

AMBLE Ramble

Newsletter for Lake Michigan Volunteer AMBLE (Avian Monitoring for Botulism Lakeshore Events)

2012 • May - July

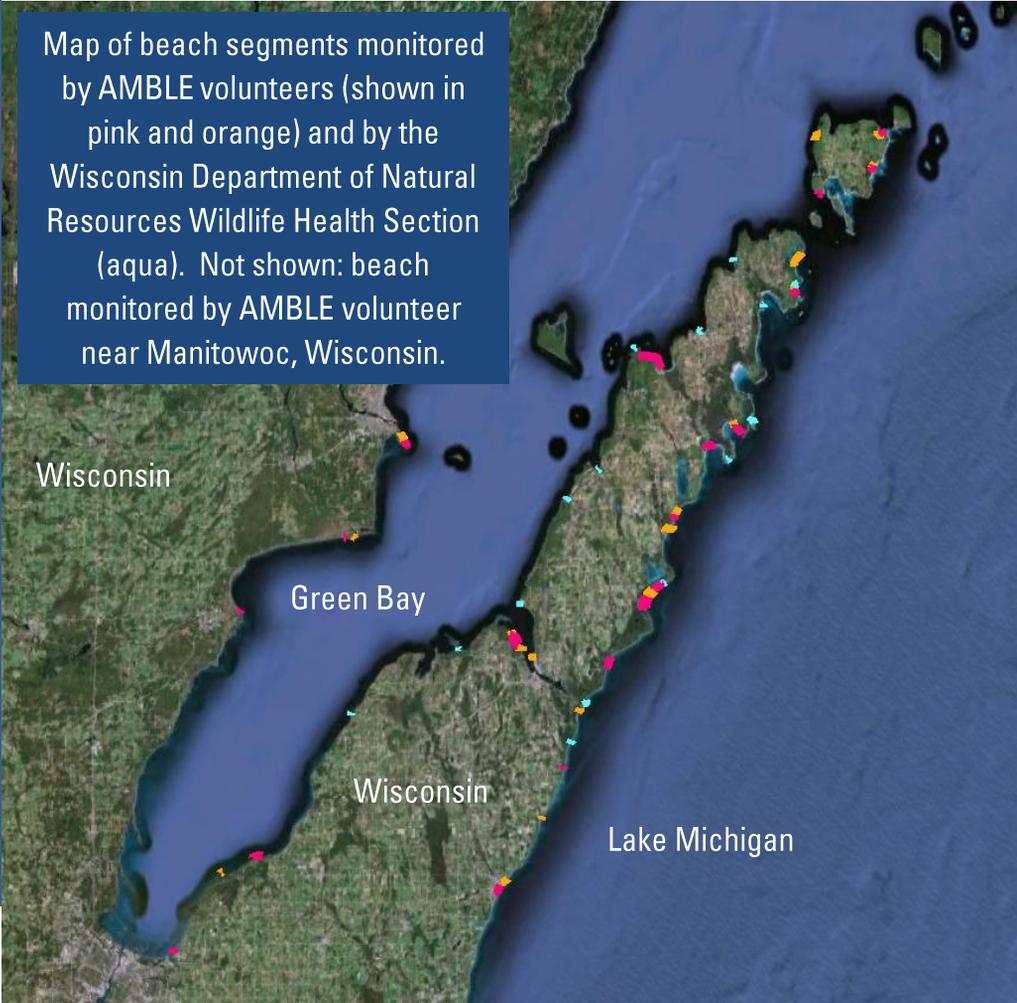
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USGS National Wildlife
Health Center
6006 Schroeder Rd.
Madison, WI 53711
608-270-2473
AMBLE@usgs.gov
www.nwhc.usgs.gov/AMBLE

Coverage Area Expanded in 2012

The 2012 Lake Michigan Volunteer AMBLE beach monitoring season began in May. Twenty-five of the 2011 volunteers are AMBLEing again. They are joined by 17 new monitors. While almost exclusively in Door County in 2011, the volunteer network has expanded into Kewaunee, Brown, Oconto, Marinette, and Manitowoc counties in Wisconsin in 2012. A total of 22.3 shoreline miles are being monitored by AMBLE volunteers in 2012 (20 beach segments maintained from 2011 and 16 new beach segments). The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Wildlife Health Section monitors an additional 3.8 miles in Door County.



