



IN-THE-FIELD PROTOCOL CHECKLIST

- FILL OUT TOP OF RECORDING FORM:**
 - **Date, survey site name and number.**
 - **Names of surveyors** (*the first slot is for the surveyor who will take distance measurements*). It is helpful to have at least two people per survey: an observer and a note-taker.
 - **Survey start time** in military time (i.e. 0934 and 1336, not 9:34 or 13:36)
- LOOK FOR BIRDS!** With your binoculars or scope, **scan from one side to the other**. Please record only birds on the water within 300 meters from the survey site, using your 300m landmark, detailed on the site description document, as a visual reference. Ignore birds in flight and beyond the 300m boundary. If you aren't sure if the bird is within 300m, please record it. Identify **species** to the best of your ability and record number of **individuals, bearing** (*using the compass, please read the number to which the red needle points*) and **distance** (*in mm from the water horizon*) for each bird or flock of birds. For **large flocks of more than 10 birds**, please record your "minimum", "maximum" and "best" estimates. **Record the counts of male(s) and female(s)** for species whose sex can be differentiated in the field; e.g. scoters and goldeneyes and not species like Pigeon Guillemots and Canada Geese, etc.
- END THE SURVEY – Surveys should only last 15-30 minutes** (*no less than 15 min and no more than 30 min*). Record **survey end time** in military time (i.e. 1004 and 1406, not 10:04 or 14:06)
- Tell us about the other conditions:
 - **Survey Conditions:** circle the word that best describes the weather conditions, the sea state, and the tide state during the survey.
 - **Visibility of Waterbirds:** circle the furthest distance where you still maintain VERY GOOD visibility of waterbirds present during your survey. If visibility was poor, please circle the reason for reduced visibility.
 - **Human Activity:** Please indicate the level of human activity during the survey by filling in the appropriate numbers in each descriptive box provided. If there was no activity during your survey, check the 'no activity' box.
 - **Raptor Activity:** record any raptor species (hawks/eagles/falcons) detected during the survey, including number, and how it may have affected the distribution of waterfowl
 - **Survey Equipment:** Circle equipment type and greatest magnification used during the survey.
 - **Notes and Comments:** After the survey, please provide any further information which you feel is important or of interest, e.g. notes on unidentified species, details on rarity sightings, or notes on disturbances, etc.
 - **Oiling Rates:** If you recorded male Buffleheads, please record if any were oiled and, if so, please include notes on the extent and location of the oiling.
- "Optional Column":** please use this column to record species that are: in flight; beyond the 300m survey; and/or spotted after the survey end-time. Notes can include sex, count, plumage, etc.



Survey Protocol

Summary

Seabird research in Puget Sound has historically been a collaborative process between state and federal agencies, NGOs, and university scientists. In 1978-1979, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) jointly funded the first seabird survey in Puget Sound, known as the Marine Ecosystems Analysis (MESA). Results from the MESA study have provided an initial baseline to estimate population trends and projections in Puget Sound. Beginning in the early 1990s, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) made seabirds a conservation priority and began a series of continuous annual surveys to estimate temporal trends in seabird abundance. These data have been incorporated into the Puget Sound Assessment and Monitoring Program (PSAMP); results indicate that nearly all species have declined since 1978-79. One potential problem with comparing WDFW surveys with the MESA density estimates is that the sampling protocol has been slightly different. To address this issue, a Washington State Sea Grant funded survey was established in 2004-05 to replicate the initial MESA project (J. Bower, Western Washington University). Preliminary results from the WWU survey agree with the PSAMP trends to some degree, but also show different trends for some species, including pigeon guillemots (declined 55% in the PSAMP survey, increased 60% in the WWU survey). These discrepancies indicate the need for additional research and continuous shore-based surveys of Puget Sound seabirds.

Objectives

1. To develop long-term baseline shore-based density estimates for seabirds in Puget Sound and the Strait of Juan de Fuca. The previous continuous study (PSAMP) estimated group sizes and species composition of groups from aerial and ship-based surveys.
2. Develop partnerships with regional Audubon chapters, local NGOs, and local, state, and federal government agencies to create a framework for long-term seabird monitoring in Puget Sound and the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

NUTS AND BOLTS

- What:** Puget Sound Seabird Survey for wintering geese, ducks, swans, loons, grebes, cormorants, gulls, terns and alcids (*see protocol below*)
- Who:** Community scientists, preferably in teams of two or more.
- When:** The first Saturday of every month, October through April. Count to take place within two hours on either side of high tide, thus creating a 4-hour window. *Please see the specific times at the end of the protocol.* Minimum of 15 minutes and a maximum of 30 minutes per site.
- Where:** Pre-selected survey sites in Puget Sound and the Strait of Juan de Fuca, at least one mile apart.
- Why:** The Puget Sound Seabird Survey is the ONLY multi-month seabird survey in Puget Sound.
- Data for surveys can be entered online: www.seabirdsurvey.org*

The Puget Sound Seabird Survey is based on the protocol used by [Birds Canada](http://www.birdscanada.org) in the British Columbia Coastal Waterbird Survey (BCCWS, <http://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/bccws/>).

