

GoMMAPPS seabird trip report
9 - 25 August 2017
Marine Mammal Surveys
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 9 – 25 August 2017, two GoMMAPPS seabird observers accompanied the GoMMAPPS marine mammal cruise Leg 3 aboard the *R/V Gordon Gunter* 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 seabirds for a total of ~183 hrs over 16 calendar days. Essentially no time that was scheduled to be surveyed was lost to weather on this cruise leg. Daily survey time ranged from ~11.0-12.25 hrs, with ~4.5 hrs of observation effort on the first afternoon while on transit from port (9 August).

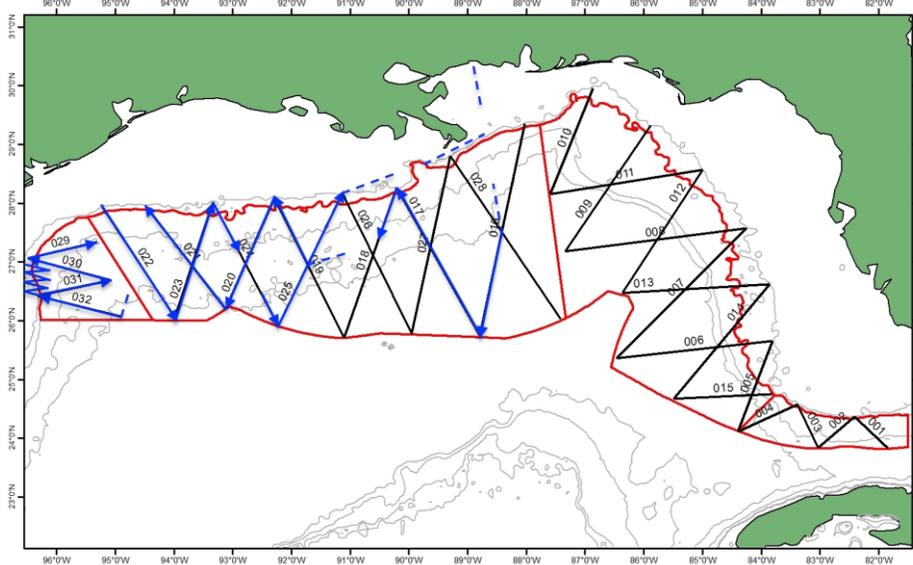


Figure 1. Map of the marine mammal track lines for the NOAA summer 2017 marine mammal survey aboard the *R/V Gordon Gunter*. GoMMAPPS observers conducted strip transect surveys during parts or all of the scheduled cruise dates, as well as transiting between track lines beginning on 9 August and ending on the evening of 24 August. NOTE: arrow lengths and arrow directions are general approximations only, thus may not exactly represent the ship course. Track lines indicated in blue are those that were completed during Leg 3 of the survey; regular lines are indicated with solid lines, approximate transit lines using dashed lines. Leg 3 started south of Pascagoula, MS, and then worked generally west.

This GoMMAPPS seabird survey was extremely successful and provided key information for decision-makers. In general, spatial coverage from the *R/V Gordon Gunter* during this leg of the marine mammal survey was widespread in the Central and Western Planning Areas out to the EEZ (**Figure 1**). Observers detected ~23 different species of pelagic, offshore, and coastal marine birds, as well as a number of

migrating passerines, shorebirds, and wading birds. The total count and birds per day exceeded any single GoMMAPPS survey conducted to date. In total, sightings of at least 2,536 individual birds were entered in the SEEBIRD database, a detection rate of ~154 birds/d or almost 14 birds/hr on Leg 3 of the 2017 summer marine mammal survey.

SPECIES LIST

- unidentified phalarope (*Phalaropus* sp.)
- pomarine jaeger
- laughing gull
- sooty tern
- bridled tern
- black tern
- common tern
- Forster's tern
- royal tern
- sandwich tern
- white-tailed tropicbird
- black-capped petrel
- Cory's shearwater
- great shearwater
- Audubon's shearwater
- Wilson's storm-petrel
- Leach's storm-petrel
- band-rumped storm-petrel
- magnificent frigatebird
- masked booby
- brown booby
- red-footed booby
- brown pelican