

Priority Marine Birds in the Southeast Atlantic Region

The management of seabirds falls under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). A primary goal of the USFWS is to identify bird species of high conservation concern with the intent to implement proactive management and conservation actions to alleviate the need for any future listings of seabirds under the Endangered Species Act. These identified bird species are included in the USFWS's "Birds of Conservation Concern 2002" report which can be found at <http://migratorybirds.fws.gov/reports/BCC2002.pdf>.

As part of this goal, the USFWS is developing a Waterbird Conservation Plan for the Southeast U.S. (Plan). Identified within the *draft* Plan are marine bird species that represent the USFWS' highest conservation priorities for the southeast region. Primary issues of concern for marine birds are contaminants such as oil, collisions with structures and interactions with fishing gear. The following list includes several species described in the Plan with a focus on those that may be vulnerable to incidental capture by fishing gear.

The list includes both pelagic and nearshore species. Pelagic species have adapted to a life on the water and spend much of their time roaming the open ocean wandering widely in search of food. Most return to land only to breed. Fledgling birds may not touch land again until they become sexually mature which, in some cases, may take up to ten years. As adults, nearly all pelagic species are seen off the southeastern Atlantic shores during their non-breeding season. Many of the coastal/nearshore species can be sighted either year-round or, as in the case of the sea ducks, during the winter. In general, seabirds are long-lived with some species reaching 30 years and older. Most have delayed maturity and may produce only one or two eggs a year. With many seabird species, particularly the pelagics, little if any data are available for assessing population trends.

Included in the species' information is their conservation status with respect to the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). Also noted, when available, is the species' evaluation by criteria established under the USFWS' *draft* Plan and the *North American Waterbird Conservation Plan* (NAWCP). The NAWCP is available at <http://www.waterbirdconservation.org/pubs/ContinentalPlan.cfm>. Seabirds constitute the majority of species covered in the NAWCP, which takes a more continental approach to identifying waterbird conservation issues and is the national plan under which framework the Southeast Regional Plan is being drafted. (Please see the following conservation category descriptions.)

Action needed as identified in the regional *draft* USFWS Southeast Waterbird Plan:¹

Immediate Management needed to reverse or stabilize significant, long-term population declines in species with small populations, or to protect species with the smallest populations for which trends are poorly known. Lack of action may lead to extirpations or extinction.

Management Attention or other on-the-ground conservation actions needed to reverse or stabilize significant, long-term population declines in species that are still relatively abundant.

Long-term Planning and Responsibility needed for species to ensure that sustainable populations are maintained.

¹ Hunter, W.C. unpublished. Draft Southeastern U.S. Waterbird Conservation Plan, USFWS, Atlanta, GA

Categories of Concern under the national *North Atlantic Waterbird Conservation Plan*:²

Highly Imperiled includes all species with significant population decline and either low population or some other high risk factor.

High Concern includes populations of species known or thought to be declining and have some other potential threat as well.

Moderate Concern includes populations of species that are either 1) declining with moderate threats or distributions, 2) stable with known or potential threats and moderate to restricted distributions, or 3) relatively small restricted distributions.

Low Concern includes population of species that are either 1) stable with moderate threats and distributions, 2) increasing but with known or potential threats and moderate to restricted distributions, or 3) of moderate size with known or potential threats and moderate to restricted distributions.

Not Currently at Risk includes all other species for which information was available.

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² James A. Kushlan, Melanie J. Steinkamp, Katharine C. Parsons, Jack Capp, Martin Acosta Cruz, Malcolm Coulter, Ian Davidson, Loney Dickson, Naomi Edelson, Richard Elliot, R. Michael Erwin, Scott Hatch, Stephen Kress, Robert Milko, Steve Miller, Kyra Mills, Richard Paul, Roberto Phillips, Jorge E. Saliva, Bill Sydeman, John Trapp, Jennifer Wheeler, and Kent Wohl. 2002. Waterbird Conservation for the Americas: The North American Waterbird Conservation Plan, Version 1. Waterbird Conservation for the Americas. Washington, DC, U.S.A.

