

# International Shorebird Survey

Newsletter March 2021

Volunteer Highlight:  
**Andrew Baksh** in the U.S.



I am known among my peers as the guy who spends way too much time looking at shorebirds. Birds were always in my blood so to speak, as I inherited that from my dad, the late Albert Bacchus, though I didn't pick up that torch until later in life. So where did my love of shorebirds come from? I think back a few years when I went on a "Shorebird for Beginners" walk led by National Park Service (NPS) Ranger Julia Clebsch. The walk was at East Pond of Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge in Queens NYC, and I was totally unprepared, not realizing that sneakers do not cut it on the East Pond. So, there I was on my first shorebird walk stranded on the dried out shoreline while others walked in the muck with waders, fascinated at the sight of shorebirds, and straining to hear Julia explain how to tell the difference between a Least vs Semipalmated Sandpiper. Not a great start, but the seed was planted that day.

The next day, I purchased a pair of waders, returned to the East Pond, and spent the day looking at shorebirds, trying to learn how to ID them using my Sibley's. The more I found the identification of

shorebirds to be difficult the more I was determined to learn. From that day forward, I began spending an exorbitant amount of time in the field looking at shorebirds, learning to identify them, and learning their behaviors. I had no one mentoring or teaching me shorebirds, but my drive to learn kept me going and slowly but surely, I began to get better. My efforts did not go unnoticed. Ranger Clebsch asked me to assist her in leading shorebird walks and, in a few years, I was approached by Tony Luscombe a NPS Biologist who ran the Piping Plover program at Breezy Point Queens NYC about becoming an ISS volunteer for Manomet.

In 2011, I was invited to participate as a leader in the NYC, Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge Annual Shorebird Festival, working with shorebird experts such as Kevin Karlson co-author of the Shorebird Guide. I spent the evening before the festival being a test case for Kevin as he walked through his presentation. After he was finished, Kevin asked me how long I had been observing shorebirds. When I responded "2 years", the look on his face was priceless. The next day Kevin made a point to mention my progress during his presentation. I was embarrassed to be called out, but delighted that someone at his level thought I was doing well in my shorebird studies. His feedback motivated me further.



I have now been an ISS shorebird volunteer for ten years. Being an ISS volunteer includes many challenges besides being able to accurately count and identify large numbers of shorebirds. For example, some of the survey sites require long drives and accessing areas that often require a county resident pass to avoid non-resident fees. A more personal challenge comes from being a person of color out in the field carrying around a spotting scope, camera, and binoculars. For many people, this may be a non-issue, but for me and perhaps others like me, we have the added burden of needing to prove that we are doing scientific work, depending on where the surveys are being conducted. This was especially so after 9/11.



I remember a few years ago leaving the north end of the East Pond at Jamaica Bay and being confronted by members of the NYPD (New York Police Department). Even after explaining that I was on the pond to count birds, I had to wait with officers while they consulted with members of Homeland Security to verify that my NPS research permit was legitimate. It was nerve-racking. I have since advocated for some form of identification from organizations that I volunteer with like NPS, Audubon New York, and Manomet. I was grateful that Lisa Schibley from Manomet responded to my suggestion and put forth my idea to her colleagues. Lisa's was the only response that was serious in considering my ID

proposal, which speaks volumes about the ISS program.

In the meantime, my work with shorebirds continues including contributing to ISS. Documenting shorebird data is critical to the understanding of shorebirds in North America as we continue to monitor population trends and collaborate with the worldwide scientific community on identifying problems and providing solutions. I am grateful to be able to contribute to the great work done by many organizations around the globe in protecting shorebirds and that includes Manomet's ISS.

**ISS is extremely grateful for Andrew's skill and dedication. Read about his birding adventures here. On Twitter (@birdingdude) he's known for sharing tricky Peep IDs. Enjoy some hints for his next one!**

**Breeding Plumage**

**Non Breeding Plumage**



**Semipalmated Sandpiper**

Medium gray with few warm tones, some brown or rust on the back. Bill is often short and stubby. Some bills can be longer and pointed. A generalist: found in mudflats, beaches, pond edges, and wet meadows.

**Least Sandpiper**

Smallest shorebird in the world. Yellow legs can sometimes be obscured with mud. Warmer toned with yellows and browns. Bill always comes to a fine point. Often found feeding in a crouched position. Prefers edges of muddy flats rather than sand.

**Western Sandpiper**

Non-breeding is a very uniform pale gray. Breeding shows bright rust on cap and back. More likely to have light spotting along flanks in breeding plumage. Longest bill, thick at base, with a small drop on the end. Body tends to look chunkier than other peeps. Most coast-loving (flats and beaches) of the three.



