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THE ORIOLE

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# Introduction

The diverse habitats of the South Atlantic and Gulf coastal regions, including various forest and shrub types and fresh- and saltwater marshes, provide valuable resources for many avian species (Johnson et al. 1974, Bellis and Keough 1995). Maritime forests, shrublands and marsh hammocks (i.e., raised topographic features in salt marshes) along these coasts are particularly important habitats for songbirds, especially Neotropical migrants moving to and from their breeding and wintering sites (Cohrs and Cohrs 1994, Moore et al. 1995, Hunter et al. 2001, Brittain et al. 2010). Migratory species tend to utilize a series of "islands" of stopover habitats, including forests and shrublands, for shelter and "refueling" during their travels (Able 1999, Moore and Aborn 2000). In fact, marsh hammocks may be critical stopover habitat for migrants (Cox 1988, Cohrs and Cohrs 1994, Somershoe and Chandler 2004). Studies of Georgia and South Carolina marsh hammocks in winter and spring documented >110 avian species and suggested that species richness was associated with hammock size (Fabrizio and Calvi 2003, Whitaker et al. 2004).

vol. 77 • 3-4

Broad-leaf maritime forests are typically dominated by Live Oaks (*Quercus virginiana*), whereas maritime shrublands are dominated by thickets of Saw Palmetto (*Serenoa repens*), Yaupon Holly (*Ilex vomitoria*), and/or Wax Myrtle (*Morella cerifera*). These habitats range in size from contiguous stands on the mainland and barrier/sea islands covering dozens or hundreds of hectares to smaller patches on marsh islands and hammocks covering just a few hectares. Permanent and summer resident bird species of regional concern occurring in these forest and shrub habitats include the Common Ground-Dove (*Columbina passerina*) and Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*), respectively (Hunter et al. 2001, Atlantic Coast Joint Venture and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2008).

Relatively few recent avian studies have been conducted in maritime habitats in the South Atlantic region. Brittain et al. (2010) documented 55 species during 2 breeding season surveys on Sapelo Island, Georgia, and found several species/habitat relationships for species of concern. These relationships, which suggest the importance of maritime forest and shrub habitats in combination with adjacent habitats (e.g., salt marsh) to specific avifauna (e.g., Painted Bunting), were later confirmed by stable isotope analyses of feathers of Georgia coastal birds (Brittain et al. 2012). Additionally, Springborn and Meyers (2005) documented the importance of a diversity of coastal habitats, including maritime forest, shrub and saltmarsh, to the conservation of the declining Painted Bunting (Springborn and Meyers 2005). These important avian habitats are at risk, primarily due to both development and sea level rise (SLR) (Brittain and Craft 2012). Development is the principal factor in the acreage decline of coastal hardwood/maritime forest habitats, whereas SLR poses the greatest risk to the loss of maritime shrub habitats.

The avifauna of the mainland component of Kings Bay Navy Submarine Base (NSB), within the South Atlantic coastal region, has been previously documented during multiple surveying efforts. Kepler and Sykes (1996) employed point counts in spring to document the occurrence of 38 and 47 species on NSB in maritime forest and shrub habitats, respectively. Using the same methodology in spring, Burst and Fleming (2005) documented 29 and 45 species in the same habitat types, respectively, in 2004-2005. Also, Forsythe (2005) censused winter birds along established routes on the facility in 2004 and 2005, recording 31 and 27 species in maritime forest and maritime shrub habitats, respectively.

In 2010, we initiated a 2-year project to document winter and spring avifauna utilizing the maritime forest and shrub habitats of NSB, with emphasis on recording occurrences and observation rates of species of concern and/or listed species. Additionally, we examined species occurrence relative to the "form" (i.e., mainland versus island) of these 2 habitat types.