WHO:

Volunteer skills and equipment

- Surveyors must be comfortable identifying all waterbird species that regularly occur in the survey area. If you are unsure about your ability, please accompany an experienced observer. **Performing surveys in pairs is recommended.**
- To adequately view and identify waterbirds from the shoreline, surveyors need at least binoculars or a spotting scope, but preferably both. Optical equipment should be good enough to identify birds up to at least 300m from the shoreline in good conditions.
- **Observers will also be required to attend a short training session prior to their first survey.** Contact the PSSS program manager for training session scheduling in your area.

What if I cannot visit every month?

We are only conducting surveys once per month during winter so consistency is paramount if we want to collect valuable data. However, in the event of illness or other unforeseen circumstances, please contact team members and the PSSS program manager so that a qualified alternate can be found. If one cannot be found, the survey for that month will have to be missed and can resume on the next scheduled date upon your return.

WHAT:

What bird species are we counting?

We are counting all species of coastal seabirds/waterfowl including *geese, ducks, swans, loons, grebes, cormorants, gulls, terns* and *alcids*. Raptors can affect waterfowl distribution so the presence of any hawks, eagles or falcons is recorded separately at the end of the recording form.

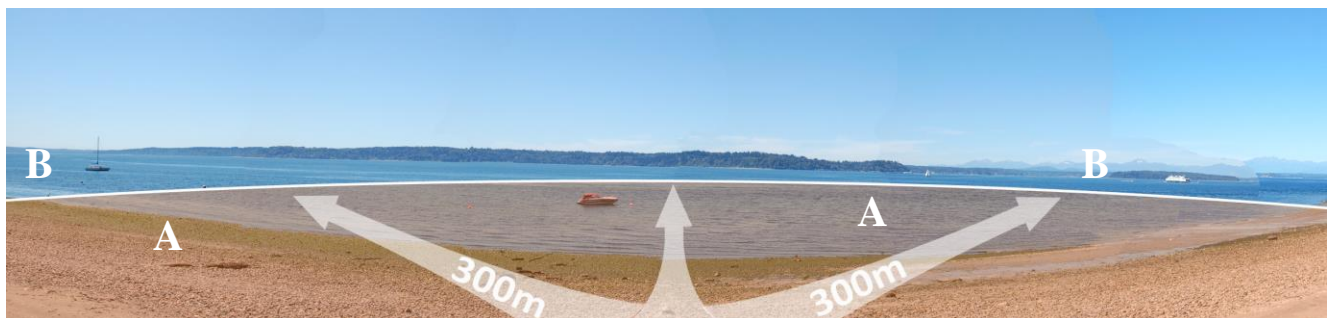
What do we record?

At each site, observers will be asked to remain in a fixed location for at least 15 minutes and no longer than 30 minutes. The boundary for the survey area is 300m from shore, within which observers should record the following data (for the bird families listed above):

- **Species ID and number of individuals**
- **Distance from the horizon down to the bird in millimeters** (*see page 3*)
- **Bearing** (*approximate sighting angle - see page 3*)
- **Sex ratio when males and females can be differentiated in the field** (*e.g. scoters, goldeneyes and other sexually-dimorphic species and not species like Pigeon Guillemots and Canada Geese, etc.*)

If you are not sure which side of the 300m boundary a bird is on, record it just to be safe. Three hundred meter reference points are selected where possible at each survey site and pictured in the survey site description handouts.

OPTIONAL: After the 30 minute maximum has been reached, observers can record the presence of any additional species in flight and/or outside the 300m survey boundary. Simply write down the species name and “check” the checkbox. Notes can be added. **NOTE: THIS IS OPTIONAL AND SPECIES OUTSIDE THE SURVEY AREA SHOULD NOT DISTRACT SURVEYORS DURING THE SURVEY.**



A. Survey area (within 300m)

Time: 15-30 min

Species: any PSSS species on water

Distance/Bearing? YES

B. Optional

Time: only AFTER survey has been completed

Species: any PSSS species (*in flight and on water*)

Distance/Bearing? NO

How do we count birds in large flocks?