Map of beach segments monitored by AMBLE volunteers (shown in pink and orange) and by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Health Section (aqua). Not shown: beach monitored by AMBLE volunteer near Manitowoc, Wisconsin.

Wisconsin

Green Bay

Wisconsin

Lake Michigan

Data Summary

Beach segments being monitored every 7-10 days by AMBLE volunteers average 0.8 miles in length, which is an increase from the 0.5 mile average in 2011. The longest single segment this year is 2.3 miles.

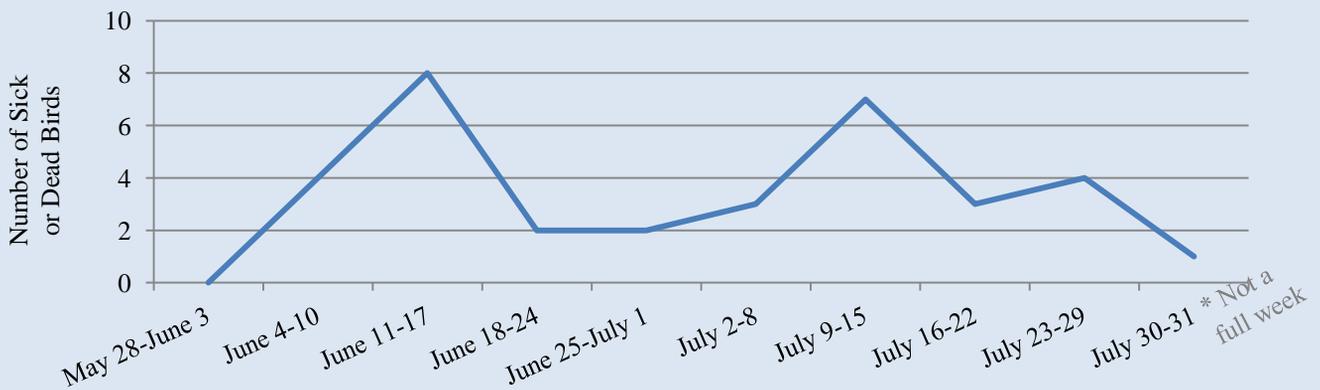
There have been 203 walking surveys reported by AMBLE volunteers for May, June, and July, 2012. Multiplying the length of each beach by the number of times it has been monitored results in a total of 118.5 miles walked collectively by AMBLers!

Thirty-four sick or dead birds have been reported during this time period (see figures below). There was one sick Ring-billed Gull, eleven freshly dead birds (two dead < 24 hours before being found and nine dead 24-48 hours before being found), and 22 decomposed bird carcasses reported. On average, there have been 1.5 sick or dead birds observed per mile of beach monitored. Over 7,000 healthy birds have been reported; that is roughly 315 healthy birds observed per mile of beach monitored.