# Crowdfunding Success for ISS at experiment.com

**Thank you** to all of the folks who helped make our crowdfunding campaign a great success. Together we were able to raise \$6,140, which will go towards **(1)** three training videos (English, Spanish, and Portuguese), **(2)** a small grants process to help get optics into the hands of our citizen scientists in Central and South America, **(3)** creation of a contributor survey to help us understand how we can make ISS better, and **(4)** improvements to our ISS Mapping Tool. We are so grateful for the 99 donors who contributed. Thanks to you, we received an additional \$1,079 from the Environmental Citizen Science Challenge grant! We're especially grateful for Wader Quest (**Rick & Elis Simpson**) and **Ted Bradford** and daughter **Phoebe**, who made extremely generous contributions to help us reach our goals. Thank you!

Part of the experiment.com process was receiving endorsements from scientists familiar with our project. We wanted to share them here in case our ISS contributors missed them since they really are endorsements of **your hard work**. Thank you!



S. Schulte

## Endorsed by

ISS has been an essential tool in South Carolina to prioritize important habitat for shorebirds. For example, shorebird surveys supported the recent designation of the Cape Romain – Santee Delta WHSRN Site. Online guidelines for surveying and data entry enable people with various commitment and expertise levels to be part of ISS. Shorebird counts not only add valuable trend information, but the surveyors become the grassroots team for onsite shorebird awareness and conservation.



**Felicia Sanders**  
Wildlife Biologist  
SC Dept. of Natural Resources

The Great Plains plays a pivotal role in shorebird conservation. However, a huge piece of the puzzle was missing for many years; having long term operational monitoring programs. Having a program like the ISS is vital in the region as it is important to be able to have data from the interior to be used to guide conservation initiatives. On a local level, data from the International Shorebird Survey is used to monitor the impact of our habitat management for shorebirds along with tracking changes in populations and migration timing.



**Robert Penner**  
Avian Conservation Manager  
The Nature Conservancy

No-one concerned with shorebird conservation, can fail to see the worth of this project. Local people are pivotal in securing a future for shorebirds and by engaging with them through such projects we can hope that communities will value their shorebirds. Wader Quest's focus is on conservation backed up by evidence based science to support and direct conservation work. This citizen science scheme will increase coverage, and the effectiveness of that coverage, by giving local people the knowledge and equipment to do the job.



**Rick and Elis Simpson**  
Founders  
Wader Quest

This project is one of the first citizen science projects in the Western Hemisphere. It has collected key data through volunteers that has been used by governmental and other scientists across the W. Hemisphere. The project also helped in stimulating the founding of shorebird science, education, and conservation groups throughout the Americas. The project is very well managed today. Basic financial support, has always been difficult to obtain for the ISS, will be well-used by its staff.



**Brian Harrington**  
Senior Scientist (Emeritus)  
Manomet Inc. (retired)

## Introducing: Shiloh Schulte



We are excited to introduce **Shiloh Schulte** who will lead a group of partners experienced with statistical design to review and revise the underpinnings of ISS while maintaining the successful core of the volunteer-based

program. In addition to rethinking the statistical design, this group will work to identify and strengthen weak areas in the program and set priorities for future development. The effort will identify where we need to establish new counts and standardize how sites are mapped, defined, and surveyed. The intent of this work is to emerge with a refreshed and renewed program while not changing the core structure so that ISS will continue to provide data for large-scale analyses as well as feedback for local and regional managers.



S. Schulte

Dr. Schulte has been part of Manomet since 2009 where he leads the American Oystercatcher Recovery Program and helps coordinate and conduct Manomet's Arctic Field Research work as part of the Arctic Program for Regional and International Shorebird Monitoring (PRISM) and the Arctic Shorebird Demographics Network (ASDN). He also enjoys astonishing us with his shorebird photography. Please welcome Shiloh to the ISS team.

# Site Highlight: **Guatemala**

by Bianca Bosarreyes  
and Alfredo Valle



Historically, Guatemala has been an unknown territory for shorebird science. In recent years, however, not only has the general composition of local biodiversity been increasingly described, but new records are being found of species that were considered rare or extirpated decades ago. The 200+ kilometer Pacific coast naturally favors shorebirds, especially considering the many rivers that flow into the ocean, providing sandbars, mudflats, mangroves, estuaries, swampy areas, shrimp farms and salt pannes used by shorebirds for foraging.

2020 was the first year for ISS in Guatemala. We visited Paredón and Salinera el Jardín, which is located in the Sipacate-Naranjo National Park, and Playa el Semillero, recently discovered as a site of importance for shorebirds with relatively large numbers of Hudsonian Godwit, Pectoral Sandpiper, American Oystercatcher, Red Knot and Wilson's Plover.

The development and implementation of comprehensive surveys such as the Central American Waterbird Census (CAWC), ISS, and the Migratory Survey Project (MSP) have generated not only large amounts of data, but great interest in the naturalist community by both individual observers and institutions. For example, the organization Vivamos Mejor and the BirdZone Atitlan birding club will be trained so that they can conduct surveys along the beaches of Tocojate and Lake Atitlán.

