

2018 Scientific Sub-Committee

Oceano Dunes SVRA

November 30, 2018

On November 15, 2018, Oceano Dunes SVRA staff provided the members of the Scientific Sub-Committee a copy of the 2018 Oceano Dunes SVRA Snowy Plover and Least Tern Annual Report and requested e-mailed comments by November 29, 2018.

This report was provided to:

Lena Chang, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Dan Robinette, Point Blue Conservation Science
Laurie Koteen, California Coastal Commission
Robert Patton, Snowy Plover and Least Tern Expert, and
Bob Stafford, California Department of Fish and Wildlife

A copy was also sent to

Doug George, Point Blue Conservation Science
Elizabeth Copper, former member of the Scientific Sub-Committee, and
Paula Hartman, MIG Inc.

Comments Received

Two e-mailed comments were received, one from Laurie Koteen and one from Robert Patton. The responses plus the original November 15 e-mail are provided in the Attachments. Please note that Laurie Koteen provided a PDF of the annual report with comments embedded into the document. Those comments were extracted into a summary document that is attached to the report. The digital version of the 2018 report with Laurie Koteen's comments is available upon request.

Some of the comments suggest edits to the report. Those comments will not be addressed further in this 2018 Scientific Sub-Committee report but will be reviewed and considered for inclusion in either a revised 2018 Snowy Plover and Least Tern Annual Report, a supplement to the 2018 report, or in future versions of the report.

Responses are provided below to those comments that can be quickly addressed in this Scientific Sub-Committee report. Additional detail may be provided in subsequent Snowy Plover and Least Tern Annual reports, as described above.

The text of the comments are as follows:

Laurie Koteen

General Comments from e-mail

I have several comments are throughout the body of this report. Please look within to find them. I'm concerned about the very high loss rates of birds in the riding areas and as a result of predation.

Thanks,

Laurie

State Parks Response – We appreciate your concern about predation and the loss of birds in the riding area. See responses below on specific issues.

Report Specific Comments

Note, all page numbers refer to the PDF document. Clarifications are noted in [brackets]

Comment 1, Page 17 - Are there measures in place to make sure that the dumpsters do not overflow, are latched and trash in the vicinity removed if found, in addition to counting gulls?

How about signage to encourage and educate the public about the dangers of leaving food about, the necessity to store and remove unused food?

State Parks Response – The Department implements a trash control and removal program throughout the park with special attention paid to the Post 2 area. The trash dumpsters are regularly inspected and, if needed, heavy equipment is used to compact the trash to reduce overflow. Interpretive information about trash and the need to control trash is provided to the public through educational campaigns; signage at key locations like restrooms and entrance stations; on the internet; and through social media campaigns. The Department has developed a campaign focused on proper handling of trash that includes giving out free trashbags with targeted marketing information (tagline, “Don’t Leave Me Behind”).

Comment 2, Page 20 - Aren't these invertebrate populations important as food sources for birds??

Would it not be better to make the enclosure permanent?

State Parks Response – It is correct that beach invertebrates are an important food source for western snowy plover. ODSVRA has developed and successfully implemented management activities to recover those invertebrate populations during the nesting season. There is no need to make the enclosure permanent for invertebrate food resources. See also previous Scientific Sub-Committee discussions on a year-round closure study.

Comment 3, Page 22 - Is there a way to verify that some of these adult birds at VAFB [Vandenberg Air Force Base] and RGDCP [Rancho Guadalupe Dunes County Park] are from ODSVRA? Variability is to be expected in population size inter-annually, however, this is the lowest number of breeding pairs in 7 years.

State Parks Response – The low number of breeding least terns is likely related to the predator pressure during the 2017 season. During the 2017 season, we had a substantial issue with skunk predation on near-hatch or recently hatched least tern nests. It is likely that some of the birds that breed at ODSVRA moved to adjacent sites as a result of this predation event. We are optimistic that with continued management and monitoring, the least tern breeding numbers will increase at ODSVRA.

Additional Clarification from Doug George at Point Blue Conservation Science. We have not received information from Rancho Guadalupe on banded birds from 2018. Based on their survey methods (nest searches by foot) it is unlikely that they would note banded birds. Vandenberg used nest cameras on a portion of the nests from 2018 and may have captured band information. They will look through the photos during the non-breeding season and will share information on banded birds. Doug notes that the sampling size and efficiency of the cameras to identify a banded adult will be limited.

