

**Final Report to
NS Department of Natural Resources
Habitat Conservation Fund (HCF)**

Prepared by Sue Abbott, Bird Studies Canada
April 2011

Project Title: Building Capacity for Coastal Waterbird Monitoring at Important Bird Area sites on the South Shore of Nova Scotia.

Project Overview: We developed and coordinated volunteer training sessions to train and support wildlife enthusiasts in monitoring shorebirds and other coastal bird species at Important Bird Areas (IBAs) on the South Shore of Nova Scotia. Participants will be asked to act as “caretakers” for Important Bird Areas of the South Shore by participating in regular monitoring visits using skills learned in our training sessions. Caretakers will also help identify threats to habitats, leading to improved habitat conservation.

Project Goals:

- To build volunteer capacity, through expert training and support, to effectively monitor coastal waterbird populations and habitats at Important Bird Areas on the South Shore of Nova Scotia.
- To collaborate with other bird monitoring programs, such as the Maritime Shorebird Survey, to ensure that volunteer training and IBA monitoring and caretaking fill data gaps, cover new sites, and do not duplicate effort.
- To ultimately ensure that designated Important Bird Areas on the South Shore of NS receive high quality monitoring and caretaking by community members into the future.

Project Objectives and Work Completed:

1. Develop high quality educational tools and materials for training non-experts in coastal waterbird identification with a special focus on common South Shore shorebirds.
 - We developed a one day-long workshop to train non-experts in beginner shorebird identification, including in-class and field activities (see attached pdf).
 - We drafted a similar workshop focusing on winter coastal waterbirds for delivery to potential volunteers at IBAs planned for fall-winter 2011-2012.
2. Collaborate with a variety of coastal waterbird experts, government biologists, and community groups on the development and coordination of the training workshop to ensure integration with other monitoring programs (e.g., Atlantic Canada Shorebird Survey - ACSS)
 - We consulted with two shorebird experts during the development and coordination of the training workshop:
 - Susann Myers, who is an experienced volunteer with the ACSS, provided advice on the development of the workshop. We had hoped to engage Susann more in

the delivery of workshops, but this was not possible due to her previous commitments to the Maritime Breeding Bird Atlas.

- Kate Robertson, an Environment Canada shorebird biologist and assistant coordinator of ACSS, reviewed workshop content and delivered parts of the workshop (including a description of the ACSS), and assisted with in-field educational support.

- We consulted with Carina Gjerdrum, an Environment Canada seabird biologist, during the development of draft winter coastal waterbird workshop.

3. Train at least 20 people in coastal waterbird identification and support volunteers to help them grow as competent and confident monitors and caretakers of IBA sites.

- We surpassed our goal of training at least 20 people. Through our skill-building workshops and our winter waterfowl count, we trained 58 people in coastal waterbird identification.
- We include details about location, participation and caretaker recruitment in Table 1 (page 3).
- Due to unexpected interest, a third shorebird identification workshop was held for 12 staff from the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency and Environment Canada's Community Programs.

4. Engage at least 15 volunteers in coastal waterbird and habitat monitoring at sites within South Shore IBAs.

- We engaged a total of 54 volunteers in coastal waterbird monitoring: 22 in waterfowl and 32 in shorebird monitoring at South Shore IBA sites. Eight of the workshop participants continue to assist in coastal bird monitoring (Table 1).
- Monitoring data was shared with Environment Canada and was uploaded and, therefore, accessible to partners as well as the general public through eBird (see www.eBird.org).
- We will continue to mentor volunteers in 2011 in order to support and expand their involvement in coastal bird monitoring.

Achievements and Lessons Learned:

Overall, we feel that this project was a success. We base this assessment on overwhelmingly positive response from participants in the skill-building workshops (see Addendum, page 5). Amateur naturalists have a keen interest in expanding their knowledge and identification. Lack of confidence among potential volunteers can be a barrier to increasing involvement in monitoring and conservation programs. We learned that skill-building workshops are an excellent means of connecting with community members with shared interests in natural history and biodiversity; giving back and supporting existing volunteers; and engaging potential volunteers. We are excited about using this model to build and support monitoring and conservation programs in Nova Scotia, and perhaps throughout the Maritimes. Through this project, we have made an important connection with Environment Canada's Atlantic Canada

Shorebird Survey and we intend to continue collaboration towards supporting shorebird monitoring into the future. With many shorebird populations in serious decline, it's increasingly important to develop a strong network of volunteers who will be able to assist with shorebird monitoring in the future.

We would have liked more time for mentoring volunteers in the field and to deliver a winter waterbird workshop. Because shorebird migration is a short window during late summer and early fall, we were limited in the amount of time we were able to spend with volunteers in the field. However, we recognize that this project was the 'first phase' and that volunteer mentoring is a long-term process. We are currently planning to deliver the winter waterbird workshop at the South Shore IBA (Port Joli Sector) in late fall-winter 2011.

Acknowledgements:

We are grateful to NS DNR's Habitat Conservation Fund for supporting this project. We would like to extend our thanks to Susann Myers, Kate Robinson, Carina Gjerdrum, and Karen Potter for their thoughtful comments and suggestions. We also thank all participants of the workshops and our growing team of volunteers for their enthusiasm and commitment to coastal habitat and bird conservation.

Table 1. Location of skill-building workshops and events in September-November, 2010.

Workshop / Event Description	Workshop / Caretaker Event Location	IBA site name	County	Community	# workshop / event participants	Target Audience	# IBA Caretakers recruited
Shorebird skill-building workshop	Barrington Tourism Centre	South Shore IBA (Barrington Bay Sector)	Shelburne	Barrington	18	Potential IBA Caretakers	4
Shorebird skill-building workshop	Little Harbour Community Hall	South Shore IBA (Port Joli Sector)	Shelburne	Little Harbour	18	Potential IBA Caretakers	2
Shorebird skill-building workshop	Queens Square	N/A	Halifax	Dartmouth	12	Environment Canada & Can. Environmental Assessment Agency staff	1
Winter waterbird count	Port Joli, Port l'Hebert, and Sable River Migratory Bird Sanctuaries	South Shore IBA (Port Joli Sector)	Shelburne	Sable River	10	Community members & Potential IBA Caretakers	1
					58		8

