

International Shorebird Survey

Newsletter Sept 2021

Volunteer Highlight:
Ben Haase in Ecuador



In October 1986, soon after arriving from the Netherlands, I initiated regular waterbird surveys along the coast near the city of Salinas, Ecuador. Observing my special interest for shorebirds, the Dutch ornithologist Tjitte De Vries, based in Quito, brought me in contact with biologist Nancy Hilgert Benavides. Nancy was the link with Brian Harrington, one of Manomet's leading scientists and the founder of ISS, who organized a shorebird monitoring course in Salinas. Hans Gomez, another motivated participant, carried out regular shorebird surveys for ISS at the Ecuasal Lagoons shortly after the training course. I became his field assistant and after a few years of training from 1990 onwards, I gradually took over the responsibility of the monthly ISS surveys. I always did my surveys at the Ecuasal Lagoons on my bike, which suffered a lot from being so often exposed to the salty environment. Within a year, my bike had become too unreliable to use! Fortunately, Manomet was able to provide some funds for a new bike so I could continue the census work. Around 2003, I also started ISS surveys at a second salt production site of Ecuasal, called Pacoa, an area twice the size of the 500 acre-Salinas area and also of importance to shorebirds.



Over time, Nicolas Febres Cordero the general manager of Ecuasal, had become very interested in our shorebird conservation actions. The company had become aware of the enormous ecological value of their local wetlands and supported our long-term monitoring efforts. In January 2007, staff of the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network Executive Office (WHSRN) visited Salinas, which consequently resulted in the inclusion of the Ecuasal Lagoons to the Network as a site of Regional importance, supported by the company. Being an important site to observe shorebirds, I recommended Ecuasal to install an observation platform in the central part of the lakes in Salinas. They liked the idea and my observation platform was inaugurated in August 2008.

With only a few temporary gaps in the more than 30 years of surveys, the Ecuasal Lagoons are unique among the local or regional wetlands. As a result of the space, the fairly quiet site, the food availability, and the unique environmental conditions, many species can be very numerous and represent a substantial part of the world's population at national, international, and regional levels. Especially the large flocks of southbound Wilson's Phalarope that visit the Ecuasal Lagoons as a stopover site, populating the pools that look like they are covered by a carpet when more



than 60,000 birds at both sites can be counted on one single day in August or September. Occasionally all three species of phalarope can be found foraging in Ecuasal.

Currently, more than 550 monthly surveys have been carried out and more than 4.2 million waterbirds counted, including 46 shorebird species. Changes have been observed of course. For example, counts of American Oystercatcher have increased by 500% at the site. Other species, unfortunately, show a declining population trend,



Ben Haase



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like the Semipalmated Sandpiper. Also noteworthy species are the Snowy and Wilson's Plover. Both their populations have noticeably gone down at the Ecuasal Lagoons, the latter has almost disappeared completely.

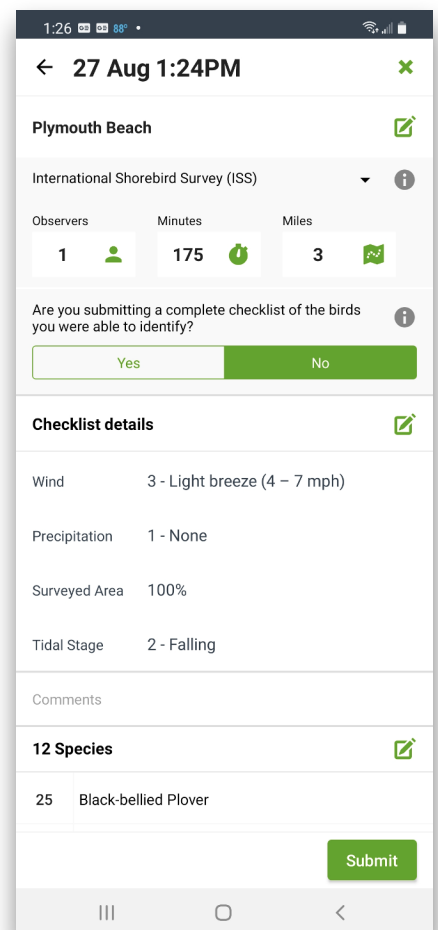
I feel it is a privilege to know the history, the growing conservation of bird life at the Ecuasal lagoons in Southwest Ecuador. Even after 30 years of raising binoculars to the eyes to spot the birds, it is never boring at all. And I would like to go for another 30 years.