For flocks with more than 10 birds, the distance and bearing of the entire group may be recorded along with three group size estimates: your 'best' estimate for the number of birds present, a 'max' estimate representing the maximum number of birds that may be present, and a 'min' estimate representing the minimum number of birds present.

How do we measure distance?

Measuring distance to the birds is easy; all you need is a ruler! Simply take the edge of the ruler and line the 0mm with the edge of the "water" horizon (or the opposite shoreline) and measure how many millimeters the birds are below the horizon. All you need to do is write down the distance in millimeters between the birds and the horizon (see page 7). How does this work? See page 5.

- **Be sure to align the "0mm" on your ruler to the horizon and only record distance in "mm".**
- **If the horizon is obscured by the weather or another structure like ferry or pier, do not record distance and check "horizon obscured" on the datasheet.**

WHY IS MEASURING DISTANCE IMPORTANT?

The technique we're using to estimate bird density is called 'distance sampling'. This method has been applied to thousands of species, from insects to elephants. Simply counting the number of birds in a given location is a simpler approach, but it forces scientists to assume that all birds are detected by observers. In reality, detection of any species declines with the distance from the observer: poor sighting conditions (fog, rain, etc), quality of observing equipment, and observer inexperience all contribute to declining detection likelihood as distance increases. Aquatic vertebrates (mammals, birds) are subject to unique conditions such as swell/wave height, and because some seabirds may be located underwater during survey periods, we cannot assume that every bird is detected. Distance sampling provides a robust approach to estimating density when some individuals are missed and will allow for calculation of less biased density estimates.

How do we measure bearing?

Each survey team is provided with a magnetic compass that can be hand-held or attached to a scope. When a bird is spotted on the water within 300m, a magnetic bearing to the bird can be easily read directly from the compass. Measurements will be much more accurate from a scope; however accurate readings can be attained from a hand-held compass as long as great care is taken to keep the compass level and pointed directly to the bird. The bearing should be recorded as the number to which the red needle points (*see pictures on page 8 and 9*).

WHY DO WE MEASURE BEARING?

The bearing or sighting angle is an important measurement to help us accurately estimate distance. Why? Look across the water the next time you are at your survey site: chances are the opposite shoreline does not create a straight line across the horizon. Consequently, we need to know in which direction you are looking to accurately calculate distance.

How do I measure distance and bearing of a large resting flock of waterfowl?

A flock is a group of birds that are associating behaviorally. Record both distance and bearing from the middle of the flock.

What about birds moving around during the survey?

If a movement of birds occurs during the survey, **focus on the birds that are on the water within 300m from the survey site**. Do your best to count birds only once. Once the survey has been completed, surveyors have the option of recording the presence of any additional species that flew through the survey area in the "optional" column of the recording sheet.

What if I see multiple individuals/flocks of the same species?

It is very likely that you will see multiple flocks or individuals of the same species during your survey. Treat each flock or individual as a separate observation, recording both bearing and distance for each. For example, if you see two different Red-necked Grebes, one at 115° and another at 193°, please record the bearing and distance for both individuals.

What if I can't see the horizon?

If you are unable to see the horizon due to fog or bad weather during your survey, DO NOT measure distance or bearing and record the reason for poor visibility at the end of the recording form. Please DO count and ID as many birds as possible. If the horizon is partially visible during the survey, DO NOT measure distance for the birds behind which the horizon is obscured and check "yes" in the "Horizon Obscured?" column. Please DO NOT measure the distance for birds which are resting above the horizon, i.e. on pilings, breakwaters, etc.

WHY MUST WE BE ABLE TO SEE THE HORIZON?

The horizon must be visible to the surveyor because it is an important variable in the formula we use to accurately triangulate the distance between the surveyor and the bird(s). Sometimes, surveyors aren't able to see the horizon due to weather. Other times, the horizon may be partially obscured by a pier, docked ferry, or advancing fog. Any of these factors can negatively affect the accuracy of your measurements. Survey sites are ideally selected away from piers, docks, etc. to reduce the chances of having an obscured horizon. This formula requires birds to be on the water: birds on structures above the horizon, e.g. pilings or piers, should be identified and counted then recorded as "horizon obscured."