#### Methods

## Study Area

The NSB is located in Camden County, Georgia, within the South Atlantic Coastal Plain. The installation comprises approximately 6475 ha, including a variety of habitats ranging from urban/developed areas to pine plantation to maritime forest (Live Oak)/shrublands to salt marsh/open water. Thus, the base provides habitat for a variety of avifauna, including resident and migrant species of concern. Approximately 768 ha of maritime forest habitat exist on the NSB, with 737 ha on the mainland component of the base, and 31 ha associated with marsh hammocks and Drum Point Island. Approximately 465 ha of maritime shrub habitat also exist on the NSB, with 252 ha on the mainland component of the base, and 213 ha associated with the Crab Island dredge containment site. Drum Point Island (22.6 ha), Crab Island, and the 4 surveyed marsh hammocks (5.1, 2.4, 0.7, and 0.3 ha) are surrounded by salt marsh and some open water habitats.

#### Surveys

Maritime forest and shrub habitats were surveyed generally utilizing the methods, mainland survey routes, and point locations employed in the Forsyth (2005) and Burst and Fleming (2005) studies. Winter surveys consisted of multiple timed, meandering surveys during November-February. The mainland components of both maritime habitat types were surveyed 4 times (2010/2011). There were 2 winter surveys of Crab Island (2010/2011; maritime shrub) and 3 winter surveys of Drum Point Island and the 2 largest marsh hammocks (2011/2012; maritime forests). The 2 smallest hammocks were only surveyed twice. One individual (CD) made all observations. These surveys documented species occurrence and species/birds observed per hour for each habitat type.

Spring surveys consisted of point counts generally following the methods of Hamel et al. (1996), tallying all birds observed or heard for a 10-minute period regardless of distance, including flyovers, in May-June. All point locations were spaced >250 m apart and a single count at each point occurred between 30 minutes prior to sunrise to 3 hrs post-sunrise. There were 28 total established

vol. 77 . 3-4

points within maritime forest habitat, including 10 total points on the island component (i.e., 4 points on Drum Point Island and 6 total points on the 4 marsh hammocks, including 2 each on the 2 larger hammocks). There were 26 total count points in maritime shrub habitat, including 6 on Crab Island. One individual (CD) made all observations, documenting species occurrence and average species/birds observed per point.

Avian species abundance data for both (winter and spring) seasonal surveys were examined relative to the 2 principal habitat types: maritime forest and maritime shrub. In addition, given the contrast in surveyed habitat types relative to adjoining habitat types (i.e., upland versus salt marsh/open water), we further examined avifauna in island/hammock habitat types (maritime oak and shrubland) relative to similar mainland habitat types. We arbitrarily defined "common" or more abundant species as those averaging >5 individuals per hour (ind/hr) for winter surveys and >1 individual per point (ind/point) for spring point counts. Scientific names of all observed avifauna are listed in Tables 2 and 3.

# Species of Concern

Although all species detected per the methodology above were recorded, special consideration was given to those species listed as "Highest" and "High" priority in the South Atlantic Migratory Bird Initiative Conservation Plan (SAMBI) (Atlantic Coast Joint Venture and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2008) and/or listed as "Extremely High" and "High" priority species for the South Atlantic Region by Partners in Flight (PIF) (Hunter et al. 2001).

## Results

Overall, 117 avian species were observed in the 2 maritime habitats during the study, including 31 species of concern (Tables 1-3). Surveys in maritime forest habitats documented 69 avian species during winter and 47 species during spring, including 12 and 10 species of concern, respectively. Surveys in maritime shrub habitats documented 60 avian species during winter and 61 species during spring, including 11 and 17 species of concern, respectively. For maritime forest habitats, our surveys suggested that overall species abundance was greater during the winter than spring for both habitat forms (i.e., mainland and island), with an especially pronounced difference in abundance of bird species suggested between seasons in island forests (Table 1). For maritime shrub habitats, overall seasonal bird species abundance was relatively equal, although spring abundance was greater for the mainland shrublands and winter abundance was greater for the island shrublands (Table 1). The most common winter species recorded included Yellow-rumped Warbler, American Robin, Northern Cardinal, and Savannah Sparrow, whereas Northern Cardinal, Carolina Wren, and White Ibis were most common in spring surveys.