Petrels

Bermuda Petrel, *Pterodroma cahow*

Conservation status

- Federally listed as endangered under the ESA throughout entire range
- Identified as species for Immediate Management in the *draft* SE Waterbird Plan
- Identified as species of high concern throughout range in the NAWCP
- Thought to be extinct for 300 years before its rediscovery in 1935

Occurrence

- Pelagic
- Occurs in summer during non-breeding season
- Appears to regularly occur in low numbers off North Carolina coast

Breeding/nesting

- No more than 100 Bermuda Petrel breeding pairs are known today, but this is a significant improvement over a few decades ago
- Currently, breeding only known to occur on small islands of Bermuda
- Has 1 brood per year, 1 egg

Prey/foraging

- Food consists primarily of cephalopods (small squid) and lesser amounts of shrimp and probably small fish
- Recent documentation (several sighting records and photographs) provides evidence that foraging areas include the Gulf Stream waters off of North Carolina

Threats

- Threats include human encroachment at breeding sites and offshore oil and gas exploration at Gulf Stream foraging sites
- Substantial threat to species concerns lighted ships and platforms that attract birds at night, leading to collisions with wires or other structures
- Vulnerable to conflicts with off-shore fishing gear; may be attracted to baited hooks

Black-capped Petrel, *Pterodroma hasitata*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as species for Immediate Management in the *draft* SE Waterbird Plan
- Identified as Highly Imperiled throughout range in the NAWCP

Occurrence

- Pelagic
- Occurs in or adjacent to the Gulf Stream between north Florida and southern Virginia
- Regularly occurs in highest numbers off North Carolina though some birds found with regularity off the coasts of South Carolina and Georgia
- Concentrations of birds can be found along the Gulf Stream throughout the year, but particularly in May, August, and late December through early January

Breeding/nesting

- Breeding thought to be restricted to steep sea and inland cliffs along the La Selle Ridge in Hispaniola (mostly in Haiti)
- Possibly down to only 2000 nesting pairs, most of which nest in Haiti where they are highly vulnerable to habitat loss and disturbance
- Has 1 brood per year, 1 egg
- This species thought extirpated from all other previously known nesting areas

Prey/foraging

- Thought to feed on squid and fish in areas of turbulence and upwellings
- Main foraging area appears to be along the Gulf Stream directly east of Cape Hatteras National Seashore, North Carolina

Threats

- Substantial threat to species concerns lighted ships and platforms that attract birds at night, leading to collisions with wires or other structures
- Vulnerable to conflicts with off-shore fishing gear, may be attracted to baited hooks

Storm petrels

The Storm petrels are a widespread family of small seabirds found throughout the world's oceans. They are the lightest seabirds in the world and have an incredible sense of smell being able to locate prey from miles away.

Band-rumped storm Petrel, *Oceanodroma castro*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as species for Management Attention in the *draft* SE Waterbird Plan
- Identified as Highly Imperiled throughout range in the NAWCP

Occurrence

- Pelagic
- Regularly occurs in moderate numbers along Gulf Stream, especially off North Carolina during summer in non-breeding season
- Has 1 brood per year, 1 egg

Prey/foraging

- Feeds on small crustaceans and fish

Threats

- Vulnerable to conflicts with off-shore fishing gear, colliding with lights on boats and structures during inclement weather

Shearwaters

Shearwaters soar close to the water's surface while searching for prey. When foraging, they enter the water from either the air or from the water's surface and may engage in an underwater pursuit of their prey. In general, shearwaters do not usually dive to great depths, however, Sooty Shearwaters have been recovered from crayfish pots set at over 20 fathoms off New Zealand. Food items include fish, squid, crustaceans, and ship refuse.