Comment 4, Page 22 - Why was productivity for terns so low in 2017? What specific changes have been instituted to reduce predation after last year, that is the primary cause of mortality was predation, as is implied here

State Parks Response – See response to Comment 3. Additionally, we have focused our predator control efforts and closely monitored skunk activity during the early part of the 2018 nesting season.

Comment 5, Page 24 - Were any nests found outside of the enclosures? If yes, where were they and which management steps were taken to either relocate them or protect them at the locations where they were found? [Specific to Least Tern Section]

State Parks Response – All least tern and snowy plover nests were within the seasonal enclosure or at South Oso Flaco. No nests of either species were initiated in the riding area during the 2018 nesting season.

Comment 6, Page 28 - Can any more be said about the age structure of the adult terns at ODSVRA?

State Parks Response – We have not conducted analysis on the age structure on the banded least tern population at ODSVRA. Please refer to Table D.1 in Appendix D for additional information on age and observation of banded least tern at the site. See also the response to Comment 3 with clarifying information from Point Blue Conservation Science.

Comment 7, Page 31 - There has been a healthy increase in adult plovers over this time period. What factors likely explain the failure for the adult population to grow over the last 5 years, following so much population growth in the past?

State Parks Response – The growth in any population will be finite based on the available habitat and other conditions like disturbance, winter survival, predation, disease and other stochastic events. Our plover population may be limited by any of these factors. However, even with this uncertainty, we are meeting or exceeding our breeding recovery targets for snowy plover at ODSVRA.

Comment 8, Page 34 - What about the riding areas? Are there nest attempts outside the exclosures and Oso Flaco?

State Parks Response – See response to Comment 5. No plover or tern nests were located within the riding area during the 2018 season.

Comment 9, Page 39 - From Appendix H, it appears that 8 plovers and terns were lost in open riding areas due to being flattened by OHVs. This is a staggering number. This information should be in the body of the report, not buried at the end in a final appendix.

What specific steps is the park taking to ensure that plovers are not killed by OHVs? Are there speed limits in the park, for example? If yes, how are these enforced?

State Parks Response – The information on the number of all observed mortality is covered in the main text of the report, starting on Page 52 – 60 of the report (58-65 of the PDF). We have a program of education, enforcement, physical habitat protection, and intensive monitoring that is designed to provide protection to nesting and roosting birds within the SVRA. Speed limits are a part of that comprehensive effort and are enforced by law enforcement personnel.

Comment 10, Page 45 - This is a lot of nests lost to predation! [re 29 plover nests lost to predation]

State Parks Response – It is not unusual to lose nests to predation at a managed site like ODSVRA. Most of these losses occurred in the early part of our season when we had skunk and raven activity at the site. From 2013 – 2018, nests lost to predation have ranged from 1.2 – 14.5%. Even with the relatively high number of nests lost to predation in 2018, our hatch rate was 72%. Most sites within the state have nest hatch rates that are at or below 50%.

Comment 11, Page 50 - This is a very high number. Specific measures must be developed to target specific predators. Obviously, species such as the peregrine falcons should not be removed, but for species that are not raptors or special status species, more should be done to prevent predation. [re gull predation of plover chicks and young fledges]

State Parks Response – ODSVRA implements a relatively aggressive predator control program that is targeted to specific predators. We are open to additional suggestions to prevent predation.

Comment 12, Page 54 - Restoring natural ecological processes is always preferable to manually placing rack in the location of plovers. The park should study the effect of leaving the plover exclosure in place all year on invertebrate abundance and diversity. This will also provide a refuge for overwintering birds.

State Parks Response – State Parks has demonstrated strong results as a result of the monitoring and management program for snowy plover and least tern. See also previous Scientific Sub-Committee discussions on a year-round closure study. See also response to comment 2.

Comment 13, Page 55 - Its not clear why its so difficult to find a dumpster cover design.

Please pursue this goal vigorously and definitively. Gulls are obviously a major source of predation to plovers.

