



**Bird Island Reserve
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Monday, May 8, 2023, 10 am**

Attendance

<u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u>	<u>Present</u>
NC Coastal Land Trust – Jessica Blake	No
NC Coastal Federation – Lauren Kolodij	Yes - call in
Bird Island Preservation Society - Bill Ducker	No
Sunset Beach Police Department	No
Town of Sunset Beach Administration – Cindy Steveson - Lisa Anglin	Yes
Natural Heritage Program – Scott Pohlman	Yes
<u>Community Members and Community Organization Members</u>	<u>Present</u>
Katie Hovermale	Yes
Noelle Kehrberg	Yes
Sunset Beach Turtle Patrol - Carmel Zetts	Yes
Cape Fear Audubon – Charley Winterbauer	No
<u>Others Present</u>	
Elizabeth Pinnix, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Southern Sites Manager John Corbett, Town council	

Welcome

The southern sites manager welcomed the committee to the Spring 2023 meeting, reviewed the agenda, and led introductions.

Reserve-wide Administrative Update

The Reserve-wide Update, which includes a range of reserve activities and information was shared with committee members prior to the meeting. **Members had no comments or questions about the updates.** The Update in its entirety is included as Appendix A.

The site manager provided some reminders from the Reserve-wide update:

- Local Advisory Committee term expirations - if your term is expiring, you have been contacted. The committee member application period will open in June. If you know of others that would like to apply, please send their contact information or forward along the application details when they become available.
 - Ms. Anglin asked how many vacancies were on the Bird Island committee. The site manager responded that there is no limit on the number of committee members at this time.

Site Specific Update

Site improvements and ongoing projects

- The site manager reported that the nature trail looked good, but a trail maintenance day will be planned soon to cut back on vegetation encroaching on the trail and help address social trails being created by wildlife and defined by visitors.
- The site manager reminded the committee about the new Chronolog and signage at the end of Main Street overlooking Bird Island. It has been receiving positive feedback and the timelapse video from the Chronolog can be found [here](#).
- Ms. Anglin asked if we were ready to begin replacing the benches at the end of Main Street to improve the viewing area. The site manager responded that we are ready to begin planning for the benches and will be in communication throughout the process.

Terrapin Tally

- The site manager provided a brief reminder of the [Terrapin Tally community science event](#) and reported that data collection session began last week. Eleven sites, including Bird Island Reserve, are participating this year.
- Ms. Anglin informed the committee that the Town of Sunset Beach is working on a new park that will be constructed in the next five years, called Majestic Park, that will provide kayak launch access to the marsh on the opposite end of the island. She suggested this could be an additional option for the Terrapin Tally.

Motus

- The site manager provided background regarding the [Motus Network](#) and the new partnership with [Cape Fear Bird Observatory](#) to construct a new motus tower at Bird Island. Funds from the most recent land acquisition of Sunset Beach West will be helping to support this new research infrastructure and upkeep. Further conversations with NC Natural Heritage Program and reserve staff will take place prior to placement of the structure. The most recent Motus newsletter was shared with the committee and can be found in Appendix B.
- Ms. Kolodij asked if any funds from Bird Island Preservation Society (BIPS) could be useful for this activity. The site manager explained that the funds being used were set to expire at the end of the fiscal year, so this project will be covered, but appreciated the offer and suggestion.
- Ms. Anglin suggested installing the tower on top of the gazebo at the pier on Sunset Beach because it would be simpler to run power to it. The site manager countered that its placement closer to the inlet on uninhabited land would have a better chance of picking up signals rather than near the public beach access.
- Additional ideas were suggested about partnering with other organizations to sponsor the purchase of tags to be deployed on birds in the area.

Bird Island Supplemental Funds - Acquisition

- The remaining funds from the most recent acquisition must be spent by the end of the fiscal year. The site manager listed the following items that are currently in process or been completed with those funds:
 - Four Reconyx wildlife cameras
 - Portable PA system for summer public field trips lead by Bird Island Stewards and other events applicable
 - New and updated Bird Island brochures
 - Motus tower

Commercial Users and Personal Watercraft (PWC)

- The site manager provided an update to address the community concern regarding PWC operating at high speeds within the creek systems in Bird Island Reserve. The reserve has created an informational packet to provide to local commercial operators that includes: letter from the site manager, site brochures, tips of how to be a responsible user, stickers, and species of interest lists.
- A list of commercial users and applicable parties has been reviewed by the Town of Sunset Beach and Sunset Beach Police Department. A sample packet will be sent to the committee for feedback. Updated brochures will be circulated once received from printing.
- Ms. Kehrberg suggested adding information about sea turtle nesting season to the packet, specifically encouraging sea turtle friendly lighting practices.