Audubon's Shearwater, *Puffinus lherminieri*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as species for Immediate Management in the *draft* SE Waterbird Plan
- Identified as Highly Imperiled throughout range in the NAWCP

Occurrence

- Pelagic
- Occurs in summer during non-breeding season, especially off of eastern North Carolina
- Found in Gulf Stream with an influx in late summer with a few remaining in North Carolina/Virginia area until November

Breeding/nesting

- Breeds in West Indies
- Has 1 brood per year, 1 egg

Prey/foraging

- Tends to spend much of its time on the water's surface where it may dive for fish or squid
- When foraging, frequently submerges and swims with use of wings for up to 20 seconds

Threats

- Highly susceptible to losses on West Indian nesting grounds to predators
- Vulnerable to conflicts with off-shore fishing gear, colliding with lights on boats and structures during inclement weather

Greater Shearwater, *Puffinus gravis*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as species for Management Attention in the *draft* SE Waterbird Plan
- Identified as species of High Concern throughout range in the NAWCP

Occurrence

- Pelagic
- Occurs in summer/fall during non-breeding season
- Regularly occurs in high numbers along Atlantic coast

Breeding/nesting

- Breeds in the Southern Hemisphere, off the tip of South America
- Has 1 brood per year, 1 egg

Prey/foraging

- Feeds on fish, often plunge diving from 20-30 feet above the water's surface
- Known to attend fishing boats; may take bait off hooks or take fish that are discarded

Threats

- Vulnerable to conflicts with off-shore fishing gear, colliding with lights on boats and structures during inclement weather

Manx Shearwater, *Puffinus puffinus*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as species for Management Attention in the *draft* SE Waterbird Plan
- Identified as species of Moderate Concern throughout range in the NAWCP

Occurrence

- Pelagic
- Occurs in winter during non-breeding season
- Regularly occurs in moderate numbers off North Carolina, casually elsewhere

Breeding/nesting

- Breeding records range from Europe to Canada and from Cape Cod to the Baja Peninsula, Mexico
- Has 1 brood per year, 1 egg

Prey/foraging

- Known as a good swimmer as sometimes pursues fish or squid underwater
- Adults may forage more than 600 miles from nesting burrow, returning to the burrow at night
- Can attend fishing boats and trawlers

Threats

- Vulnerable to conflicts with off-shore fishing gear, colliding with lights on boats and structures during inclement weather

Cory's Shearwater, *Calonectris diomedea*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as species for Management Attention in the *draft* SE Waterbird Plan
- Identified as species of Moderate Concern throughout range in the NAWCP

Occurrence

- Pelagic
- Occurs in summer during non-breeding season
- Regularly occurs in high numbers along Atlantic coast

Breeding/nesting

- Breeds on islands in the eastern Atlantic Ocean, primarily in the Azores
- Has 1 brood per year, 1 egg

Prey/foraging

- Known to follow predatory fish to feed on bait fish driven to the surface
- At night feeds on crustaceans and large squid taken from the surface
- Follows ships, attends trawlers

Threats

- Vulnerable to conflicts with off-shore fishing gear, colliding with lights on boats and structures during inclement weather

Sooty Shearwater, *Puffinus griseus*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as species for Management Attention in the *draft* SE Waterbird Plan
- Identified as species of Moderate Concern throughout range in the NAWCP

Occurrence

- Pelagic
- Occurs in summer during non-breeding season
- Regularly occurs in high numbers along Atlantic coast

Breeding/nesting

- Breeds in the Southern Hemisphere on islands off South America, New Zealand and Australia
- Has 1 brood per year, 1 egg

Prey/foraging

- When feeding, can plunge head first from several feet above the water's surface with wings open making short dives for fish and squid
- Attracted to fishing trawlers

Threats

- Vulnerable to conflicts with off-shore fishing gear, colliding with lights on boats and structures during inclement weather

Boobies

Masked Booby, *Sula dactylatra*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as species for Management Attention in the *draft* SE Waterbird Plan
- Identified as species of High Concern throughout range in the NAWCP

Occurrence

- Occurs during post-breeding dispersal from West Indies, principally northward in Florida and westward to Texas
- Rare northward to the Outer Banks of North Carolina
- Most common April through October

Breeding/nesting

- Breeds in small numbers on the Dry Tortugas
- Has 1 brood per year, 1-2 eggs

Prey/foraging

- Flying fish and small squid are primary prey
- Can plunge vertically from 40 feet in the air to 10 feet underwater

