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Coastal Bird Program Joins Motus Network – Installs First Gulf Coast Array



Map of Central Flyway migratory route.

Spring migration is upon us and the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program's Coastal Bird Program is ready! Each spring highly migratory birds fly from their wintering grounds in the south to their Arctic breeding grounds, sometimes travelling up to 14,000 thousand kilometers one way. In the Central Flyway alone, billions of birds will fly from places as far away as southern Chile through Texas on their way north, stopping only to rest and recharge. The uniqueness and productivity of our bays and estuaries makes the Coastal Bend a prime location for these tiny travelers find nourishment, so many of the species we see on our beaches and tidal flats during this time are not actually Coastal Bend residents. They are migratory birds like Sanderlings and Red Knots fueling up on their way to, hopefully, a successful breeding season.



Motus station in the Laguna Madre.

On their journey these little birds face threats from both natural and human-caused sources including exhaustion, starvation, collisions, predators, disease, pollution, natural disasters and hunting to name a few. It's an incredible feat to survive, but easy to understand why populations are in decline.

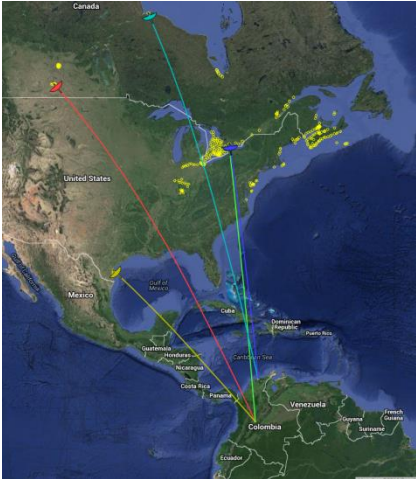
Because migratory birds are good indicators of environmental health, declining populations have led to increased focus on conservation of these species in recent years. Their migratory nature, however, makes monitoring and understanding threats to populations more challenging. To tackle this issue the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program's Coastal Bird Program installed the first array of Motus telemetry stations last spring along the Gulf Coast as part of a project to document shorebird migration along the Central Flyway through the Gulf of Mexico and the Prairie Pothole region. The CBBEP stations join a network of more than 300 other receiving stations that are a part of the Motus Wildlife Tracking System, a program of Bird Studies Canada in partnership with collaborating researchers and organizations. Each telemetry station can detect signals from active tags at distances of up to 15 km. When combined, this array can track animals across a diversity of landscapes covering thousands of kilometers.



Sanderling with radio transmitter attached.

"Migratory birds are among the most fascinating creatures on the planet, and our tracking efforts have confirmed connections between birds in the Coastal Bend and places as far flung as the Arctic, the prairies of the American west

and Canada, southern Mexico, and the southern reaches of Chile,” said David Newstead, Director of the Coastal Bird Program. With four stations in the Coastal Bend and Lower Laguna Madre, the Coastal Bird Program is now in a great position to obtain very valuable migration data on these species of concern. Partnering with Environment Canada and University of Saskatchewan, approximately 60 radio transmitters have been placed on Sanderlings and Red Knots in conjunction with the Central Flyway project, which began uncovering critical information from the Motus antennas about bird movements last spring. “Plugging in to the Motus network with these antenna towers allows us to learn more about migration dynamics, and about how management of coastal habitats in Texas affects the entire populations of some of these amazing species,” said Newstead.



Detected flights of Swainson's Thrushes from www.motus-wts.org.

In addition to providing valuable data on the movements of migratory birds for this particular project, the Motus stations that were installed have other far reaching benefits. Since data from all Motus stations is centralized by Bird Studies Canada any research animal with one of these special tags can be detected by any station throughout the geographic network. So last spring shortly after installing the first of our four Motus towers, a Swainson's Thrush that was tagged as part of a separate project in a coffee plantation in Colombia on March 10 was detected passing by one of our stations in Texas on May 15!

Exciting discoveries are possible with the open and collaborative network provided by Motus, so stay tuned for updates as we move into spring and data begins to come in. To learn more about these birds' journeys, including details of their flight paths and speeds visit www.motus-wts.org.

Additional funding for this project was provided by The Nature Conservancy. Learn more about the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Coastal Bird Program visit www.cbep.org.



The Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program is a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting and restoring bays and estuaries in the 12-county region of the Texas Coastal Bend. CBBEP is partially funded by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

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