Roundtable

- The site manager asked the committee about meeting preferences. The committee agreed to meetings twice a year and to schedule them at the first of the year.
- Ms. Anglin announced a new town website that will be launched in late May that highlights non-profit organizations at Sunset Beach. She requested information for the Friends of the Reserve and Bird Island Stewards so it can be added.
- Ms. Anglin also reported that she will be attending the NC Beach Inlet and Waterways spring meeting to learn more about dredging and engineering on our coasts and how that will impact Bird Island and Sunset Beach. She stated the Town of Sunset Beach was in the engineering phase (3) with Resilience Coastal Communities Program and have applied for phase 4. This would include a living shoreline at 40th Street. They also are working on a grant for public access walkways improvement but will be dependent on permitting.
- The Town of Sunset Beach also received a new permit for shellfish relocation through the NC Divisions of Marine Fisheries and Coastal Management in response to dredging activities and to better protect their oyster beds.

Public comments

- None

Action Items

- Provide new brochures to the town when received
- Follow up with the town about new benches for the end of Main Street
- Send commercial user packet to committee for review and feedback

N.C. Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve Spring 2023 Local Advisory Committee Meetings Reserve-wide Update

Local Advisory Committee Membership

Thank you for your continued service to the reserve's Local Advisory Committees! A number of community member appointments will expire at the end of 2023 and the reserve is seeking community member applications in June 1-30, 2023 for each of the reserve's ten committees. As a reminder, community members may apply to serve consecutive or non-consecutive terms per the [Local Advisory Committee Operating Procedures](#). More information about the upcoming application period will be available in mid-May.

Program Highlights

- Spring **student field trips** to the Rachel Carson Reserve and Masonboro Island Reserve via the Island Explorer Program are starting, and **summer camps** at the Rachel Carson Reserve will start in June in partnership with the NC Maritime Museum.
- The Coastal Reserve's **Training Program** hosted three workshops for real estate professionals this April on living shorelines and low impact development for water quality protection. The workshops were held in partnership with the Brunswick County Association of Realtors and Cape Fear Realtors. At these workshops, real estate professionals received 4 elective continuing education credits. Since 2020, the training program has hosted 11 real estate professional workshops reaching over 700 people.
- The Coastal Reserve and NC Wildlife Resources Commission are gearing up for the 9th annual **2023 Terrapin Tally** to help better understand the overall population status and condition of the diamondback terrapin within the state. This citizen science project takes a snapshot of the diamondback terrapin population numbers in a given area by conducting kayak surveys at specified times and prescribed routes. Terrapin Tally paddling routes are available at 11 locations including: Cape Lookout National Seashore, Rachel Carson Reserve, Calico Creek, Hammocks Beach State Park, Lea Hutaff Island, Masonboro Island Reserve, Carolina Beach State Park, Fort Fisher State Recreation Area, Zeke's Island Reserve, Bald Head Island, and Bird Island Reserve. Data collection will occur during established windows during May and June.
- North Carolina is celebrating the [Year of the Trail](#) in 2023, as designated by the N.C. General Assembly. The reserve will highlight available trails at sites on social media throughout the year.
- Repairs to the **Currituck Banks Reserve boardwalk** are complete and the boardwalk has reopened to visitors. The original footprint of the boardwalk was maintained, and the aging decking boards, benches, and railings were replaced. These replacements are identified as a facility need in the N.C. National Estuarine Research Reserve's 2020-2025 Management Plan. This project was made possible with funding from the Division's N.C. Public Beach and Coastal Waterfront Access Grant Program, DEQ, and NOAA. A big thank you to staff and the DEQ facilities team for their hard work on this project. An event will be held in early June to celebrate the enhanced public access at the site.