Brown Booby, *Sula leucogaster*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as species for Management Attention in the *draft* SE Waterbird Plan
- Identified as species of High Concern throughout range in the NAWCP

Occurrence

- Pelagic
- Regularly occurs offshore around Florida, especially at Dry Tortugas

Breeding/nesting

- Breeds off southern Florida
- Has 1 brood per year, 1-3 eggs

Prey/foraging

- Feeds on fish
- Plunge diver, making shallow dives from 30-50 feet above the water

Frigatebird

Magnificent Frigatebird, *Fregata magnificens*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as species for Immediate Management in the *draft* SE Waterbird Plan
- Identified as species of High Concern throughout range in the NAWCP

Occurrence

- Typically oceanic
- Common off Florida in the summer

Breeding/nesting

- Breeding within the continental U.S. occurs at Long Key, Dry Tortugas (about 70 pairs)
- Breeding birds greatly reduced from historical times
- Post-breeding birds (thousands) from tropics stream into southeast region each year, mostly along or near coastlines
- Generally lays 1 egg, most females do not breed every year

Prey/foraging

- Feeds by picking up squid, flying fish or jellyfish from the water's surface
- May pursue other seabirds and force them to disgorge food

Threats

- Vulnerable to conflicts with fishing gear, especially monofilament

Tropicbird

White-tailed Tropicbird, *Phaethon lepturus*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as species for Management Attention in the *draft* SE Waterbird Plan
- Identified as species of High Concern throughout range in the NAWCP

Occurrence

- Pelagic
- Occurs in summer during non-breeding season
- May occur regularly in the Gulf Stream off North Carolina, rare elsewhere on the Atlantic coast

Breeding/nesting

- Breeds on tropical islands in the Atlantic (Bermuda and the Bahamas)
- Has 1 brood per year, 1 egg

Prey/foraging

- Feeds on fish, crabs and squid by diving from 50-100 feet in the air

Threats

- Vulnerable to conflicts with fishing gear

Razorbill

Razorbill, *Alca torda*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as species for Management Attention in the *draft* SE Waterbird Plan
- Identified as species of Moderate Concern throughout range in the NAWCP

Occurrence

- Pelagic
- Winters at sea and occurs during winter off North Carolina, sometimes in moderate numbers
- Infrequent further south

Breeding/nesting

- Nests in New England and areas further north
- Has 1 brood per year, 1-2 eggs

Prey/foraging

- Forages by diving on small schooling fish from the surface and swimming underwater with half-folded wings to depths of 60 feet or more
- Feeds on fish, crustaceans and squid

Threats

- Vulnerable to conflicts with fishing gear

Gannet

Northern Gannet, *Morus bassanus*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as species for Management Attention in the *draft* SE Waterbird Plan
- Identified as Not Currently at Risk throughout range in the NAWCP
- Generally considered secure, but recent major die-offs along Atlantic Coast are cause for concern

Occurrence

- Pelagic
- Common during winter along Atlantic coast

Breeding/nesting

- Nests on remote, rocky islands in the Canadian Provinces
- Returns to nesting site every year; sites used for hundreds of years
- Has 1 brood per year, 1 egg

Prey/foraging

- Feeds on fish and squid
- Can plunge dive from heights reaching 100 feet in the air and can dive to depths of 50 feet underwater
- Readily attends fishing trawls

Threats

- Vulnerable to conflicts with off-shore fishing gear, particularly gillnet

Skimmer

Black Skimmer, *Rynchops niger*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as species for Management Attention in the *draft* SE Waterbird Plan
- Identified as species of High Concern throughout range in the NAWCP

Occurrence

- Fairly common during winter along both Atlantic and Gulf coasts
- Occurs near beaches, in inlets and in estuaries

Breeding/nesting

- Breeds locally from Virginia south to Florida
- Depends on beaches and spoil islands for nesting but are also known to nest on rooftops
- Regionally about 11,500 breeding pairs
- Has 1 brood per year, 4-5 eggs

Prey/foraging

- Feeds on fish and crustaceans by skimming along the water's surface
- Often begins foraging in late evening when prey rise to the surface

Threats

- Vulnerable to high levels of disturbances of nesting colonies

Terns

Terns are slim, very maneuverable birds commonly referred to as “sea swallows” or “flying scissors”. When feeding, terns typically hover above the water's surface and plunge headfirst for fish.