Collecting **Wind, Precipitation, Tide,** and "**Surveyed Area**" for your ISS count in eBird

When ISS began in 1974, the forms that our volunteers completed held additional fields which helped scientists understand conditions under which counts were taken. In 2006 when data collection moved to eBird, ISS lost a way to easily collect that data, but last year Cornell Labs reached out to the ISS team with some very exciting news. They were adding supplementary data fields to the eBird user interface, and ISS was one of the first projects where it would be implemented. As a result, starting this summer, you have new fields to fill out.

For **Wind, Precipitation,** and **Tide,** please pick the category from the drop-down list that most closely matches the description of conditions for most of your count duration.

For **Surveyed Area,** consider the extent of the area on which you conduct a survey. The ISS protocols ask that this area stays the same each visit. We encourage you to cover the same route and scan the same spaces every time you conduct an ISS survey. For the most part, your surveyed area will be the same, i.e., 100%. But there are situations which might cause you to give a lower percentage, for example, a road is temporarily closed or a thunderstorm chases you off a beach. Collecting this percentage means you can still submit your survey with valuable information, but the models will be able to quantify the added noise that a changed survey area would produce. Please reach out with any questions.

A screenshot of the eBird app interface. At the top, it shows the date and time: "27 Aug 1:24PM". Below that, the location "Plymouth Beach" is entered. The survey type is "International Shorebird Survey (ISS)". The form shows "1" observer, "175" minutes, and "3" miles. A question asks "Are you submitting a complete checklist of the birds you were able to identify?" with "Yes" and "No" options. Below this is a "Checklist details" section with fields for "Wind" (3 - Light breeze (4 - 7 mph)), "Precipitation" (1 - None), "Surveyed Area" (100%), and "Tidal Stage" (2 - Falling). There is a "Comments" field. At the bottom, it shows "12 Species" and a list starting with "25 Black-bellied Plover". A "Submit" button is at the bottom right.

Update on the "lost" *rufa* Red Knots

In early July we sent out an invitation to our contributors to participate in an effort to find "lost" *rufa* Red Knots by visiting their ISS site between July 10th and 20th. The low 2021 spring count of Red Knots at Delaware Bay was concerning and shorebird scientists hypothesized that perhaps some shorebirds did not make the expected migration to their breeding grounds.

We received data from 14 sites in four countries in Latin America, totaling 1002 Red Knots. The vast majority were reported from sites in Brazil. Although these are significant numbers (>2% of the total *rufa* Red Knot population), they are not an indication of extra



Brad Winn

birds remaining on the winter grounds. Other partners of Manomet and the WHSRN Executive Office also participated in surveys, including a number of aerial surveys at key winter sites. When all data is in, a general summary of these results will be posted on the Manomet and WHSRN websites.

Our sincere thanks to all who participated.

Plumage Tips for Juvenile & Adult Shorebirds

Even though ISS doesn't ask its contributors to note the life stage of counted shorebirds, we thought a primer in plumage differences might be fun for shorebird enthusiasts. Most shorebirds have three distinct plumages: breeding, non-breeding, and juvenile.