Staffing News

- Dr. Justin Ridge joined the reserve as the new Research Coordinator in February. Justin comes to us from the Duke University Marine Lab where he led the Marine Robotics and Remote Sensing (MaRRS) Lab's coastal mapping research program. Justin has a Master's degree in biological oceanography from Florida Institute of Technology and a PhD in marine science from UNC Chapel Hill where his research focused on North Carolina's sounds (and primarily within the Rachel Carson Reserve), examining growth of oyster reefs and their influence on saltmarsh sedimentation and erosion. Justin's recent research includes the application of novel methods

(e.g., drones, deep learning, etc.) for coastal resource management to address human and climatic driven changes, working with the southeast national estuarine research reserves and beyond, along the east and gulf coasts and in Belize.

- Jillian Daly joined the reserve as the new Communications Specialist in February. Jillian is a recent graduate of UNC Chapel Hill with a BS in Environmental Science and a minor in Marine Science, with a strong interest and experience in science communication. In her free time, she enjoys spending time at the Rachel Carson Reserve.
- Several interns and seasonal staff are working with the reserve in Beaufort and Wilmington this summer. Thank you to Friends of the Reserve, the N.C. Internship Program, and NOAA’s Education Partnership Program with Minority Serving Institutions for their support of the internships. Students will work on stewardship and education projects, including Spanish translation of materials to better serve this visitor population.
- NOAA provided capacity building funds to the Division of Coastal Management from its allocation of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (or Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act) to hire time-limited staff to work on conservation and restoration projects. The reserve’s time-limited position will conduct habitat resilience planning and project implementation at the N.C. National Estuarine Research Reserve sites to increase coastal habitat resilience to ensure the sites continue to provide ecological services and protective services to the communities where they are located. The position will be posted soon.

Federal Budget

- The budget table below is a summary of the current status of the federal budget* for fiscal years 2020-2024 as it relates to the N.C. Reserve. The Senate and House are currently working on their versions of the FY2024 federal budget. Thank you to the National Estuarine Research Reserve Association and Friends of the Reserve for their work to educate Congress on the value of the national system and the NCNERR.

Federal Budget Lines	FY2020 Enacted	FY2021 Enacted	Final Omnibus Appropriations FY2022	FY2023 Enacted	FY2024 President’s Request
NERRS Operations	\$27.5M	\$28.5M	\$29.7M	\$32.5M	\$32.5M
NERRS Procurement, Acquisition, & Construction (PAC)	\$4.5M	\$4.5M	\$6.5M	\$8.5M	\$4.5M
CZM Grants	\$77 M	\$78.5 M	\$79M	\$81.5M	\$78.5M

* The federal fiscal year is October 1-September 30. The National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS) budget line provides funding to the 30 reserves within the System through cooperative agreements that are matched by the states, and supports national coordination of programs and implementation of system-wide and competitive projects. The Coastal Zone Management (CZM) grants budget line provides funding to coastal states with approved coastal management programs through cooperative agreements that are matched by the states. The Division of Coastal Management (DCM) receives funding from both budget lines to operate the N.C. National Estuarine Research Reserve

(NCNERR) and N.C. Coastal Management Program. The CZM cooperative agreement that DCM receives provides funding for Reserve staffing, state site operations, and administrative support.

CAPE FEAR REGION MOTUS COLLECTIVE



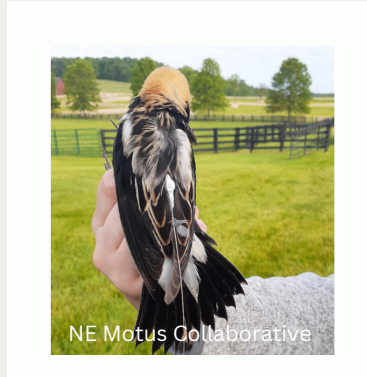
Evangelyn Buckland

Last year we introduced you to our local Motus towers and the important work they are doing on Lea Island, Masonboro Island, and Bald Head Island. For anyone getting interested in Motus for the first time, Motus towers are automated radio tracking towers that allow for migratory data to be collected over vast distances and for a wide variety of species of birds, bats, and insects. Motus is a collaborative international network where each tower can track a tagged individual within about a 15 km (9 mile) radius.

