NEWS, NOTES, COMMENTS

Shorebird Research at Winous Point Conservancy – 2006 - 2007

The western Lake Erie basin and Sandusky Bay region have long been known as important habitats for migrating shorebirds. In the fall of 2000, the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network Council awarded the western Lake Erie marshes Regional Shorebird Status based on surveys conducted mainly by members of the Black Swamp Bird Observatory and volunteers at Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge. This is only the second such region in the Midwest to receive this designation. With more data, the region could easily receive an international designation. This designation exemplifies the value of these wetlands for supplying shorebirds with necessary habitat and food for their long-distance migration. The Pectoral Sandpiper, which is fairly common in the marshes during migration, easily may be the longest migrant in the world. It appears that some of these visitors nest in western Siberia and migrate through Ohio on their way to their wintering grounds in southern South America. What is not documented is how important are these areas along their migration route. Based on this, we have set out to study the shorebirds in the Lake Erie marshes. Both of us have years of experience with capturing, banding, and collecting data on migrant birds. However, before this project, neither had done much with shorebirds but very little has been done anywhere with the study of shorebird migration.

So in the summer of 2006, we began a study of shorebirds using the marshes of the Horseshoe Island unit of the Winous Point Conservancy on the northwest shore of Sandusky Bay. Using banding and censusing techniques, we set out to document what species were using the marshes, what numbers, and how long they were staying in the marshes. Shorebirds have a somewhat unique migration system. Some species arrive in Ohio by late March while others do not arrive until early to mid-June. Some species begin their journey south in mid-June while others do not enter the area until late October. The peak time for southward migration appears to be mid-July through early September. With that in mind, we have concentrated our study mostly to the month of August with hopes of expanding in the future. In order to capture and band shorebirds, we used mist nets made of thin nylon. The nets are 61 mm mesh that are 12 m long and 2.6 m high with four tiers. Depending on weather and wind of the day, 6 to 13 nets were up about an hour before sunrise and taken down about 0930 each day of banding. Early on in our efforts we realized that the birds were seeing and avoiding the nets shortly after 0900. In the future, we hope to attempt some netting at sunset.

After two years of research, 13 shorebird species and 507 individuals have been banded. In addition eight other species of birds have been captured and banded:

Species	2006	2007
Semipalmated Plover	6	1
Killdeer	4	1
Greater Yellowlegs	-	1
Lesser Yellowlegs	5	17
Spotted Sandpiper	-	3
Red Knot	1	-
Semipalmated Sandpiper	40	73
Least Sandpiper	25	82
Pectoral Sandpiper	1	19
Stilt Sandpiper	1	1
Short-billed Dowitcher	142	75
Long-billed Dowitcher	-	2
Wilson's Snipe	1	6

This is over 19 days of banding attempts and 593 net hours. In addition to shorebirds being banded, the following were also banded: Black-crowned Night-Heron (1), Wood Duck (1), American Green-winged Teal (2), Tree Swallow (14), Bank Swallow (4), Barn Swallow (8), Song Sparrow (1), and Red-winged Blackbird (2). In summary, for 2006, we banded 236 birds on eight days of banding with 213.5 net-hr of effort, or 1.11 birds/net-hr; and for 2007, 304 birds on 11 days with 379.5 net-hr of effort or 0.80 birds/net-hr. Censusing data has documented 29 species of shorebirds using the Horseshoe Island Unit. Some of the more

uncommon species include American Avocet, Willet, Hudsonian Godwit, Marbled Godwit, Red Knot, Western Sandpiper, White-rumped Sandpiper, Baird's Sandpiper, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Wilson's Phalarope, and Red-necked Phalarope. In addition, uncommon species, such as Snowy Egret, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Peregrine Falcon, King Rail, Virginia Rail, Sora, Laughing Gull, Black Tern, and Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow have also been observed.

A number of individuals have been recaptured over the last two seasons but all during the year of their original banding. Of the 540 birds banded, 41 individuals were recaptured at least once. Two individuals were recaptured twice during the 2007 season. This was a recapture rate of 7.5%. The minimum length of stay has varied from one day to 25 days. For the 2006 season, 19 individuals were recaptured for a recapture rate of 8%. Six Semipalmated Sandpipers and 11 Short-billed Dowitcher were recaptured. The longest stay for Semipalmated Sandpiper was seven days and for Short-billed Dowitcher, it was nine days. For the 2007 season, 22 individuals were recaptured for a recapture rate of 7%. Eleven Least Sandpipers, six Semipalmated Sandpipers, and five Short-billed Dowitchers were recaptured. One Least Sandpiper stayed at least 25 days but we believed that this bird was injured. Another individual was documented for 23 days. With Semipalmated Sandpipers, three individuals were documented staying a minimum of 11 days. For Short-billed Dowitchers, one individual was documented for a minimum stay of 11 days. We believe these data are showing that the wetlands of the Horseshoe Island Unit are extremely important to migrant shorebirds. One piece of data which does not show up in the banding results is what the shorebirds are feeding on. More research in this area needs to be done. We have noticed that the freshwater amphipods (scud), which are known to be an important food source for shorebirds, were more abundant during the fall of 2006 than the fall of 2007. Their population appeared way down this past fall, which may explain the lower numbers and diversity of shorebirds in 2007.

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Survival and Band Wear in Black Skimmers

The Black Skimmer (*Rynchops niger*) is a relatively new species in California. It was first recorded in the state in 1962 (Small 1963) and in 1973 documented as a breeder at the Salton Sea (McCaskie et al. 1974). Since then its statewide population has continued to grow (Collins and Garrett 1996) with breeding populations documented at the Salton Sea (Molina 1996) and five sites on the coast from San Diego northward to San Francisco Bay (Collins and Garrett 1996).

Black Skimmers have bred in coastal Orange County at the Bolsa Chica State Ecological Reserve since 1985 and Upper Newport Bay State Ecological Reserve since 1986. A program of banding hatching-year/local (HY/L) Black Skimmer chicks at these two locations has provided information on age and sex determination (Schew and Collins 1990), chick growth (Schew and Collins 1991), over-wintering site fidelity and movements (Gazzaniga 1996) and early survival (Taylor 1997). Recent observations of banded birds in both of these breeding colonies as well as wintering flocks have added to the data on adult survival and movements and, in 2007, information on three 18-19 year old individuals.

The three older Black Skimmers reported here were among 70 individuals whose bands were read successfully between 21 Jun and 18 Sep 2007 in the breeding colonies at Bolsa Chica and Upper Newport Bay. All bands were read with telescopes; no skimmers were trapped or handled.

Skimmer No. 1 (634-54814) was banded at Bolsa Chica on 18 Jul 1989 and seen by Collins and Garrett at Bolsa Chica on 14 Aug 2007 when it was four days shy of 18 yr 1 mo of age. Surprisingly, there were no previous encounters with this individual.

Skimmer No. 2 (564-46133) was banded at Bolsa Chica on 4 Aug 1988 and seen by Collins and Garrett in the colony at Upper Newport Bay on 21 Jun 2007 at an age of 18 yr 10.6 mo. This individual had been seen previously in a wintering flock in Long Beach, Los Angeles County, on 16 Jan 2004 and 5 Jan 2005 and in the colony at Bolsa Chica on 7 Aug 2004.