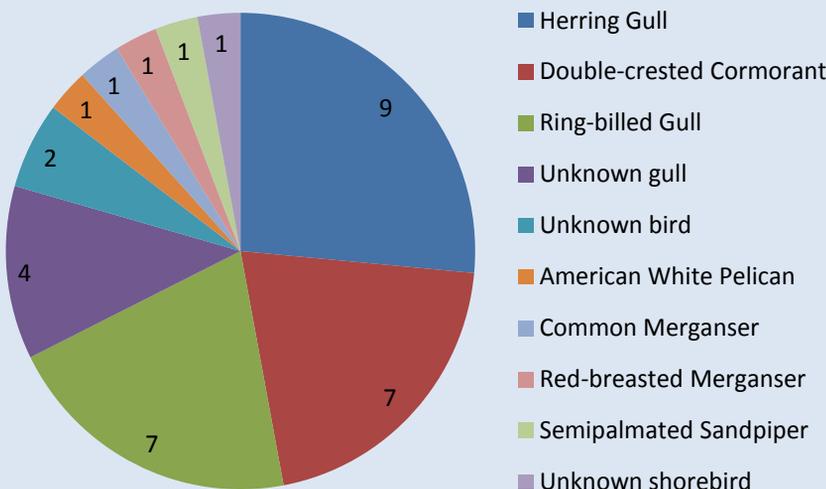
AMBLE volunteers have removed a total 4,756 items of trash from beaches on Lake Michigan and Green Bay!

The Wisconsin DNR Wildlife Health Section has monitored their circuit of Door County beaches two times, once in June and once in July, and found 1 sick Herring Gull and one decomposed Double-crested Cormorant in June (findings not included in “Timeline” and “Species Found” below, but see “Test Results”).

Timeline of Birds Found Sick or Dead by AMBLE Volunteers



Species Found Sick or Dead by AMBLE Volunteers



Test Results



A Herring Gull found sick by the Wisconsin DNR Wildlife Health Section on June 19th was transported to Bay Beach Wildlife Sanctuary but later died. This bird tested positive for avian botulism type E. Photo credit: Melissa Clark

Piping Plovers

Written by Sarah Saunders, graduate student at University of Minnesota

The Great Lakes Piping Plover population has substantially increased from 17 breeding pairs when it was listed as endangered in 1986 to 57 breeding pairs this season. This increase is a consequence of numerous recovery efforts, including protecting nests with wire cages to exclude predators, monitoring nesting pairs, and collecting abandoned eggs for rearing in captivity. Researchers also band individuals with unique colored leg band combinations to keep track of each bird's movements, such as where it hatches, where it nests each year, and how many young it produces each season. Locating and identifying nesting plovers would not be as successful without the help of volunteers who survey local beaches and accurately report findings.

Piping Plovers are best identified by their thick black neck bands and black forehead band running between the eyes. They have a distinct orange bill with black on the tip and bright orange legs. They forage by scurrying along the sand with frequent bouts of stopping to peck at the ground. When approached, they make a high pitched "piping" call of peep-lo. Typically, the majority of piping plovers spotted in the Great Lakes will be banded. Band combinations are read from the bird's left leg to right leg and top to bottom. Thus, the adult bird pictured has a combination of: Orange flag, dark blue, black on the left leg and metal band with a yellow band on the right leg. If the bird is banded, you will see either an orange flag as shown here or an orange band high up on one of the legs and a metal band on the other leg. The rest of the bands will be of various colors. It is important to note whether the band color is dark or light (i.e., dark or light blue) if possible. Plover chicks don't have the black neck or forehead bands, but are grey and white with a black ridge of feathers near the base of the tail. They are incapable of flight for the first 28 days of life, so the parents stay with them until they have reached that age. If you see a piping plover, please email your sighting to plover@umn.edu. Note the time of the sighting, details of the location (GPS coordinates would be ideal, but simply noting the name of the beach and the distance from beach entrance is great), behavior of the bird (sitting on eggs, peeping alarm calls, foraging, etc.), band combination, and any photos if possible.

In Wisconsin, nesting plovers have been doing well. Last year, 6 pairs initiated 8 nests and fledged 9 chicks from Long Island [Lake Superior]. This season, 5 pairs have initiated 6 nests and young have yet to fledge. A new location in Wisconsin was discovered in Door County this year and if the pair there is successful, one or both members are likely to return next year. The breeding season is winding down at this point in the summer; birds are already heading to their wintering grounds along the southern Atlantic coast. The males will start returning next April to the beaches of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Canada. The females will follow a few weeks later (typically the beginning of May). Nests are laid throughout May and into June and the first chicks start hatching within the first week of June. The earliest chicks fledge at the end of June, but most are not flight-capable until July. By the end of July and beginning of August, most birds have started to make their way south. Thus, although the plover migration means the end of summer, we look forward to their return next year that means spring has arrived!



