



March 2024

Black Skimmer Project Update – Coastal Collaborations

GULF COAST, TEXAS - 23 years ago, the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program hatched the Coastal Bird Program into the Texas conservation scene and set out to reverse the decline of bird populations along the Texas Coast through research, management, and education. Many species of interest, such as Black Skimmers, Red Knots, Long Billed



Adult Black Skimmer Foraging

Curlews, and a variety of plovers, are highly migratory birds, spanning across the Americas and into the Arctic and facing a plethora of threats along the way. By closely monitoring populations through surveys, bandings, and GPS tracking methods, the Coastal Bird Program has been able to more deeply understand how these populations are using the habitat around them to nest and forage and the impacts that humans are having on their behavior. The Program then focuses on putting this understanding into action through the implementation of management and conservation strategies that address the biggest issues facing coastal bird populations. The Coastal Bird Program primarily works in the Texas Coastal Bend region but has been able to expand their working territory from the Texas Rio Grande Valley to the Chandeleur Islands in Louisiana and even into Canadian wilderness with the help of partners throughout the Midcontinent Flyway.

The Black Skimmer is one of the most iconic birds of the Texas coast, a treat to watch as it flies along shorelines dragging its knife-like lower bill in shallow water hoping to encounter an unlucky fish. It is also one of the most severely declining waterbird species, having lost over 70% of its population in the past 40 years. The Coastal Bird Program has identified low nesting success as one of the problems most likely contributing to that decline. Over the past two breeding seasons, the Program has been looking closely at factors that may be causing nesting failures, such as tidal flooding, predation, and disturbance from human intruders on their nesting sites. They have also been tracking Black Skimmer adults using GPS tags that are helping identify primary foraging areas so that they can be better protected and identify the distances they will travel from the nest site



Black Skimmer Colony

to inform the prioritization of island nest site restoration and management. This effort has been expanded into the Texas Mid-Coast region with the help of the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory conducting monitoring in West Galveston and East Matagorda Bay, as well as a 60-year-old nesting site nestled inside Dow Chemical Plant in Freeport, Texas.

Coastal Bird Program Staff are in the process of synthesizing multiple types of data – from tracking devices, water level loggers, game cameras on nest sites, and weekly productivity checks – to provide a more comprehensive assessment of the environment the birds utilize and the factors that are causing decline so that they can be addressed in the future. This project is unique in that it will also integrate a Human Dimensions study being conducted by Texas State University to understand the knowledge and opinions held by bay users so that outreach efforts to raise awareness and reduce the frequency of human disturbance can be targeted more effectively. We are looking forward to sharing the results of this study in late 2024. For more information about the CBBEP’s Coastal Bird Program contact David Newstead at dnewstead@cbbep.org.



Adult Skimmer Feeding Chick

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 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 Quinn Hendrick, 361-336-0305 or qhendrick@cbbep.org.

www.cbbep.org - www.facebook.com/CBBEP

