MIDWEST MARSH BIRD WORKING GROUP CONFERENCE CALL

17 June 2014

Participants:
Jane Austin, Ryan Brady, Candy Chambers, Tom Cooper, Heath Hagy, Evan Hill, Benjamin Kahler, Amy Kearns, Katie Koch, David Krementz, Dan Larkin, Steve Lewis, Mike Monfils, Bob Russell, Greg Soulliere, Auriel van der Laar, and Lisa Webb.

New/Ongoing Action Items

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Responsible person:	**Task:**	**Due Date:**
Jane Austin, Ben Kahler, and Mike Monfils	Review available published and gray literature for information regarding vital rates that could be included in life cycle models: Yellow Rail (Jane), Sora (Ben), and Virginia Rail (Mike).	Ongoing
Ben Kahler and Mike Monfils and others	Developing a process for estimating species abundance at various spatial scales	Ongoing
Wes Glisson, Ben Kahler, Dan Larkin, Mike Monfils, and Greg Soulliere	Evaluating habitat variables as predictors of marsh bird occupancy	Ongoing
Katie Koch	Midwest Avian Data Center: provide a link to archived presentation on how to use MWADC.	11/21/14*
Ben Kahler, Katie Koch, Mike Monfils	Sketch a draft out of marsh bird session at workshop.	06/27/14
Ryan Brady, Katie Koch, others	Identify information and format for subpage of the Midwest Coordinated Bird Monitoring website to document and help manage the work of the group	11/21/14*
Ben Kahler and Mike Monfils	Gather and collate vegetation and habitat data collection protocols associated with regional marsh bird survey efforts.	6/27/14

*A target deadline for completion was not identified during the call, so we entered a post hoc deadline that seemed reasonable for the given tasks.

Meeting Minutes

1) **General Updates**
   a) Heath Hagy (new to the group) said the wetland wildlife part of the Illinois State Wildlife Action Plan is up and going and gaining momentum. Hagy is collaborating with Mike Eichholz (Southern Illinois University) researching whether the amount of wetlands in Illinois is of sufficient quality on the landscape for focal wildlife species (waterfowl-centric), whether they are flooded at the appropriate time and depth, and if they provide enough forage. Also, they are looking at the mismatch of water and flooding, and if wetland objectives are appropriate/achievable. Currently, there is no marsh bird component to the research; however, they are looking to add a marsh bird monitoring component. They are interested in Comparing WRP/CREP with other wetlands and compare and also look at marsh bird response, landscape composition and landscape change.

   Hagy also said that there is interest in conducting marsh birds monitoring to compare with marsh bird estimates from the Illinois Natural History Survey's Critical Trends Assessment Program (CTAP), a long-term monitoring program (since 1997) which generates estimates of baseline condition and change in wetlands, forests, and grasslands in Illinois.

   b) Dave Krementz spoke about Auriel van der Laar, a master's student at The University of Arkansas, who is studying marsh bird (primarily Sora) use in twelve public wetlands across Missouri looking at phenology and habitat characteristics. Formal experiments are being conducted with wetland managers looking at typical flooding regimes geared primarily to waterfowl. Van der Laar is conducting a cross-over phenology experiment look at whether timing of water level management impacts marsh bird response. Two wetlands per conservation area are subjected to the following flooding schedule.

   Timing of water level management (replicated at each conservation area)

	Year 1	**Year 2**
Wetland 1	Aug 1st	Sept 15th
Wetland 2	Sept 15th	Aug 1st

   c) Mike Monfils provided overviews of two recently-funded research projects related to marsh bids that he and others are working on.

   Monfils and Greg Corace (Seney NWR) received funding from the Joint Venture to investigate marsh bird use of wetlands in BCR 12. Specifically, they will evaluate effects of hydrologic regimes (altered/restored/natural) on marsh bird use across a continuum of hydro-conditions. They will also investigate fire history and hydrological effects on marsh bird use.

   Monfils and Dan Hayes (Michigan State University) are collaborating with Ryan Brady, Dave Sherman, and Ben Kahler to assess marsh bird use of impounded and

unimpounded wetlands in Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin. They will be combining marsh bird survey data from the three states over the past several years and comparing marsh bird use between wetlands in the two categories. The results may be the first step in understanding how these birds respond to typical waterfowl management regimes. Based on the results, they intend to set up an experimental management plan at a subset of sites across the three states to evaluate marsh bird response to specific actions (e.g., drawdowns).