The most common winter species recorded in both habitat types and forms were Yellow-rumped Warblers, whose observations ranged from 10-30 ind/hr, and American Robins, whose observations ranged from 4-45 ind/hr among all habitat types and forms except island maritime shrub, where they were not seen. Other common (>5 ind/hr) species in winter mainland maritime forest habitats were Turkey Vulture, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Tufted Titmouse, and Red-bellied Woodpecker. Species common to both mainland and island maritime shrublands in winter were Savannah Sparrow and Mourning Dove.

The most common species recorded in spring among all habitat types and forms were Northern Cardinal, averaging >1 ind/point, and Carolina Wren, averaging 1.28 ind/point in forests and 0.6 ind/point in shrub habitat. Common, habitat-specific spring species included Bobolink (2.8 ind/point) and Northern Parula (1.28 ind/point), which were found in mainland maritime forests, and White Ibis (>2 ind/point), which was found in maritime shrub habitats.

The 31 species of concern observed included resident, spring resident (breeding season), and migrants; several exhibited habitat-related and/or seasonal trends in occurrence (Table 2). Wood Stork and Eastern Towhee were observed during both seasonal (winter and spring) surveys in all maritime habitats and forms. Northern Parula was also observed during both seasonal surveys, but primarily in mainland and island maritime forest habitats during the spring. Common Ground-Dove and Loggerhead Shrike were observed during winter and spring in maritime shrub habitats, although the ground-doves were more prevalent on the islands and shrikes were more prevalent on the mainland. Painted Bunting was observed in maritime shrub habitats during spring, as was Willet and several wading bird species of concern (e.g., Snowy Egret, Tricolored Heron). Species of concern observed only during winter surveys included American Kestrel in shrub habitat and several non-resident sparrows, such as Vesper Sparrow, in or adjacent to maritime forest or shrub habitats (Table 2).

Observation rates for the more common species of concern were highly variable among habitats and seasons, although none averaged >5 ind/hr during winter surveys, and only 6 species exceeded 1 ind/hr in winter (Table 2). For the

spring surveys, White Ibis was common (>1 ind/point) in mainland maritime forest and both maritime shrub forms. Common Ground-Dove, Eastern Towhee, and Painted Bunting were also common in island maritime shrub habitats, and Northern Parula was common within mainland maritime forest habitat.

#### Discussion

The NSB offers multiple diverse and apparently resource-abundant habitats for winter resident, spring resident (breeding season), and migratory avifauna. Overall species abundance observed here was somewhat similar to that reported from other South Atlantic coastal habitats (Fabrizio and Calvi 2003, Whitaker et al. 2004, Brittain et al. 2010), as well as to earlier surveys of NSB (Kepler and Sykes 1996, Burst and Fleming 2005, Forsythe 2005). As in previous studies, occurrence of all avian species, including species of concern, varied both by habitat type (maritime forest vs. shrub), habitat form (mainland vs. island), and season (winter vs. spring). For example, the increased species abundance observed in the spring maritime shrub surveys was largely due to sightings of wading bird and other waterbird species of concern that breed locally on NSB. However, detailed comparisons to other studies are problematic due to differences in methodology and effort.

There are important considerations regarding species abundance recorded at NSB in this study relative to habitats, habitat forms, and seasonality. Concerning habitat form (mainland vs. island), the mainland survey areas were generally embedded in relatively large areas of maritime forest or shrub habitat, and thus the bird species encountered were likely to be traditionally associated with one of these specific habitat types. In contrast, the survey areas on the islands were various-sized (often small) patches of habitat types generally surrounded by salt marsh habitat and/or open water (e.g., Crab and Drum Point Islands); thus, several of the observed species may have been be more typically associated with edge or salt marsh/open water habitats than with maritime forest/shrub habitats found on islands. For example, several marsh-associated species such as Marsh Wren, Seaside Sparrow, Nelson's Sparrow, and Saltmarsh Sparrow were documented in maritime forests and shrublands on islands. Similarly, White Ibis, which utilizes salt marshes as foraging habitat, was documented as a prevalent species in both maritime habitats simply because it was observed in large flocks flying to marshes during the surveys.