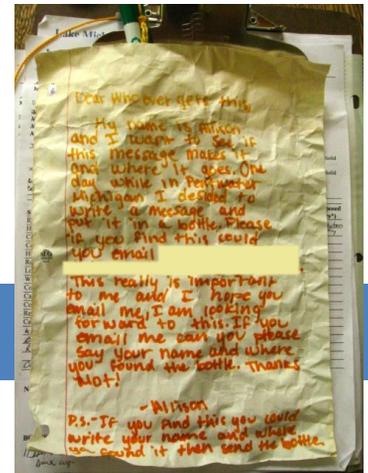
Piping plover adult (left) and chick (right).

Photo credit: Alice Van Zoeren

Message in a Bottle

Written by AMBLE volunteer George Cobb

While AMBLEing my beach on Moonlight Bay near Baileys Harbor, Wisconsin, I was picking up trash along the eastern coast line of the bay and wondering why so many items ended up on this beach area when I happened upon a plastic bottle lodged among the rocks. Thinking it another among the many pieces of floating trash items, I started to place it into my bag, then I saw “Read ME” in black letters on the outside of the bottle. I opened the bottle to find a small plastic baggie with a note written in faded orange marker pen inside. The message reads, “Dear Whoever gets this, My name is Allison and I want to see if this message makes it and where it goes. One day while in Pentwater Michigan I decided to write a message and put it in a bottle. Please if you find this could you email [...]. This is really important to me and I hope you email me, I am looking forward to this. If you email me can you please say your name and where you found the bottle. Thanks a lot! -Allison P.S. – If you find this you could write your name and where you found it then send the bottle.” I wrote to the address but thus far have not received an answer. So if you know a young person in the Pentwater area named Allison tell her to look at her email. Meanwhile look for other treasures while AMBLEing, who knows what mysteries you might turn up!



AMBLE volunteer George Cobb and his message in a bottle.

Photo credit: George and Sharon Cobb

Wisconsin Citizen-based Monitoring Networks

Over the winter, AMBLE became a Level 1 program in the Wisconsin Citizen-based Water Monitoring Network. This network is coordinated by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and University of Wisconsin - Extension. The mission statement of the network reads, “To help preserve and protect Wisconsin's over 15,000 lakes and 84,000 miles of rivers, it is important to first understand how they function and then take note of their status. The Citizen-based Water Monitoring Network of Wisconsin offers citizens multiple opportunities to be part of this learning process and to monitor our state's waters.” Other Level 1 monitoring programs include Citizen Lakes Monitoring Network; Clean Boats, Clean Waters; Water Action Volunteers; and Wisconsin Ephemeral Ponds Project. Check out AMBLE’s feature page: <http://watermonitoring.uwex.edu/level1/amble.html>

Lake Michigan
AMBLE is also listed in “Who’s Who of Citizen-based Monitoring in Wisconsin,” a directory of natural resource monitoring programs in the state. You can search by subject or county to find citizen science opportunities!
<http://wiatri.net/cbm/WhoWho/>



Common Tern not Common

Reports of Common Terns have been submitted by quite a few AMBLE volunteers. Common Terns, turns out, are not common in Wisconsin. The Great Lakes bird identification pamphlet that was distributed during AMBLE training only has one tern featured – the Common Tern – so that might explain why volunteers are reporting so many Commons. Please reference a more thorough bird identification book if necessary. If you would like to borrow a copy of the book Peterson’s Field Guide to Birds of Eastern and Central North America and did not check one out during training, contact Jenny Chipault and she will send you a copy.

