

For Immediate Release
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New Bird Monitoring Guidelines Mark 10-Year Anniversary of Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill

Portland, ME – Today marks the 10-year anniversary of oil coming ashore and impacting the Gulf of Mexico coastline after the Deepwater Horizon disaster. On this important anniversary, we are announcing Biodiversity Research Institute’s involvement in the ‘Strategic Bird Monitoring Guidelines for the Northern Gulf of Mexico’ produced by the Gulf of Mexico Avian Monitoring Network (GoMAMN; gomamn.org/strategic-bird-monitoring-guidelines).

The Deepwater Horizon oil spill has highlighted the risk present to the coastal habitats and offshore waters of the northern Gulf of Mexico -- one of the most ecologically and socio-economically important ecosystems in the world. Among other natural resources, the spill impacted a diverse range of birds from Brown Pelicans to Clapper Rails. Not enough was known about the status of these birds prior to the spill and even less was understood about how to restore them to healthy population sizes. As part of the Deepwater Horizon settlement, large-scale restoration work has begun in the northern Gulf of Mexico and presents a new set of opportunities to understand bird populations and advance bird-habitat conservation. For this restoration process to succeed, decision makers will need information on bird ecology, life-history strategies, and responses to environmental change to account for the myriad stressors - from natural processes to anthropogenic activities - that affect the health and persistence of bird populations.

GoMAMN is a self-organized group of federal, state, academic and NGO scientists and managers using the principles of structured decision making to prioritize guidelines for avian monitoring in the Gulf of Mexico (www.gomamn.org). They formed in the wake of the oil spill to facilitate the collection and utilization of bird monitoring data to inform conservation and restoration decision making. BRI is a founding member of GoMAMN and has been involved in many aspects of natural resource conservation in the region, including research that assessed the impact of the spill on birds (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7078153/>), determined the physiological impacts of oil exposure on birds (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29024020>), and quantified oil exposure and its effects on the health of bird species of conservation concern like Common Loons (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27177142>).

The ‘Strategic Bird Monitoring Guidelines for the Northern Gulf of Mexico’ (gomamn.org/strategic-bird-monitoring-guidelines) is the product of efforts from the bird monitoring community of northern Gulf of Mexico and represents extensive monitoring expertise from around the region. Topics range from key methodological and analytical

techniques of bird monitoring to designing monitoring frameworks that push our knowledge of the ecosystem forward. This document is advisory in nature and is a living document intended to be updated every five years as we learn more about birds in the region.

Dr. Evan Adams, a quantitative ecologist at BRI and GoMAMN steering committee member, authored two chapters in the report: a taxa-specific chapter on seabirds and a chapter focused on data management and integration to achieve region-wide monitoring goals. Dr. Adams says this report represents a landmark in Gulf of Mexico bird conservation, “The Deepwater Horizon oil spill made it obvious that we didn’t know enough about Gulf of Mexico birds to make informed conservation decisions. With the release of this report we are hoping to amend this issue, by helping the restoration of bird populations the Gulf and significantly improve our knowledge of this incredible ecosystem.”

While this report does represent an important milestone, GoMAMN isn’t finished with its release. ‘Now the hard part begins, where we have to synthesize information from all of these individual monitoring projects and use them to understand the ecosystem at a Gulfwide scale,’ says Dr. Adams. With guidelines now available to all, GoMAMN will be continuing to work on Gulf bird monitoring with a focus on synthesis of active and ongoing projects.

You can get updates from GoMAMN projects and join it’s Community of Practice at www.gomamn.org and the new GoMAMN report is found at gomamn.org/strategic-bird-monitoring-guidelines. Thanks to all of the GoMAMN partner organizations for their hard work on completing this milestone. Please visit www.briloon.org for updates on the organization and you can follow Dr. Adams at @eco_evan on Twitter.

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