



April 2016

Coastal Bend Curlews Take Flight



Live tracking map of the Coastal Bend curlews from www.migratoryconnectivityproject.org.

Spring migration is a very exciting, very busy, time for the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program's (CBBEP) Coastal Bird Program. After months of preparation, the program anxiously watches as Long-billed curlews depart for their breeding grounds, each outfitted with a piece of technology that will help provide answers to questions that have so far eluded scientist about this species.

This work is part of an initiative called the Migratory Connectivity Project, led by the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute's Migratory Bird Center. CBBEP's Coastal Bird Program is a project partner and has been involved in tagging and placing satellite transmitters on 10 Long-billed curlews in the last few months - 9 in the Coastal Bend, and 1 very special bird in Georgia. Long-billed curlews are a highly migratory bird species that spends its winters on the warm shores of the Gulf Coast and southeastern United States, California, and Mexico, and migrates north to the grasslands of the Great Plains and Great Basin to breed. The satellite transmitters allow the birds to be tracked in near real-time, and provide important connectivity information including migratory pathways, locations of stop-over and wintering areas, and the similarity (or dissimilarity) among individuals.

"Conserving migratory birds poses unique challenges since they often depend on numerous sites spread over several continents," said David Newstead, Coastal Bird Program Director. "With these advances in technology, we can now gain a great amount of information from a relatively small number of birds," said Newstead.

The Coastal Bend curlews, all 9 of them from a large wintering population of curlews in the Corpus Christi Bay area, began migrating north on March 12th with the last one leaving on April 4th. Prior to their departure, the satellite transmitters were able to report the birds local movements here in the Coastal Bend, which revealed some interesting habits. One bird, affectionately referred to as 'Lincoln', captured the attention of students and teachers when it was trapped, tagged, and released at a city park across the street from an elementary school. 'Lincoln' and his flock preferred mowed grassy fields and frequented many Corpus Christi city parks and school properties before he departed. Another bird used CBBEP's [Nueces Bay Marsh Restoration Site](#) for nourishment and refuge during its time here, and both of these



'Lincoln' outfitted with satellite transmitter.



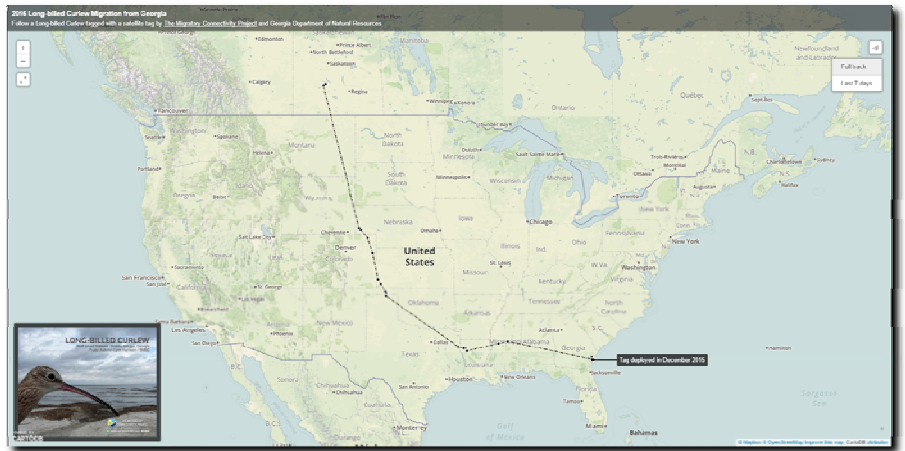
The Migratory
Connectivity Project



Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute
Migratory Bird Center

birds stopped at the CBBEP's [Nueces Delta Preserve](#) for a couple of days to fuel up before departing - a testament to many years of planning of work that went into both of those projects.

The Georgia curlew began its migration on April 5th, and is unique in that it comes from a wintering population of less than 100 curlews. "This is the first time that anyone has tracked a curlew from this vanishing wintering group of curlews along the Atlantic Coast," said Autumn-Lynn Harrison, a research ecologist with the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center. "The birds were once abundant in the marshes of the southeast, but are now rarely seen, making them like ghosts. Thanks to this bird, we're finally going to get answers and discover this unknown migration."



Live tracking map of the Georgia curlew from www.migratoryconnectivityproject.org.

The great news is that all the tagged birds are currently making their way towards, or have already settled into, their breeding grounds, spanning from Nebraska to Canada. Once migration is complete, the information provided by the satellite transmitters will be analyzed and ultimately help focus conservation efforts where needed for this species.

All of the curlews can be followed on [live tracking maps](#), or you can follow the field adventures of the Migratory Connectivity Project on their [Project blog](#). The curlew tracking work is funded in part by the ConocoPhillips Charitable Investment Global Signature Program.

Learn more about CBBEP's Coastal Bird Program at <http://www.cbbep.org/coastal-waterbirds/>.



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.

For more information about the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program, contact Kathryn Tunnell at (361)336-0304 or ktunnell@cbbep.org.

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