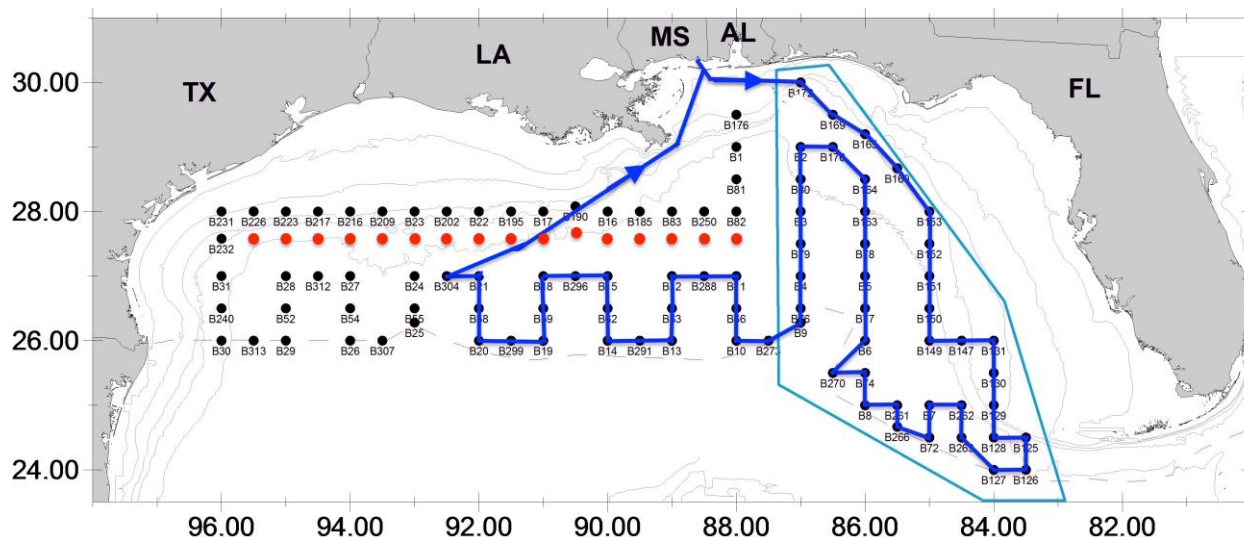


**GoMMAPPS Seabird Vessel Trip Report**  
**27 April - 11 May 2018**  
**Spring Plankton- Leg 1**  
**R/V Oregon II, R2-17-02 (322)**

*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 27 April – 11 May 2018, two GoMMAPPS seabird observers accompanied the NOAA spring plankton cruise, Leg 1, aboard the *R/V Oregon II* based at the NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service, Pascagoula, MS. Chris Haney and Michelle McDowell 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 detected for a total of ~120 hrs over 14 calendar days. No time scheduled for surveys was lost due to weather on this leg. Daily survey time ranged from ~8 to 11 hrs with ~3.5 hrs of dedicated observation effort on the first afternoon while on transit from port (27 April).



**Figure 1.** Map of the spring plankton stations and track lines for the NOAA 2018 spring plankton survey aboard the *R/V Oregon II*. GoMMAPPS observers conducted strip transect surveys during parts or all of the scheduled cruise dates, as well as transiting between track lines beginning on 27 April and ending on the evening of 10 May. NOTE: depiction of survey route is a general approximation only, and thus may not exactly represent the ship’s course. Track lines indicated in blue are those completed during Leg 1 of the survey. Leg 1 started south of Pascagoula, MS, and worked generally southeast before turning north-west and then west.

This GoMMAPPS seabird survey was successful and will provide value information for decision-makers. In general, spatial coverage from the *R/V Oregon II* during this leg of the spring plankton survey was widespread in the Eastern and Central Planning Areas out to the EEZ (Figure 1). Observers detected 22 different species of pelagic and coastal marine birds, as well as a number (28 additional species) of migrating passerines, shorebirds, raptors, waterfowl, and wading birds. The total count and birds per day were at the low range for GoMMAPPS surveys conducted to date. In total for this leg of the 2018 spring plankton survey, sightings of ~2,102 (~1,491 seabirds<sup>1</sup>) individual birds (see Species List below) were entered in the SEEBIRD database; ~150 birds/d or >17 birds/hr. Several marine mammals were also detected including: sperm whale, false killer whale, Risso’s dolphin, pantropical spotted dolphin, striped

dolphin, Atlantic spotted dolphin, and Atlantic bottlenose dolphin, as well as likely *Kogia* (pygmy or dwarf sperm whale) and/or *Mesoplodon* (beaked whale). No sea turtles were recorded.

## SPECIES LIST

- red phalarope<sup>1</sup>
- red-necked phalarope<sup>1</sup>
- pomarine jaeger<sup>1</sup>
- parasitic jaeger<sup>1</sup>
- herring gull<sup>1</sup>
- laughing gull<sup>1</sup>
- sooty tern<sup>1</sup>
- bridled tern<sup>1</sup>
- black tern<sup>1</sup>
- common tern<sup>1</sup>
- royal tern<sup>1</sup>
- sandwich tern<sup>1</sup>
- common loon<sup>1</sup>
- black-capped petrel<sup>1</sup>
- Audubon's shearwater<sup>1</sup>
- Leach's storm-petrel<sup>1</sup>
- band-rumped storm-petrel<sup>1</sup>
- magnificent frigatebird<sup>1</sup>
- northern gannet<sup>1</sup>
- masked booby<sup>1</sup>
- brown booby<sup>1</sup>
- brown pelican<sup>1</sup>

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- ruby-throated hummingbird
  - barn swallow
  - bank swallow
  - cliff swallow
  - chimney swift
  - purple martin
  - black-throated blue warbler
  - Cape May warbler
  - palm warbler
  - yellow warbler
  - American redstart
  - eastern wood-pewee
  - bobolink
  - gray catbird
  - veery
  - ovenbird
  - yellow-billed cuckoo
  - common nighthawk
  - cattle egret
  - snowy egret
  - great egret
  - green heron
  - great blue heron
  - blue-winged teal
  - least sandpiper
  - semi-palmated sandpiper
  - spotted sandpiper
  - merlin

<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