The breeding plumage is often bright, colorful, and easy to distinguish (see above for a Red Knot). But the difference between adult birds in non-breeding plumage and young birds is more subtle. We show Red Knots (non-breeding adult, upper right and juvenile, lower right) as an example and offer a few pointers to pick out juveniles:

- Juveniles often have a fine scalloped pattern on the back
- Each feather is usually outlined crisply
- The pattern is fresh with every feather in place
- Also consider timing - adults migrate from the breeding ground first

Given these tips, which photo below shows the juvenile Least Sandpiper and which shows the adult?



Brad Winn



Alan Kneidel



Maina Handmaker



Alan Kneidel

Site Highlight: **Kachemak Bay, Alaska**



Gary Lyon

Bounded by snow-capped mountains and glaciers with impossibly dense spruce forests growing right to the shoreline, Kachemak Bay cuts into the Alaska wilderness on Kenai Peninsula near the town of Homer, at the end of the North American road system. Below dramatic peaks and jagged cliffs, a complex area of spits, tidal flats, sandy beaches, and rocky shores supports an abundance and diversity of wildlife including 36 species of shorebirds. These shorebirds have long been part of the Kachemak Bay story. In 1984 when the late Dr. George West, professor emeritus from the University of Alaska Fairbanks, retired to Homer, he established a shorebird monitoring project on Homer Spit, counting shorebirds during spring migration for 12 years and submitting 102 counts to ISS. In 1992 the Kachemak Bay Shorebird Festival began, now the largest wildlife viewing festival in Alaska. And in 1996 Kachemak Bay was designated a WHSRN site, formalizing its identification as one of the most important sites for migrating shorebirds in Alaska.

In 2008 George Matz and the Kachemak Bay Birders wanted to include a citizen science project in their activities, in addition to field trips and meetings. Because of Dr. West's historic data and because of the importance shorebirds has to the area, a shorebird census seemed a logical choice. USFWS shorebird biologists Rick Lanctot and Brad Andres suggested submitting their data to ISS as well.

Since then, the Kachemak Bay Birders have submitted 13 years' worth of data for one of the most important shorebird staging sites in Alaska. Eight years ago, because of the great interest in the program, the Kachemak Bay Birders added monitoring teams to the estuaries of the nearby Anchor River and Kasilof River. Over the 13 years, 47 volunteers have submitted 802 ISS surveys at 20 different locations in the Kachemak Bay and surrounding area, making it one of the most well-covered sites in the hemisphere for ISS.

In addition to contributing data to help shorebird scientists understand global trends for shorebird populations, the Kachemak Bay Birders wanted to attain a better understanding of the status of shorebird populations in Kachemak Bay, particularly during spring migration. This monitoring project also aimed to benefit local birders by offering opportunities to observe and enjoy shorebirds. Each outing often has a dynamic mix of both accomplished and unpracticed shorebird enthusiasts. And importantly, the Kachemak Bay Birders have seen that their monitoring data has helped protect local shorebird populations and habitats.

Each year George produces an Annual Project Summary based on their monitoring data which is then published by the Alaska Shorebird Group.

Dr. Richard Lanctot, PhD, Shorebird Coordinator for the Alaska Region of the US Fish and Wildlife Service tells us, "I remain constantly amazed by the dedication that George Matz and the Kachemak Bay Birders have exhibited over the years. Little did I know that this wonderful group of volunteers would not only continue conducting annual surveys each year at Kachemak Bay, but that they would expand their effort both temporally and spatially. It remains one of the few long-term migratory shorebird sites monitored in Alaska."