We also note that the mainland habitat surveys in this study were more rigorous than island habitat surveys relative to the total number of winter surveys (4 for the mainland vs. 2-3 per island, respectively) and total number of survey points (38 points for the mainland vs. 16 for islands). Additionally, survey methodology varied seasonally (spring point counts vs. winter meandering walks). These differences in survey effort may have resulted in more and/ or different species recorded. Concerning seasonal trends, the timing of the surveys was such that the varied arrival/departure times of certain migrants (e.g., Bobolink) resulted in high counts for these species during the spring surveys -- a period typically associated with summer resident/breeding birds. Similarly, Northern Parula was occasionally observed in late winter surveys, suggesting a year-round residence, when it likely was just returning to the region.

#### Conclusion

Bird species found on the NSB benefit from both diverse and rare habitats, as well as from the juxtaposition of these habitats within the regional landscape. Among the 31 documented species of concern were 5 of the region's most atrisk species of concern: Wood Stork (federally endangered species), Painted Bunting, Loggerhead Shrike, Common Ground-Dove and Saltmarsh Sparrow. Whereas Wood Stork (and other wading bird species of concern) breeds locally and utilizes local fresh- and saltwater marshes, Painted Bunting and Common Ground-Dove, as well as Northern Parula and Eastern Towhee, are habitatspecialists that typify the avifauna that utilize maritime forest and shrub habitats within this region and benefit from conservation of these habitats.

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Table 1. Avian species abundance observed in maritime forest and maritime shrub habitats on Kings Bay Navy Submarine Base during winter and spring surveys, 2010-2012.

Habitat type	Habitat location	Season	Species	SOC
Maritime forest	Combined <sup>2</sup>	Winter	69	12
		Spring	47	10
	Mainland	Winter	49	6
		Spring	37	8
	Island/hammock	Winter	57	8
		Spring	33	6
Maritime shrub	Combined <sup>2</sup>	Winter	61	11
		Spring	60	17
	Mainland	Winter	50	6
		Spring	57	16
	Crab Island	Winter	34	8
		Spring	21	9
Combined habitats <sup>3</sup>		Winter	88	19
		Spring	70	19

Species of Concern based on the South Atlantic Migratory Bird Initiative Conservation Plan and the Partners in Flight protocol.

<sup>2</sup>Includes data for both mainland and island habitats.

<sup>3</sup>Data for maritime forest and maritime scrub habitats combined.

			Maritim	he forest			Maritin	ne shrub		/•
		Wir	iter	Spri	ng	Win	ter	Spri	ng	3-4
		Mainland	Island <sup>2</sup>	Mainland	Island <sup>2</sup>	Mainland	Island <sup>3</sup>	Mainland	Island <sup>3</sup>	
Species of concern	Effort <sup>1</sup> :	3.35 hrs	10.40 hrs	18 points	8 points	5.10 hrs	6.00 hrs	20 points	6 points	
Brown Pelican (Pelecanus occidentali	is)	•	0.1							-
Snowy Egret (Egreta thula)		•			•	,	,	0.25	0.33	
Tricolored Heron (Egretta tricolor)			,		•			09.0	0.67	
Little Blue Heron (Egretta caerula)			,		,	0.20	•	0.25	0.50	7
Black-crowned Night-Heron (Nycticorax nycticorax)		0.30							•	THE O
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (Nyctanassa violacea)					•		ı.	0.10		RIOL
White ibis (Eudocimus albus)		0.30		0.06	1.30		•	12.95	2.67	E
Wood Stork (Mycteria americana)		•	0.19	0.28	0.10	0.20		0.15		
Northern Harrier (Circus cyaneus)					•		0.33	•		
American Kestrel (Falco sparverius)						1.37	0.50	•	•	
Northern Bobwhite (Colinus virginian	(sur			0.11				•		
Common Moorhen (Gallinula chlorop	(sno	0.30	1	0.06		•		•	,	
American Oystercatcher (Haematopus palliatus)			i		•		•	•	0.17	