Roseate Tern, *Sterna dougallii*

Conservation status

- North American populations federally listed under the ESA: endangered on Atlantic coast Maine to North Carolina/threatened elsewhere
- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as species for Immediate Management in the *draft* SE Waterbird Plan
- Identified as species of High Concern throughout range in the NAWCP

Occurrence

- Occurs during summer/non-breeding season though uncommon off the southeast Atlantic coast

Breeding/nesting

- Florida Keys breeding birds (~300 pairs) are part of West Indian populations (4000-6000 pairs), and are highly variable in location from Marathon to Key West
- Has 1 brood per year, 1-3 eggs

Prey/foraging

- Eats mainly small fish

Threats

- Vulnerable to human disturbance and predators on nesting grounds

Bridled Tern, *Sterna anaethetus*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as species for Management Attention in the *draft* SE Waterbird Plan
- Identified as species of High Concern throughout range in the NAWCP

Occurrence

- Pelagic
- Spends most of its time in the warm waters of the Gulf Stream north to Cape Hatteras, North Carolina

Breeding/nesting

- Breeds mostly off the Costa Rican coast and from the Bahamas through the Antilles to islands off Venezuela
- A few (~18) breeding pairs are found off the Florida Keys
- Has 1 brood per year, 1 egg

Prey/foraging

- Eats small fish, squid, and crustaceans

Threats

- Vulnerable to introduced predators and human disturbance

Least Tern, *Sterna antillarum*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as species for Management Attention in the *draft* SE Waterbird Plan
- Identified as species of High Concern throughout range in the NAWCP

Occurrence

- Fairly common on the Atlantic coast

Breeding/nesting

- Breeds from Maine to Texas
- Nests on beaches and spoil islands on both Atlantic and Gulf coasts though has also adapted to nesting on rooftops
- Regionally about 10,500 breeding pairs
- Has 1-2 broods a year, laying 1-3 eggs

Prey/foraging

- Feeds primarily on fish and occasionally on shrimp and marine worms
- Catches prey by swooping down on the surface or by diving

Threats

- Vulnerable to human disturbance of nesting areas

Gull-billed Tern, *Sterna nilotica*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as species for Management Attention in the *draft* SE Waterbird Plan
- Identified as species of High Concern throughout range in the NAWCP
- Almost exterminated in early 1900's due to demand for its eggs and feathers

Occurrence

- Fairly common but local summer residents along the Atlantic coast

Breeding/nesting

- Has disjunct nesting locations from Long Island south to Argentina
- Depends on beaches and spoil islands for nesting
- Regionally about 3,000 breeding pairs
- Has 1 brood per year, 1-4 eggs

Prey/foraging

- Seldom dives for fish
- Feeds on insects, crabs, crayfish, and other invertebrates

Threats

- Vulnerable to high levels of disturbances especially on beaches, but does respond positively to artificial spoil islands

Royal Tern, *Sterna maxima*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as species for Long Term Planning in the *draft* SE Waterbird Plan
- Identified as species of Moderate Concern throughout range in the NAWCP

Occurrence

- Frequently found in harbors, estuaries, sandy beaches and nearshore waters on the coast

Breeding/nesting

- Breeds in large colonies on isolated and mostly unvegetated small coastal and artificial dredge spoil islands along coastlines from North Carolina to most of Florida
- Regionally, about 70,000 breeding pairs
- Can lay from 1-4 eggs

Prey/foraging

- Feeds primarily on fish and shrimp
- Plunge dives from 40-60 feet in the air

Threats

- Some vulnerability to entanglement with fishing gear (especially monofilament)
- Subject to vulnerability if colonies are accessible by boat, so known colonies should be protected to the degree possible from recreational access by boats