Caspian Terns (center) are similar in size to local gulls. Common Terns are significantly smaller. Photo credit: Melissa Clark

Provided here is a great picture taken by Melissa Clark of the Wisconsin DNR Wildlife Health Section during her avian botulism monitoring in Door County. This picture illustrates that Caspian Terns are only slightly larger than Ring-billed Gulls. Because Caspians are also slightly smaller than Herring Gulls, when viewed in a mixed group, the Caspian Tern will appear generally similar in size to the gulls you are most likely to see while AMBLEing. Common Terns, in contrast, are roughly half the size of the Caspian Tern so will look significantly smaller than most local gulls. Other ways to distinguish between Caspian and Common terns are by the degree of the fork in the tail – Commons have more pronounced forking – and by the amount of black under the wings – Caspians have a larger area of black outline under their wings (see pages 173 and 175 in the Peterson’s field guide).

JHA

All AMBLE volunteers should have received via email a JHA (Job Hazards Analysis) document. We apologize for the additional paperwork but we decided that all official USGS volunteers, like all USGS employees, should have a signed JHA on file. Plus, we thought it might be convenient for you to have all relevant safety information in one document. In future years, we will take care of this paperwork at training. Most of the content of the JHA is review from AMBLE training, but please note the policy on the use of life vests and the requirement of extra safety training for any AMBLEing done in water. Also note the limitations of participation of minors (volunteers under the age of 18) in the AMBLE program. All AMBLE volunteers should sign and return the completed first page of the JHA as soon as possible. Again, sorry for the inconvenience and rest assured that nothing in particular has happened to prompt the creation of this JHA. Contact Jenny Chipault if you want a hard copy sent to you.



Speaking of safety... watch out for crocs! AMBLE volunteers Beth and Greg Goetzman found a this shoe on their beach in Marinette County!



Bay Beach Wildlife Sanctuary

Volunteers have asked what they can do to help sick birds that they might find while AMBLEing. The Bay Beach Wildlife Sanctuary in Green Bay has answers. What is the Bay Beach Wildlife Sanctuary? From their website: “The Bay Beach Wildlife Sanctuary is a beautiful 700 acre urban wildlife refuge featuring live animal exhibits, educational displays, miles of hiking/skiing trails and various wildlife viewing opportunities. It is the largest park in the Green Bay Park system and home to the second largest wildlife rehabilitation program in Wisconsin, caring for more than 4,500 orphaned and injured animals annually.”

Sick Double-crested
Cormorant. Photo credit:
John Tracey

As an AMBLE volunteer, you are in no way obligated to handle or transport sick birds. If you decide to do more than simply note a sick bird on your AMBLE data sheet, you can call the Bay Beach Wildlife Sanctuary Animal Care staff at the Observation Building (920-391-3685) for assistance. In general, remember that we do not know what the bird is ailing from so wear protective gear and use caution, being mindful of sharp beaks and feet and strong wings. An extra note of caution: birds tend to peck at shiny objects, so injured or sick birds might try to defend themselves by pecking at glistening eyeballs or jewelry.

Bay Beach Wildlife Sanctuary
1660 East Shore Drive
Green Bay, Wisconsin 54302
Open daily 8:00 am - 6:30 pm

Bay Beach frequently asked questions:

<http://www.baybeachwildlife.com/animals-page/animal-faqs/>

Bay Beach volunteer opportunities:

<http://www.baybeachwildlife.com/get-involved/volunteer-opportunities/>

Freezer Update

The Newport State Park freezer is now functioning. However, the freezer remains off when it is not in use. Please call (920-854-2500) before dropping off a carcass to give staff time to start chilling the freezer.

Barkhausen Waterfowl Preserve at 2024 Lakeview Drive in Suamico, Wisconsin has offered to let AMBLE volunteers drop off carcasses at their freezer. They too advise that you call ahead (920-434-2824).

Thanks to AMBLE volunteers and partners!



Disclaimer

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Unless otherwise noted, all writing and pictures in this newsletter are the product of Jenny Chipault, USGS National Wildlife Health Center.