2) **Updates regarding ongoing tasks/new topics**
   a) Reviewing the literature for rail vital rates.
      Greg Soulliere and Jane Austin developed a conceptual model for shallow water rails across the full annual cycle. Some work has been done researching vital rates for YERA, SORA, and VIRA that can be used in the population models, and Ben Kahler, Mike Monfils, and Jane Austin will keep this on their radar – continue to pull this information together.

   b) Developing a process for estimating species abundance at various scales.
      There is considerable interest in the workgroup to use marsh bird survey data to generate abundance estimates. Flyways desperately need estimates at the flyway level especially for hunted species. Also, this information would complement the revision of the JV Waterbird Habitat Conservation Strategy – to be completed in 2015. Some members have used estimates generated by Mark Seamans using the data; however, some have been skeptical of or concerned by the estimates. It's not likely that the National Marsh Bird Monitoring Coordinator (previously held by Mark Seamans) position will be filled. However, Mark continues to work on marsh bird data analyses when he can. The Coordinator position at Waterbird Conservation of the Americas (previously held by Jennifer Wheelers) is more likely to be filled. There was much discussion on how regional or flyway population estimates could be generated moving forward without a dedicated position to which no clear consensus was reached.

   c) Evaluating habitat variables as predictors of marsh bird occupancy
      Several members working from a spreadsheet of variables Mike Monfils put together. Monfils has received feedback from several already, but this is a tool that could be useful with continual augmentation.

   d) Midwest Avian Data Center (Katie Koch)
      Katie Koch gave a status update on the transition of the national marsh bird survey database to the Midwest Avian Data Center. Point Blue (the contractor) has transferred the data from USGS to Avian Knowledge Network (AKN) servers. The USGS site it turned off. If you had data in the USGS system then the data is now in AKN.

Those who have been managing data need to be set up as project leaders and set the data to "CLEAN," which would make the data discoverable to others, and a higher data sharing level if so desired.

The new system includes the ability to make histograms and other analytical and reporting functions as well. Refuge data managers are ahead of the game to get trained up on the new system. Continue using the new data entry system if you have on-going project data. A user-acceptance team helped inform the architecture and functionality of the new system. There is a bulk upload option; answer a few questions and then upload the data as bulk. The system is also good for legacy data.

On training and locating other's data sets: Katie Koch will provide a link to an archived presentation to the working group on how to use MWADC. It might be possible to get some training on how to use the new system while at the August workshop. Katie will double-check to make sure Mark Weimer's data went into the new data system.

e) Tom Cooper gave an overview of a project funded by the PPJV to evaluate marsh bird response to invasive cattail and reed canary grass control using grazing, mowing, and herbicide application in the Prairie Pothole Region of Minnesota. Doug Johnson developed the sampling framework and a graduate student from the University of Minnesota Fish and Wildlife research unit will begin field work in 2015. They are working with DNR and FWS managers who do invasive species control.

f) Other member updates (all)
There is interest among group members to capture all of the work the group has done over the past few years and maintain it for reference. Katie Koch suggested the Midwest Coordinated Bird Monitoring Partnership website could host the information on a subpage. Katie said she would like to sit down with several group members to get at this. Ryan Brady volunteered to help brainstorm on this stuff. Tom Cooper suggested that those involved could write a paragraph on what's going on.

A satellite transmitter was attached to a King rail at Winous Point (NW Ohio). Other group members shared a few other KIRA sightings regionally in seemingly bad habitat.

Ryan Brady said that the 2nd WI breeding bird atlas is starting in 2015 and will be looking to implement marsh bird efforts.

3) **Planning for marsh bird session of Midwest Bird Conservation and Monitoring Workshop**
Katie Koch provided an overview of the current schedule for the marsh bird session. The call for papers closes on Friday, June 20th. The poster session is scheduled for Tuesday evening. Katie will send abstracts to coordinators to see if they want it to be added to the working group meeting.

There was considerable discussion among workgroup members to identify priority tasks and issues to be addressed at the workshop. Mike reviewed the 10 steps of successful monitoring. Katie recommended that we report out on what we have learned and what we are working on. Some noted the need to identify our target audiences, their information needs, and the best products to address those needs. It was suggested that we revising our future research and monitoring needs. Someone also suggested that we have some products in mind to discuss at the workshop. We need to discuss what products we need, how do we complete them, and what are some creative ways to get there? Some suggested products included conceptual models, MWADC, and population estimates. Some brainstorming on how we could get someone onboard (not an FTE) to do some of this work.

The Avian Knowledge Network (AKN) is built on an R platform. There is an R code repository in which people can contribute and share code and run the analyses to generate on the fly. Leo Salas from Point Blue Conservation will be at the workshop and will be conducting training of MWADC all day Tuesday. Leo may be available to help with the working group.

Ryan suggested that we talk about the data being collected during surveys to characterize marsh bird habitat – how are the data being used and how can we coordinate better? What are states doing, is it useful, are their deficiencies, and what are the strengths? Are habitat assessments being used in research or program reporting? The data provide a snapshot of what is happening at survey sites.

We developed list of tasks and responsible parties to be done in preparation for the meeting. Ben and Mike agreed to gather information on the habitat assessment protocols and collate them into a presentable format during the workshop.