The surveys have provided a much better picture of the species diversity for the country. We now know that species once considered rare are actually always present. And surveys are continuously adding species

to the country list such as American Golden Plover and White-rumped Sandpiper, and non-shorebird species like the California Gull and even Inca Tern and Little Gull! What more can we expect?!

In Guatemala there are few protected areas on the Pacific coast, and those that exist are not actively managed. However, the generation of data has encouraged non-governmental organizations to create new marine-coastal protected areas, for example WCS and the Private Institute for Climate Change Research creating a new protected area at Playa el Semillero.

The shorebird surveys have generated increased interest in birdwatching among local communities, resulting in many new and good observers who are keen to go count birds where there is an opportunity or need. Thanks to this increase in interest and participation, ISS surveys will continue in 2021 at three sites on the Pacific coast (Salineras Guadalupe, La Grande and El Jardín) and at two sites in the interior of the country (Lago de Amatitlan and Laguna Chichoj).

All these observers, scientists, and conservationists are aware of the great potential in collecting data for the conservation, resulting every year in an increase of participating volunteers and institutions. However, there still are training needs for species identification and survey protocols. Also, it would be important to support contributors in protected areas with optical equipment in order to be able to successfully join ISS and other surveys.





# FOR 2020

## 455 CONTRIBUTORS



## 1104 SITES

Beaches, grasslands, mudflats, wetlands, fields, saline ponds, mangroves, and more.

## SHOREBIRDS COUNTED

# 1.7 MILLION



## 21 COUNTRIES

from Anchor Point, Alaska to Jacarandá, Tierra del Fuego, Argentina

## 4802 SURVEYS

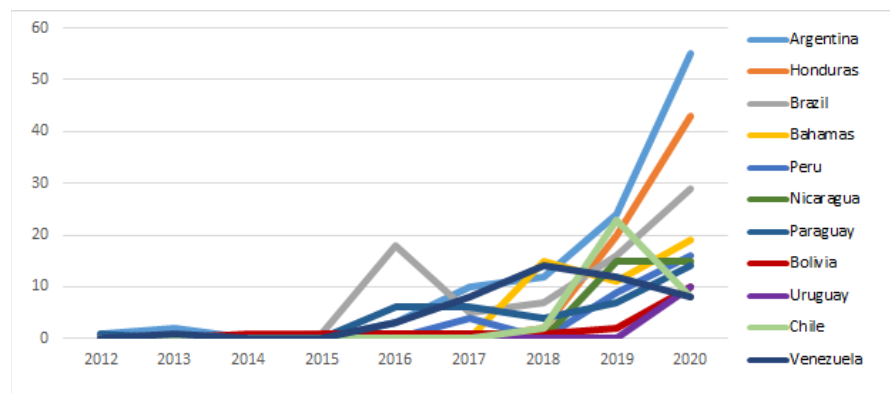
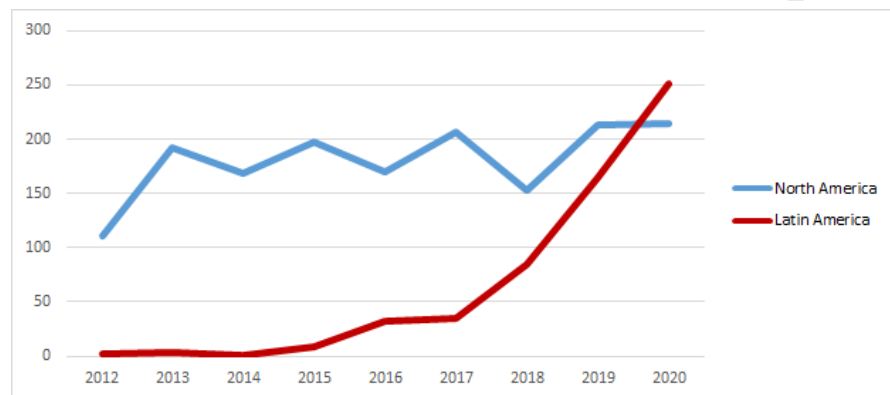
## ISS by the Numbers

In 2020, ISS had an increase in participation across the hemisphere despite COVID challenges. Thank you to all our contributors for enabling us to provide shorebird scientists and conservation partners the information they need to make important decisions about shorebirds.

We especially want to highlight the impressive jump in participation in South and Central America and the Caribbean! Over time, the increase of data will provide us with much needed information on population trends and key sites on which these birds depend for their survival.

We know the love for shorebirds spans the entire hemisphere, and we are grateful for all your contributions. Thank you!

## Contributors across the Hemisphere



### There is always more to explore

Use the ISS "Observation Type" on the eBird App or [ebird.org](http://ebird.org)

Explore your and all ISS data at [manomet.org/iss-map](http://manomet.org/iss-map)

Review the protocols at [manomet.org/project/international-shorebird-survey/](http://manomet.org/project/international-shorebird-survey/)

Join the Facebook Page [facebook.com/InternationalShorebirdSurvey](https://facebook.com/InternationalShorebirdSurvey)

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