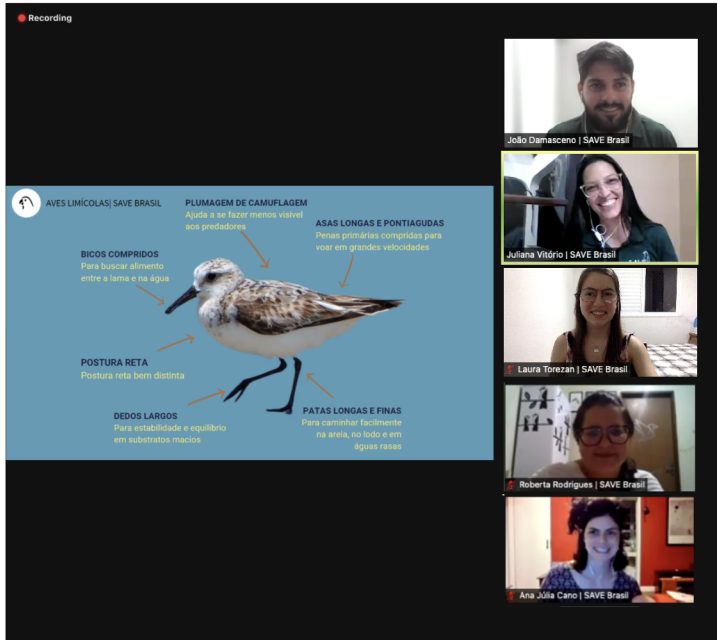
George Matz says "One thing I have learned from participating in many CBC's, the granddaddy of citizen science, is that birders like to make a contribution to a cause and it is important for volunteers to know their contribution adds up to a lot, especially in these days of limited professional resources for bird conservation and exponentially increasing demand."

The ISS team is grateful to the Kachemak Bay Birders for their dedication to the Kachemak Bay shorebirds and ISS. Thank you for your counts!



Carol Harding

A shorebird ID course for ISS contributors in Brazil



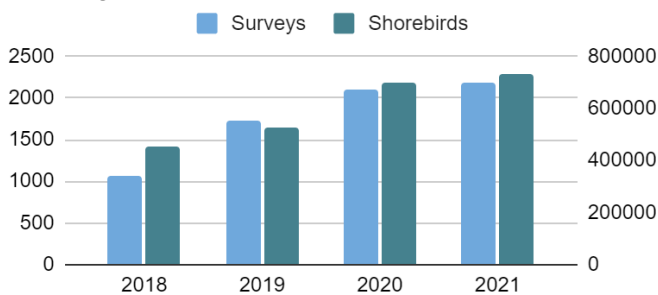
ISS is an important tool not only for monitoring shorebirds, but for engaging contributors in shorebird conservation throughout the Americas. To improve knowledge and increase engagement, Save Brasil, the ISS partner in Brazil, has developed “Introduction to the Identification of Shorebirds in Brazil,” an online and free workshop for volunteers. We expected 60 people or so, however, our team was surprised with over 310 registrants! To make sure we could reach everyone registered, we decided to present five classes between August and October. The participants will learn about the main families of shorebirds and their distribution in Brazil, morphological and behavioral characteristics, as well as tips on how to identify them through the different types of plumage patterns.

ISS continues to grow

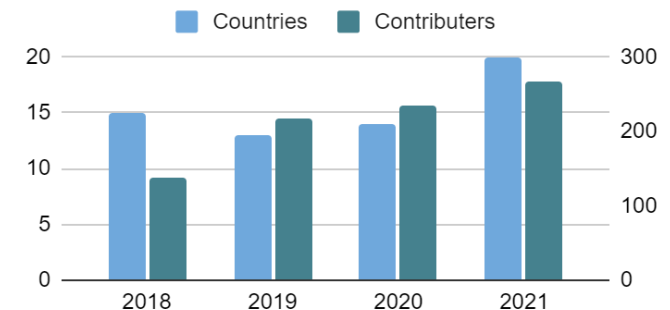
Whether you are looking at countries, contributors, surveys, or shorebirds, ISS numbers continued to grow through the first half of 2021. The graphs below compare January to June numbers for the last four years.

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

Surveys and Shorebirds



Countries and Contributors



There is always more to explore

Explore all ISS data at manomet.org/iss-map

More about ISS at

manomet.org/project/international-shorebird-survey/

Join the Facebook Page

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