of avoidance and mitigation measures related to offshore energy operations. In addition, the data will improve the knowledge base of other federal agencies with living marine resource responsibilities, and will assist with multiple ocean use planning activities under the National Ocean Policy.

White-tailed Tropicbirds were seen daily on the first leg of the cruise in July 2011 from Florida to Virginia, with up to 5 individuals recorded in a day. (Photo credit: NOAA/NMFS, permit# 7751874.)

This summer the survey work will concentrate on shipboard surveys. The northern surveys run from July 1 to August 19, departing from Newport, RI, aboard the NOAA Ship *Henry B. Bigelow*, and covering the region between Maine and Norfolk, Va. The southern surveys take place from July 8 through September 11, exploring from Norfolk to Florida aboard the NOAA Ship *Gordon Gunter*. Both surveys will be divided into smaller segments running a few weeks at a time.

Aerial surveys have been flown by USFWS and NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service in 2010-2013; this is the fourth year for NOAA's NMFS ship-based surveys. Research to date has contributed to updated abundance estimates for 19 species or species groups of cetaceans (whales and dolphins) in U.S. and Canadian (Nova Scotian) waters and the first ever preliminary abundance estimate for loggerhead turtles in U.S. Atlantic waters. At this time, six peer-reviewed papers and technical reviews have been published, four are currently in review and at least six more are in preparation. This study continues to facilitate improvements in the use of tagging, passive acoustic listening and observation technology and methodology and contributes biological data to existing research database initiatives.



Loggerhead turtle on deck in 2011, ready for evaluation and tagging as part of the research conservation effort by the study partners. (Photo credit: NOAA/NMFS, permit # 775-1874)

One of BOEM's marine biologists, Dr. Desray Reeb in the Office of Renewable Energy Programs, will join the science team for the northern leg leaving from Newport, RI, on July 1. Follow her and others on the [mission website](#) and [blog](#).

- BOEM -

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) promotes energy independence, environmental protection and economic development through responsible, science-based management of offshore conventional and renewable energy.