Common Tern, *Sterna hirundo*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as species for Management Attention in the *draft* SE Waterbird Plan
- Identified as species of Low Concern throughout range in the NAWCP
- Almost wiped out in early 1900's by plume hunters for the fashion industry

Occurrence

- Common on breeding grounds and during migration
- Occurs off Florida in winter, further north along the coast in summer

Breeding/nesting

- North and South Carolina breeding populations (now about 1,000 pairs) have declined in last decade
- Has 1-2 broods per year, 1-3 eggs

Prey/foraging

- Known to associate with large fish, such as mackerel and tuna, as they drive smaller fish to the surface

Threats

- Major migration stop-over sites should be identified and protected from excessive disturbance

Sooty Tern, *Sterna fuscata*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as species for Long Term Planning in the *draft* SE Waterbird Plan
- Identified as species of Moderate Concern throughout range in the NAWCP
- Declines since 1960's attributed mostly to island erosion and reduction of shrub nesting cover

Occurrence

- Pelagic (It is believed that this species sleeps "on-the-wing" as it does not land on water or return to land except to nest)
- Regularly occurs in summer in the Gulf Stream to North Carolina

Breeding/nesting

- An average of about 30,000 pairs breeds in southeast U.S. with almost all at Bush Key, Dry Tortugas, Florida

- Scattered nesting pairs are found in most other coastal southeast states each year
- Has 1 brood per year, 1 egg

Prey/foraging

- Feeds primarily on small fish and squid which it takes from the surface of the water

Threats

- Highly vulnerable to rats and other mammalian predators as well as to human disturbances on breeding grounds

Noddy

Brown Noddy, *Anous stolidus*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as species for Long Term Planning in the *draft* SE Waterbird Plan
- Identified as Not Currently at Risk throughout range in the NAWCP

Occurrence

- Pelagic
- Common on or around the Dry Tortugas, casual occurrence northward to the Outer Banks of North Carolina

Breeding/nesting

- Breeds on subtropical and tropical islands throughout the world
- About 2,000 pairs breed in Dry Tortugas, Florida
- Has 1 brood per year, 1 egg

Prey/foraging

- Feeds on small fish and squid that it picks up from the surface or while diving from the surface. Does not plunge dive like other terns

Loon

Red-throated Loon, *Gavia stellata*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as species for Management Attention in the *draft* SE Waterbird Plan

Occurrence

- Largest wintering concentrations along Atlantic coast are in North Carolina waters between mainland and Outer Banks
- Usually solitary except on wintering grounds when hundreds may congregate in bays along the coast

Breeding/nesting

- Breeds in the high arctic of Eurasia, Alaska, Canada and Greenland
- Has 1 brood per year, 1-3 eggs

Prey/foraging

- Feeds primarily on fish
- Dives to depths of 90 feet or more

Threats

- Highly vulnerable to entanglement with gillnets, this species being number one among coastal divers found to be killed by gillnets
- Have been found entangled in fishing gear at a depth of 200 feet

Common Loon, *Gavia immer*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as species for Management Attention in the *draft* SE Waterbird Plan

Occurrence

- Winters throughout region, principally along Atlantic and Gulf coasts

Breeding/nesting

- Breeds on northern lakes
- Has 1 brood per year, 1-3 eggs

Prey/foraging

- Mainly fish-eating
- Dives from the surface and is known to reach depths of 75 feet

Threats

- Vulnerable to entanglement in fishing gear, particularly gillnet
- Vulnerable to human disturbance and habitat loss, oil spills

Pelican

Brown Pelican, *Pelecanus occidentalis*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as species for Long Term Planning in the *draft* SE Waterbird Plan
- Identified as species of Moderate Concern throughout range in the NAWCP
- Faced near-extinction in many areas during the 1960's and 70's due to contaminants that caused thinning of its eggshells and reproductive failure

Occurrence

- Generally found in nearshore habitats

Breeding/nesting

- Breeds on islands along the Atlantic from North Carolina south to Venezuela, has been expanding northward into Chesapeake Bay
- Regionally about 45,000 breeding pairs
- Has 1 brood per year, 2-4 eggs

Prey/foraging

- Feeds on a variety of fish that occur near the water's surface
- Exhibits plunge diving behavior

Threats

- Some local declines may be underway along the Gulf Coast of Florida where high levels of human interaction may be leading to many birds becoming entangled in fishing gear, especially monofilament

Cormorant

Double-crested Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax auritus*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as Not Currently at Risk throughout range in the NAWCP

Occurrence

- Since 1970's, hundreds of thousands now winter in southeast U.S.