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0.67 1.33

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Common Ground-dove (Columbina passerina)

Willet (Tringa semipalmata)

vol. 77 •					LE	ORIO	HE	T							_	78
s observed				,	,	-	4		1.17	1.00				а.		
of individual			•	•				0.10	0.80	0.25	0.20	0.25	•	0.05	0.30	0.10
ge number o		1.00	•		!	0.17	0.17	0.10	0.33			0.17			•	•
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servation ra	a.							0.60	0.40	0.60	0.10	•				
ur; spring of					1	÷	•	1.28	,	0.11		•	,	,	0.17	0.06
erved per ho		,	1.06	1.15	0.19			0.1	0.29	4						
ividuals obse				,		-	•	0.60	06.0				0.10		÷	,
Winter observation rates = average number of indi- er count point.	White-throated Sparrow (Zonotrichia atricapilla)	Vesper Sparrow (Pooecetes gramineus)	Seaside Sparrow (Ammodramus maritimus)	Saltmarsh Sparrow (Ammodramus caudacutus)	Nelson's Sparrow (Ammodramus nelsoni)	Grasshopper Sparrow (Ammodramus savannarum)	Le Conte's Sparrow (Ammodramus leconteii)	Northern Parula (Setophaga americana)	Eastern Towhee (Pipilo erythrophthalmus)	Painted Bunting (Passerina ciris)	Brown Thrasher (Toxostoma rufum)	Loggerhead Shrike (Lanius ludovicianus)	Northern Flicker (Colaptes auratus)	Red-headed Woodpecker (Melanerpes erythrocephalus)	Chimney Swift (Chaetura pelagica)	Yellow-billed Cuckoo (Coccyzus americanus)

Table 2 continued

per count point. <sup>21</sup>sland maritime forest habitat was located on marsh hammocks and Drum Point Island. <sup>31</sup>sland maritime shrub habitat was located on Crab Island dredge spoil containment area.

Table 3. List of non-species of concern bi maritime forest and maritime shrub hab 2012.	irds observed during winter and spring surveys of itats on Kings Bay Navy Submarine Base, 2010-
	Species
Anhinga (Anhinga anhinga)	Carolina Chickadee (Poecile carolinensis)
Double-crested Cormorant (Phalacrocorax auritus)	Carolina Wren (Thyrothorus ludovicianus)
Great Blue Heron (Ardea herodias)	House Wren (Troglodytes aedon)
Great Egret (Ardea alba)	Sedge Wren (Cistothorus platensis)
Green Heron (Butorides virescens)	Marsh Wren (Cistothorus palustris)

Bufflehead (Bucephala albeola)

Turkey Vulture (Cathartes aura)

Black Vulture (Coragyps atratus)

Red-shouldered Hawk (Buteo lineatus) Red-tailed Hawk (Buteo jamaicensis) Bald Eagle (Haliaeetus leucocephalus) Cooper's Hawk (Accipiter cooperii)

Peregrine Falcon (Falco peregrinus)

Osprey (Pandion haliaetus)

Greater Yellowlegs (Tringa melanoleuca)

Wild Turkey (Meleagris gallopavo)

American Coot (Fulica americana)

Clapper Rail (Rallus longirostris)

Killdeer (Charadrius vociferus) Common Snipe (Gallinago gallinago) Black-bellied Plover (Pluvialis squatarola)

Ring-billed Gull (Larus delawarensis)