Researchers from as nearby as UNCW and as far away as the Arctic circle have benefitted from these towers. Below we will highlight some of the data that has been collected and where you can find it too!



Dr. Andrew Vitz



NE Motus Collaborative

Bobolinks that had been tagged in the northeast came through and were detected by the Cape Fear Audubon and Masonboro towers in September, 2022.

Researchers from Massachusetts collected important data when some of their tagged American Kestrels passed through the area on their way south in the fall. One kestrel from that project has been detected by the Bald Head Island and Masonboro towers this spring on the way back north to breeding grounds. This is very valuable information about their migratory routes.

Our towers have been busy detecting migratory birds from all over! These towers are now contributing to data collection that spans our hemisphere. Take a look at some of these interesting statistics.



3 towers

76

Tag detections

17

Research projects

4

Countries



Lea Island Tower



- 13 species detected
- First species detected: Seaside Sparrow
- Most recently detected: American Robin
- Species highlight: Short-billed Dowitchers tagged in the Arctic!

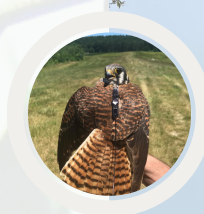
Masonboro Island Tower



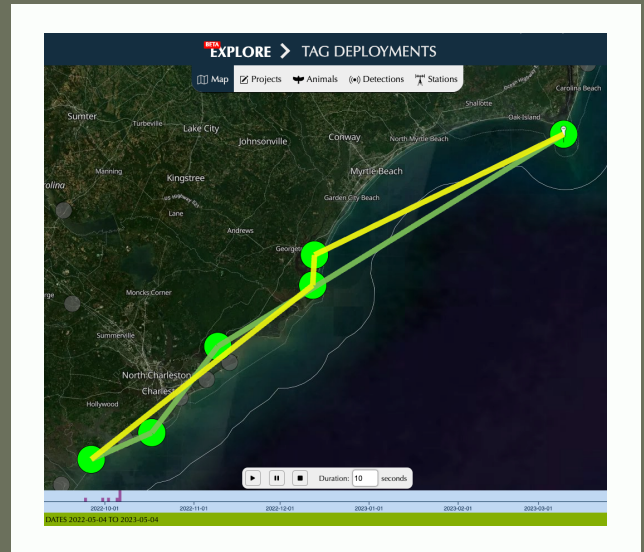
- 18 species detected
- First species detected: Seaside Sparrow
- Most recently detected: Painted Bunting
- Species highlight: Kirtland's Warbler - 3 Kirtland's passed by Masonboro in October!

Bald Head Island Tower

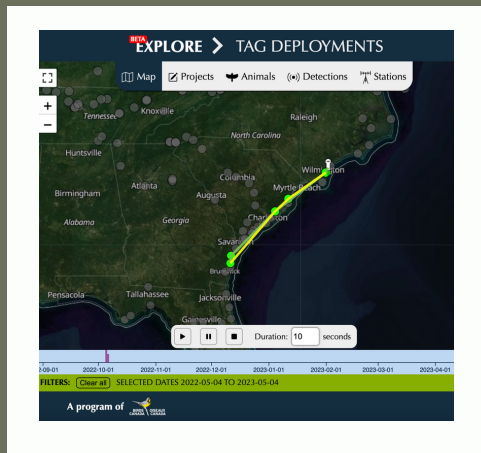
- 4 species detected
- First species detected: Painted Bunting
- Most recently detected: Painted Bunting
- Species highlights:
 - Lesser Yellowlegs tagged in Colombia, South America!
 - American Kestrels have been detected going south and now also returning on their way north!



PAINTED BUNTINGS RETURN



- An adult male Painted Bunting tagged last August at the Bald Head Island Conservancy travelled south in October where it was detected by several towers in South Carolina.
- In April, he started heading north and was detected through South Carolina again before arriving on his breeding grounds near the Bald Head Island motus tower.



- An immature female Painted Bunting tagged in late August on Masonboro Island headed south in October where she was detected by towers in South Carolina and Georgia.
- In April, she started heading north and was detected by 3 towers in South Carolina before being detected again by the Masonboro tower.
- Welcome back!