Breeding

- Breeds principally in Florida and along both Atlantic and Gulf coastlines
- Species was largely absent as a breeder inland during most of 1900's, due to both shooting and contaminants. Recent establishment of small inland nesting colonies in Mississippi, Louisiana and Arkansas
- Regionally about 10,000 breeding pairs
- Has 1 brood per year, 2 eggs

Threats

- In some inland areas they are the subject of major controversies involving depredation of both sport fish and aquaculturally raised catfish

- Vulnerable to conflicts with fishing gear, particularly gillnet

Gulls

Gulls are often described as generalists or opportunists. Several species have learned to follow feeding whales or gear being actively fished. They often create a mob scene when competing for fish lucky enough to escape a whale's mouth or small enough to slip through the fishermen's net. Some gulls are known to go after baited hooks and are vulnerable to getting hooked or entangled in the line.

Lesser Black-backed Gull, *Larus fuscus*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as species of Moderate Concern throughout range in the NAWCP

Occurrence

- In recent years, more reports of this species wintering along U.S. eastern coast to southern Florida

Breeding/nesting

- Has 1 brood per year, 3 eggs

Prey/foraging

- Feeds on small fish, seaweed, variety of marine invertebrates, insects, refuse and carrion
- Also steals food from other birds

Threats

- Potential impact from habitat degradation

Bonaparte's Gull, *Larus philadelphia*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as species for Long Term Planning in the *draft* SE Waterbird Plan
- Identified as species of Moderate Concern throughout range in the NAWCP

Occurrence

- Most populations winter near coastlines and ocean bays but migrants and some wintering birds may concentrate inland at reservoirs

Breeding/nesting

- Breeds in the Canadian Plains and Arctic
- Has 1 brood per year, 2-4 eggs

Prey/foraging

- Tends to forage in small groups for surface fish and large plankton

Threats

- Potential impact from habitat degradation

Herring Gull, *Larus argentatus*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as species of Low Concern throughout range in the NAWCP

Occurrence

- After facing serious decline in the 19th century, this species is once again becoming numerous along the Atlantic Coast
- Major numbers move into southeast U.S. during winter, mostly along coastlines, bays

Breeding/nesting

- Regionally over 900 breeding pairs
- Increasing as a breeding species in North Carolina
- Has 1 brood per year, 2-3 eggs

Prey/foraging

- Considered to be a major predator on other beach-nesting species, with some calls for population control where nesting near federally and state listed species (terns and plovers)
- Follows ship to feed on refuse thrown overboard
- Also feeds on fish, variety of marine invertebrates, carrion and algae

Threats

- Potential impact from habitat degradation

Ring-billed Gull, *Larus delawarensis*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as Not Currently at Risk throughout range in the NAWCP

Occurrence

- Winter distribution along coast

Breeding/nesting

- Has 1 brood per year, 2-4 eggs

Prey/foraging

- Large variety of food from fish to worms to rodents as well as refuse

Threats

- Potential impact from habitat degradation

Great black-backed Gull, *Larus marinus*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as Not Currently at Risk throughout range in the NAWCP

Occurrence

- Influx of wintering birds occurs as far south as Florida, found mainly in coastal waters

Breeding/nesting

- Recently established as a breeding species in North America, with even more recent breeding as far south as North Carolina
- Regionally about 200 breeding pairs.
- Has 1 brood per year, 2-3 eggs

Prey/foraging

- Considered to be a major predator on other beach-nesting species, with some calls for population control where nesting near federally and state listed species (terns and plovers)
- Eats carrion, fish, mollusks, crustaceans, other seabirds