Laughing Gull (Larus atricilla) Mourning Dove (Zenaida macroura) Species Carolina Chickadee (Poecile carolinensis) Carolina Wren (Thyrothorus ludovicianus) House Wren (Troglodytes aedon) Sedge Wren (Cistothorus platensis) Marsh Wren (Cistothorus palustris) Golden-crowned Kinglet (Regulus satrapa) Ruby-crowned Kinglet (Regulus calendula) Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (Polioptila caerulea) Eastern Bluebird (Sialia sialis) American Robin (Turdus migratorius) Hermit Thrush (Catharus guttatus) Gray Catbird (Dumetella carolinensis) Northern Mockingbird (Mimus polyglottos) Cedar Waxwing (Bombycilla cedrorum) European Starling (Sturnus vulgaris) Orange-crowned Warbler (Oreothlypis celata) Yellow-rumped Warbler (Setophaga coronata) Black-throated Blue Warbler (Setophaga caerulescens) Palm Warbler (Setophaga palmarum) Pine Warbler (Setophaga pinus Blackpoll Warbler (Dendroica striata) Yellow-throated Warbler (Dendroica dominica)

> Black-and-white Warbler (Mniotilta varia) American Redstart (Setophaga ruticilla)

vol. 77 . 3-4

THE ORIOLE

# THE ORIOLE

vol. 77 . 3-4

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#### Table 3 continued.

Rock Pigeon (Columba livia)

Great Horned Owl (Bubo virginianus)

Belted Kingfisher (Megaceryle alcyon) Red-bellied Woodpecker (Melanerpes carolinus)

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (Sphyrapicus varius)

Downy Woodpecker (Picoides pubescens) Pileated Woodpecker (Dryocopus pileatus) Great Crested Flycatcher (Myiarchus crinitus)

Eastern Phoebe (Savornis phoebe)

Red-eyed Vireo (Vireo olivaceus) White-eyed Vireo (Vireo griseus) Blue-headed Vireo (Vireo solitarius) Yellow-throated Vireo (Vireo flavifrons)

Blue Jay (Cyanocitta cristata)

American Crow (Corvus brachyrhynchos) Fish Crow (Corvus ossifragus) Tree Swallow (Tachycineta bicolor) Barn Swallow (Hirundo rustica) Tufted Titmouse (Baeolophus bicolor)

Ovenbird (Seiurus aurocapilla) Common Yellowthroat (Geothlypis trichas)

Yellow-breasted Chat (Icteria virens)

Summer Tanager (Piranga rubra)

Northern Cardinal (Cardinalis cardinalis)

Blue Grosbeak (Passerina caerulea) Chipping Sparrow (Spizella passerina) Savannah Sparrow (Passerculus sandwichensis) White-crowned Sparrow (Zonotrichia leucophrys) Song Sparrow (Melospiza melodia) Swamp Sparrow (Melospiza georgiana) Bobolink (Dolichonyx oryzivorus) Brown-headed Cowbird (Molothrus ater) Red-winged Blackbird (Agelaius phoeniceus) Common Grackle (Quiscalus quiscula) Boat-tailed Grackle (Quiscalus major) Orchard Oriole (Icterus spurius)

House Finch (Haemorphous mexicanus) American Goldfinch (Spinus tristis)

# THE ORIOLE

Journal of the Georgia Ornithological Society

Volume 77	2012	Numbers 3-4

# CONTENTS

NATHORIAM, RICHARD & "DICK" DARKS
N MEMORIAM: RICHARD A. DICK FARKS
WIFAUNA IN MARITIME FOREST AND SHRUB HABITATS ON NAVY
JUBMARINE BASE KINGS BAY IN SOUTHEASTERN GEORGIA
arry Bryan, Chris Depkin, Paul Schoenfeld, and Susan Wilde
CURRENT STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION OF THE BLACK-BELLIED WHISTLING
DUCK (DENDROCYGNA AUTUMNALIS) IN GEORGIA
Gregory D. Balkcom, Bobby T. Bond, and Todd M. Schneider
JENERAL NOTES
GOS FALL MEETING ABSTRACTS: 2012
FROM THE FIELD: JUNE - JULY 2012
FROM THE FIELD: AUGUST - NOVEMBER 2012