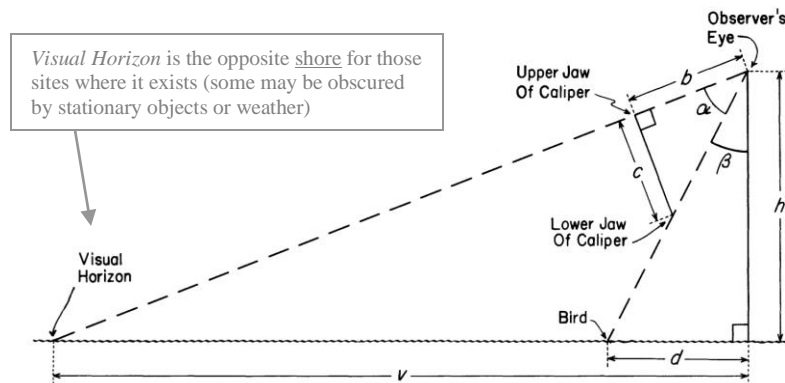


Diagram of distance sampling technique.

SOURCE: Heinemann, D. (1991). A Range Finder for Pelagic Bird Censusing *The Journal of Wildlife Management*, Vol. 45, No. 2. April 1981, pp. 489-493.

Gathering baseline oiling rates on seabirds in Puget Sound and the Strait of Juan de Fuca

If male Buffleheads are detected during the survey, please record whether or not the white portions of their bodies were visibly oiled. If no male Buffleheads were detected, please circle "N/A". If male Buffleheads were recorded and not visibly oiled, please circle "NO". If male Buffleheads present were visibly oiled, please circle "YES" and describe extent and location of oiling as well as notes on the condition of the birds.

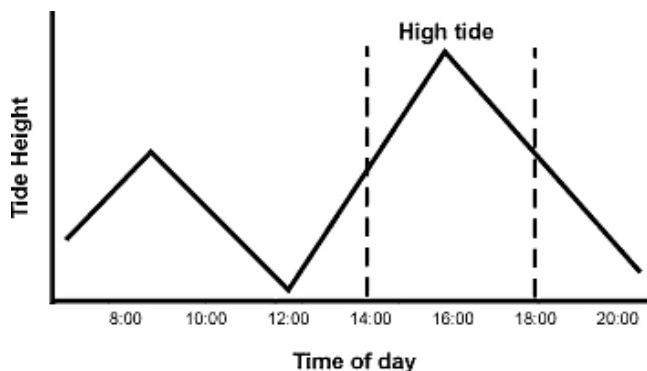
WHEN:

When do I do my Puget Sound Seabird Survey?

This is a monthly survey. To standardize counts in each area, surveyors are asked to visit their site(s) on the first Saturday of each month. The standard survey period is October through April

What time of day?

All survey times must occur within the four-hour window designated for that day. The dates and times for the surveys can be found on the Puget Sound Bird Observatory website, on the PSSS Survey Windows page. A minimum of 15 and a maximum of 30 minutes is requested at each site. Surveyors may stay longer than 30 minutes to record the presence of additional species in the “optional” column of the recording form. Do not continue the survey past the four-hour window designated for that day.



*The four-hour window is *roughly* pegged to the daytime high tide (two hours on either side). Some surveys have to be shifted to start 30 minutes after sunrise or end 30 minutes before sunset to ensure optimum viewing conditions.*

SEE THE [PSBO WEBSITE](#) FOR THIS SEASON'S SURVEY WINDOWS

WHY DO WE ONLY COUNT DURING A FOUR-HOUR WINDOW EVERY MONTH?

The four-hour window affords us a synchronized “snapshot” of the bird populations on Puget Sound, which decreases the risk of double counting between survey sites. Setting a maximum survey time of 30 minutes also standardizes the amount of time volunteers can count birds. Otherwise, if Site A records greater species diversity than Site B, we won't know for certain if it is due to better habitat or greater volunteer effort. Standardizing the date, time window and survey duration reduces the number of confounding factors that would weaken the quality of the data.

Weather and Sea Conditions

Weather conditions can affect the visibility of seabirds and your enjoyment, especially in winter. Wind and rain is OK, but avoid extreme weather! It can be difficult to see birds in rough, stormy waters so please record the conditions during your survey on the last page of the recording form. If it is foggy and you are unable to see the horizon, please refrain from recording distances and record the reason for reduced visibility. However, species counts (and bearings, if possible) are still valuable. Suitable weather and sea conditions are up to the discretion of each volunteer counter, but please be mindful that, while consistency and frequency affords the most valuable data, your safety is paramount.