Threats

- Potential impact from habitat degradation

Laughing Gull, *Larus atricilla*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as Not Currently at Risk throughout range in the NAWCP
- Apparently stable or increasing across most of range

Occurrence

- Common along coastlines along both Atlantic and Gulf

Breeding/nesting

- Breeds from Nova Scotia to Caribbean
- Regionally over 160,000 breeding pairs
- Has 1 brood per year, 3 eggs

Prey/foraging

- Mainly feeds on small fish
- Considered to be a major predator on other beach-nesting species, with some calls for population control where nesting near federally and state listed species (terns and plovers)

Black-legged kittiwake, *Rissa tridactyla*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as Not Currently at Risk throughout range in the NAWCP

Occurrence

- Occurs during winter/non-breeding season
- Tends to be more pelagic than other gulls and is not commonly seen from shore, as it generally spends the entire winter on the open ocean

Breeding/nesting

- Breeds along the coast from Nova Scotia south to Texas
- Nests on high narrow cliffs on Arctic and sub-Arctic coasts
- Has 1 brood per year, 1-3 eggs

Prey/foraging

- Primarily feeds on small fish but will also eat crustaceans, mollusks, squid and refuse from ships
- Out at sea, this species may follow whales or fishing vessels
- This is the only gull that dives and swims underwater to capture food

Threat

- Large nesting colonies may be vulnerable to human disturbance

The following are diving sea ducks, which are less likely to occur in the South Atlantic Council's area of jurisdiction but are worthy of mention as they are also vulnerable to incidental capture in fishing gear.

Grebe

Horned Grebe, *Podiceps auritus*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA
- Identified as species for Management Attention in the *draft* SE Waterbird Plan

Occurrence

- Occurs during winter especially along coasts or in protected bays

Breeding/nesting

- Breeds in Arctic, nesting on fresh water lakes and ponds
- Has 1 brood per year, sometimes 2; 3-7 eggs

Prey/foraging

- In winter, feeds mostly on fish, crustaceans
- Diving bird may travel up to 500 feet underwater

Threats

- Vulnerable to fishing gear entanglement, particularly gillnet
- Vulnerable to habitat loss

Scaups

Greater Scaup, *Aythya marila*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA

Occurrence

- Abundant during winter in bays and estuaries

Breeding/nesting

- Breeds further north
- Has 1 brood per year, 5-11 eggs

Prey/foraging

- Can dive to 20 feet below the surface
- Diet at sea is primarily mollusks and algae

Threats

- Vulnerable to entanglement in fishing gear, particularly gillnet
- Vulnerable to habitat degradation

Lesser Scaup, *Aythya affinis*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA

Occurrence

- Common during winter in bays and estuaries

Breeding/nesting

- Breeds further north
- Lays 6-15 eggs

Prey/foraging

- Diving duck
- At sea, feeds on marine invertebrates and plant material

Threats

- Deaths due to fishing nets and line may be significant
- Vulnerable to entanglement in fishing gear, particularly gillnet
- Vulnerable to lead poison from ingesting lead shot

Scoter

Black Scoter, *Melanitta nigra*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA

Occurrence

- Winter distribution, mainly coastal

Breeding/nesting

- Nest in northern areas
- Has 1 brood per year, 5-8 eggs

Prey/foraging

- Scoters are heavy birds, built for diving and rough seas
- Feed on mollusks and crustaceans

Threats

- Vulnerable to contaminants
- Vulnerable to entanglement in fishing gear, particularly gillnet

Merganser

Red-breasted Merganser, *Mergus serrator*

Conservation status

- Listed under the MBTA

Occurrence

- Occurs in coastal bays, sea in winter

Breeding/nesting

- Has 1 brood per year, 5-16 eggs

Prey/foraging

- Built for chasing fast swimming fish
- Have a serrated bill to better grip slippery prey which is mainly fish
- Mergansers sometimes forage cooperatively by forming a line to drive fish into shallow waters to catch them

Threats

- In coastal wintering habitat, vulnerable to pollution, habitat degradation
- Vulnerable to entanglement in fishing gear, particularly gillnet