State Parks Response – State Parks continues to pursue options to cover the trash dumpsters. We continue to look for methods that meet our operational needs and work with the other constraints at our park.

Comment 14, Page 56 - Would any changes in the materials used be beneficial to plovers or terns? [re enclosure fencing]

State Parks Response –The fence materials meet our requirements for price, availability, and ease of installation. We are interested in suggestions for new materials and regularly consult with other sites on suitable materials.

Comment 15, Page 57 - What about threats from vehicles in riding areas? Will there be sign posting to reduce speed limits. [increasing public awareness]

State Parks Response – See also response to comment 9. We have a program to educate the public about the plover and tern management program and specific rules and enforcement efforts focused on speed limits.

Comment 16, Page 58 - If there is not enough food in the enclosure area, perhaps the size of the enclosure needs to be increased. This could explain the failure of the population of the park to grow over the last 5 years. Alternatively, keeping the enclosure in place year-round could increase the food supply naturally. This may also reduce fighting among broods.

State Parks Response – State Parks recognizes the challenges with fighting among broods and brood density on the shoreline. However, we are meeting or exceeding our recovery goals with the enclosure in its current configuration and without a year-round closure. See also previous Scientific Sub-Committee discussions on a year-round closure study.

Comment 17, Page 58 - If marker post 6 is a particular problem, the enclosure should be expanded in its vicinity. [re brood aggression at 6 shoreline]

State Parks Response – See response to comment 16

Comment 18, Page 139 - What is the assumed cause of death? [re Post 7 plover found at fenceline on 2-28]

State Parks Response – The assumed cause of death for the plover found on February 28 near the post 7 fence line is fence strike.

Robert Patton

Another excellent report.

Comment 1 – Sorry to see your tern numbers down, but congratulations on your hatching and fledging success. At least it appears that part of the decrease resulted from adults simply shifting to Guadalupe or VAFB, so with your continued productivity hopefully the colony will increase again in the future (thankfully not as dismal as some of our sites to the south...).

State Parks Response – We note that the low least tern breeding numbers at our site are probably a result of the high level of predation of near-hatch or newly hatched nests from the 2017 season. Some of the birds noted in 2018 at Vandenberg and the Rancho Guadalupe County park could have been breeders from ODSVRA from 2017. We are hopeful that with continued monitoring and management, our breeding least tern numbers will increase.

Comment 2 – With that problem banded male peregrine returning and continuing to inflict plover losses, wondered if there'd been any discussion of attempting to trap and relocate it farther prior to next season?

State Parks Response – We have started discussion with other experts and the wildlife agencies to determine the best approach to this problem individual. Some of the options we are exploring include increasing the release distance, holding the bird in captivity longer, and other options. We are open to other suggestions and approaches that can help us effectively address known problem predators. We appreciate your suggestion.

No other comments or questions. Thanks again for all the great work you do!

Robert

Recommendations from 2015, 2016 and 2017 Scientific Sub-Committee Report Not Implemented:

Note, numbering refers back to the 2014 SSC report

9. Continue to look for an appropriate design to cover trash dumpsters

11. Conduct study evaluating alternative plover/tern habitat treatment strategies – Ongoing SSC recommendation

12. Consider option to capture previously banded adult least terns to determine their origin – Ongoing SSC recommendation

2018 Response to Past Recommendations

No Action was taken on Recommendation #'s 9, 11 and 12

The Department may pursue a trash enclosure through the Public Works Plan process that is underway with various stakeholder groups. We are also examining other operational measures that can help contain trash generated within the park. There are no firm details on these changes at this point.

Recommendations from Predator Management Reports

USDA Wildlife Services:

1. WS encourages educating the public about the importance of not feeding wildlife in an effort to reduce predator attraction.
2. WS also recommends that all garbage containers have reinforced lids to prevent garbage consumption by wildlife.
3. WS recommends the state park continue maintaining the height and strength of the perimeter fence surrounding the enclosures during the nesting season. Maintenance of fencing where sand has shifted to create low spots or places where mammalian predators can breach should continue to be conducted on a regular basis to prevent predators from entering enclosures while fencing is constructed during the season.
4. WS recommends the state park continue to enforce the leash law for pets on the beach, which is crucial during nesting season.
5. WS recommends the state park continue removing animal carcasses from the beach to eliminate alternate food sources that serve as an attractant to scavenging predators such as coyotes.
6. WS recommends the selective removal of predators that are a potential or known threat to the CLTE and SNPL breeding population at ODSVRA. Removal of concerning predators prior to predation events should be the goal to protect CLTE and SNPL nesting and brooding areas.

