

GoMMAPPS seabird trip report
17 - 30 September 2017
Fall Plankton Survey, Leg 2
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 energy-related 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 influencing conservation of migratory avian resources (Seabird Science Plan 2016).

From 17 – 30 September 2017, two GoMMAPPS seabird observers accompanied the fall plankton cruise Leg 2 aboard the *R/V Gordon Gunter* based at the NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service, Pascagoula, MS. Chris Haney and Matt Love conducted counts of all birds detected within a 300-m strip transect while the ship was underway (Balance and Force 2016). Observers counted these and seabirds outside the strip transect for ~110 hours over 13 calendar days. No time that was scheduled to be surveyed was lost to weather conditions or to mechanical issues. Daily survey time ranged from ~4.0 to 12 hrs.

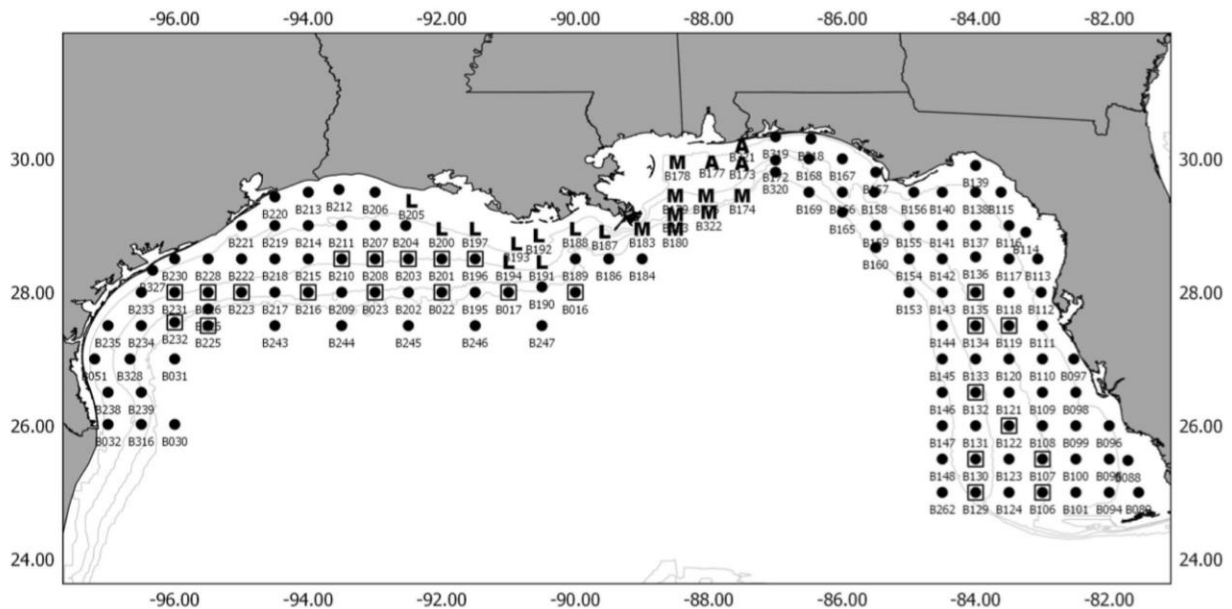


Figure 1. Map of the sampling stations for the NOAA fall 2017 plankton survey aboard the *R/V Gordon Gunter*. GoMMAPPS observers conducted strip transect surveys during daylight hours between stations, as well on the day of embarkation (17 September) from Pascagoula, and for two long transit days back to port (28-29 September). **NOTE:** During Leg 2 of the NOAA fall plankton survey, only that portion of the Gulf of Mexico west of about stations B183 and B184 was surveyed.

This GoMMAPPS seabird survey was extremely successful and will provide key information for decision-makers. In general, spatial coverage from the *R/V Gordon Gunter* during this leg was widespread in the Central and Western Planning Areas over continental shelf habitats (*Figure 1*).

Observers detected 20 different species of pelagic, offshore, and coastal marine birds, as well as a number of migrating passerines, shorebirds, raptors, and wading birds. The total count and the birds per day exceeded by a factor of three the encounter rates from any single GoMMAPPS survey conducted to date. By September 29, sightings of at least 7,860 individual birds were entered into the SEEBIRD database, for a detection rate of >600 birds/d or almost 70 birds/hr on Leg 2 of the NOAA 2017 fall plankton survey.

SPECIES LIST

- red-necked phalarope
- parasitic jaeger
- long-tailed jaeger
- laughing gull
- sooty tern
- bridled tern
- least tern
- black tern
- common tern
- Forster's tern
- royal tern
- sandwich tern
- tropicbird sp.
- Cory's shearwater
- Audubon's shearwater
- magnificent frigatebird
- masked booby
- brown booby
- double-crested cormorant
- brown pelican