

Midwest Marsh Bird Working Group

AUGUST 5, 2014

WORKSHOP MINUTES (provided below in blue font)

Workshop Goal: Continue our work to better coordinate marsh bird monitoring, research, and conservation within the Midwest by 1) communicating what we have accomplished and progress toward ongoing projects, 2) identifying key products to be produced by the working group that facilitate conservation activities, and 3) discussing opportunities to coordinate the collection of marsh bird habitat data.

10:00 - 10:30 AM Introductions and overview (Mike Monfils and Ben Kahler)

- *Provide a brief overview of workshop format.*
- *Update everyone on working group activities since last workshop (Aug 2012).*
- We began by having attendees introduce themselves.
- Mike Monfils then briefly described the workshop format and provided an update of Working Group activities since the last workshop was held in 2012 (see [2_midwest_mbwg_2014_monfils_workshop_intro.pdf](#)). He reviewed the results of a stakeholder survey, goals and objectives developed for the Working Group, priority research questions that could be addressed via coordinated monitoring, and technical documents prepared by the Working Group.
- We then heard presentations from the following researchers studying aspects of marsh bird management in the Midwest.

10:30 - 11:00 AM Effects of wetland management strategies on the distribution and habitat associations of secretive marsh birds on public wetlands in Missouri. (Evan Hill)

- See [3_midwest_mbwg_2014_hill_presentation.pdf](#) to view slides.

11:00 - 11:30 AM Effects of wetland management strategies on habitat use of autumn migrating rails in intensely-managed wetland complexes in Missouri, progress and future directions. (Ariel Fournier)

- See [4_midwest_mbwg_2014_fournier_presentation.pdf](#) to view slides.

11:30 - 12:00 PM Developing an optimization tool for a balanced delivery of breeding marshbird and nonbreeding waterfowl habitats on an intensively managed mid-latitude National Wildlife Refuge in the Mississippi Flyway. (Brian Loges)

- See [5_midwest_mbwg_2014_loges&lyons_presentation.pdf](#) to view slides.

12:00 - 1:30 PM LUNCH (on your own)

1:30 - 2:45 PM Identify working group products (e.g., population estimates, conceptual models, data storage, and analyses capabilities)

- *Review “steps to successful monitoring” and marsh bird research priorities.*
- *Have an open discussion about product identification, including aspects of audience, resolution, format, and timing.*
- Mike Monfils introduced the afternoon session by reviewing the “10 Steps to Successful Bird Conservation” and updating attendees on the Working Group’s progress toward each step (see [6_midwest_mbwg_2014_monfils_discussion_intro.pdf](#)). He described those steps that have been completed and highlighted the steps and tasks that remain to be addressed.
- The Working Group previously identified two topics as priorities for discussion at the 2014 workshop: (1) determining the next products to be produced by the Working Group, and (2) evaluating the methods being used to describe marsh bird habitat at survey sites and the potential use of those data. We spent the first part of the afternoon session discussing potential Working Group products and the second portion discussing habitat data collection.
- Attendees discussed many potential products that could be developed by the Working Group. Most of our discussion centered on products that would utilize the regional data set, such as analyses conducted to estimate population sizes and distributions and evaluate habitat associations of particular species. We developed a short list of potential products, which was not intended to be comprehensive, but rather identify those items previously discussed by the Working Group, as well as new ideas. Once the list was developed, we ranked the items as having “high,” “medium,” or “low” priority. Prioritization was meant to help focus the Working Group’s efforts on one or two products in the coming year; however, all of the products on the list were deemed important.
- Developing marsh bird population estimates and predicted distributions were both ranked as “high” priority products, with population estimates being identified as the first product to be addressed of the two. We then discussed population estimates in more detail by identifying potential user groups, next steps, proposed deadline for completion, and Working Group leads (see [8_midwest_mbwg_2014_summary_slides.pdf](#)).

3:00 - 5:00 PM Open discussion on habitat data collection.

- *Compare habitat data collection protocols of group member agencies.*
- *Share thoughts on what does or does not work.*
- *Identify shared objectives, motivations, and (current/future) use of data, and common measurements.*

- Mike Monfils introduced the topic of marsh bird habitat data collection by posing several questions to the group, including how the data are currently being used, should sampling be required of volunteers, what works and what does not work with regard to the methodology, and how could we better coordinate data collection in the region (see [6_midwest_mbwg_2014_monfils_discussion_intro.pdf](#))?
- Ben Kahler presented a spreadsheet summarizing the data being collected in Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin to help identify opportunities for improved coordination among the states (see [7_midwest_mbwg_2014_kahler_methods_summary.pdf](#)).
- We had a wide ranging discussion that covered many topics, including what variables to be collected (e.g., water depth, measures of interspersion), whether to keep data collection optional or require it of volunteers, the necessity of sampling during all three visits, and gathering more specific information on bird locations (e.g., direction the observer is facing during the survey and azimuth from observer to bird).
- We agreed to make the following changes in marsh bird habitat sampling: (1) add a measure of the interspersion of open water and emergent vegetation, (2) limit data collection to the third visit only (i.e., once per season), and (3) require volunteers to collect habitat data. Because the configuration of open water and vegetation is known to influence marsh bird use of wetlands, we agreed that some measure of interspersion would be a valuable covariate to include in analyses of habitat associations. Furthermore, indices of interspersion can be difficult to estimate using aerial imagery. We decided to have observers rank the level of interspersion at survey points using codes, such as those used in the Stewart and Kantrud (1971) classification system. There was general agreement that sampling the habitat once per season was sufficient in most situations, because in our experience conditions rarely change from one survey to the next. However, we should have volunteers record the information more than once per season if they note a major change in conditions (e.g., water level change due to management or beaver activity). We also felt that if the data are important enough to collect, then we should require it of participants, especially given that we are now only asking that it be done once per season.
- We had much discussion on the value of sampling water depths and gathering more specific bird locations (i.e., estimate azimuth in addition to distance to each bird). We know water depth can influence bird use of wetlands and more accurate bird locations could improve our ability to evaluate habitat associations. Although we all agreed there is value in collecting this information, some expressed concern over requiring volunteers to bring additional equipment (i.e., meter stick, compass). We decided to ask programs to consider adding water depth and azimuth measurements to their protocols, but we would not require it at this time.
- See [8_midwest_mbwg_2014_summary_slides.pdf](#) for slides summarizing the main outcomes of the workshop.