Bloom Biological:

No specific recommendations provided

Response to Predator Control Recommendations

Oceano Dunes SVRA will implement recommendations as staffing and funding permit. Most of these recommendations have been successfully implemented in previous years.

Attachments

Full e-mail Text from Laurie Koteen dated November 29, 2018

Summary of Comments from Laurie Koteen extracted from PDF of Report

Full e-mail Text from Robert Patton dated November 29, 2018

2018 Scientific Sub-Committee Report

Page 8 of 8

From: Koteen.Laurie@Coastal
To: Glick.Ronnie@Parks
Cc: Kahn.Kevin@Coastal
Subject: RE: Oceano Dunes SVRA Scientific Sub-Committee
Date: Thursday, November 29, 2018 5:34:09 PM

Hi Ronnie,

I have several comments are throughout the body of this report. Please look within to find them. I'm concerned about the very high loss rates of birds in the riding areas and as a result of predation.

Thanks,

Laurie

From: Glick, Ronnie@Parks [mailto:Ronnie.Glick@parks.ca.gov]
Sent: Wednesday, November 28, 2018 3:42 PM
To: Elizabeth Copper; Robert Patton; Dan Robinette; Paula Hartman; lena_chang@fws.gov; Stafford, Bob@Wildlife; Doug George 3 (dgeorge77@gmail.com); Koteen, Laurie@Coastal
Cc: Iwanicha, Joanna@Parks
Subject: RE: Oceano Dunes SVRA Scientific Sub-Committee

Just a friendly reminder that we are expecting comments on the 2018 Snowy Plover and Least Tern report back from the Scientific Sub-Committee members back tomorrow, Thursday, November 29.

Please let me know if you will be submitting comments.

Thanks.

Ronnie

From: Glick, Ronnie@Parks
Sent: Thursday, October 25, 2018 5:36 PM
To: 'Elizabeth Copper' <ecopper@san.rr.com>; 'Robert Patton' <rpatton@san.rr.com>; 'Dan Robinette' <d robinette@prbo.org>; 'Paula Hartman' <Hartman@traenviro.com>; 'lena_chang@fws.gov' <lena_chang@fws.gov>; Stafford, Bob@Wildlife <Bob.Stafford@wildlife.ca.gov>; 'Doug George 3' (dgeorge77@gmail.com)' <dgeorge77@gmail.com>; Koteen, Laurie@Coastal <Laurie.Koteen@coastal.ca.gov>
Cc: Iwanicha, Joanna@Parks <Joanna.Iwanicha@parks.ca.gov>
Subject: Oceano Dunes SVRA Scientific Sub-Committee

Members of the Scientific Sub-Committee,

It is that time of year again and I wanted to give you a heads up about the process we are using this year. We anticipate having our annual snowy plover and

least tern report complete in the early to mid part of November. As we have done in previous years, we are not going to have a phone discussion about the report, but we will accept comments from the SSC members by e-mail and compile them into a final report to the Technical Review Team.

Right now this is our tentative schedule.

- The final plover and tern report will be available no later than November 16. I am asking for e-mailed comments back to me by November 29
- I will compile the comments into a report and send out prior to December 5 and ask for your concurrence by December 7.
- The final 2018 SSC report will be provided to the Technical Review Team by December 10

Hopefully this schedule will work for you.

Thanks for your continued support of our efforts.

Ronnie

Laurie Koteen Comments on Snowy Plover and Least Tern Report

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Cc: [Iwanicha, Joanna@Parks](mailto:Iwanicha_Joanna@Parks)
Subject: RE: Oceano Dunes SVRA Scientific Sub-Committee
Date: Thursday, November 29, 2018 10:32:13 AM

Thanks Ronnie, Joanna, Doug, et al,

Another excellent report.

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Cc: Iwanicha, Joanna@Parks <Joanna.Iwanicha@parks.ca.gov>

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