What if the weather is REALLY bad?

If a severe storm is predicted on a survey date, please use your best judgement, and Puget Sound Bird Observatory will endeavor to contact you regarding the selection of an alternate day or cancelling the survey for that month altogether.

WHERE:

Where are Puget Sound Seabird Survey Sites?

Survey sites are located (at least 1-mile apart) along the shoreline of Puget Sound and the Strait of Juan de Fuca. A survey site is considered one point on the shore. Each survey site is determined by the program manager and thoroughly documented with photographs and GPS coordinates. Shoreline accessibility and the potential for double-counting were taken into consideration during site selection, with the hopes that one team of volunteers might be able to visit multiple sites in the 4-hour survey window. A survey site can be along rocky intertidal shorelines, a sandy or cobble beach, a small or large bay or an estuary. *For a map of survey sites, please visit [here](#).*

Recording Data

- Datasheets are available for download from the [PSBO website](#).
- Those volunteers attending training sessions can pick up datasheets printed on Rite-In-The-Rain paper.

Submitting Data

- Data should be submitted ONLINE at <https://www.pugetsoundbirds.org/data>.

Data Archival

- After you input your data online, please return the paper copy of the recording form to PSBO. PSBO will archive them after the completion of the survey year.
- Send completed Puget Sound Seabird Survey recording forms to:

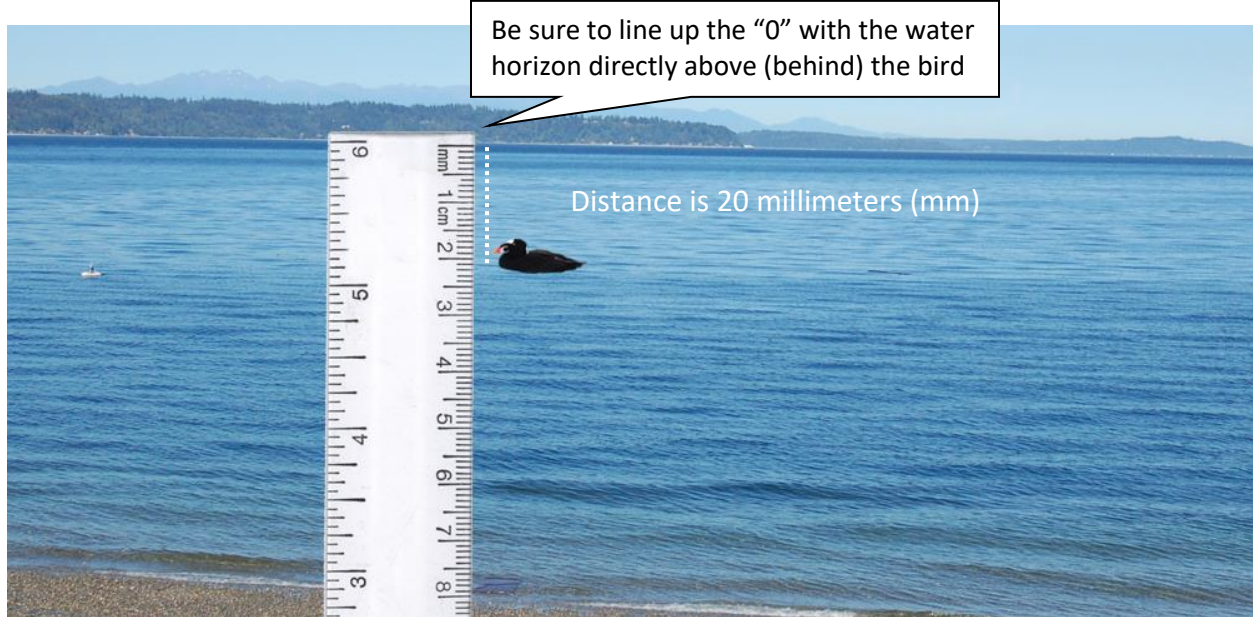
**Puget Sound Bird Observatory
PO Box 25072
Seattle, WA 98165**

SAFETY

The shoreline can contain dangerous habitats. Please take great care during your survey, especially in inclement weather. Please inform someone when you are counting coastal seabirds and your expected time home. Please wear the appropriate clothing, like warm layers and rain gear when needed. Puget Sound Bird Observatory cannot accept responsibility or liability for accidents during activities related to the Puget Sound Seabird Survey.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Measuring distance



Calculating "bearing"

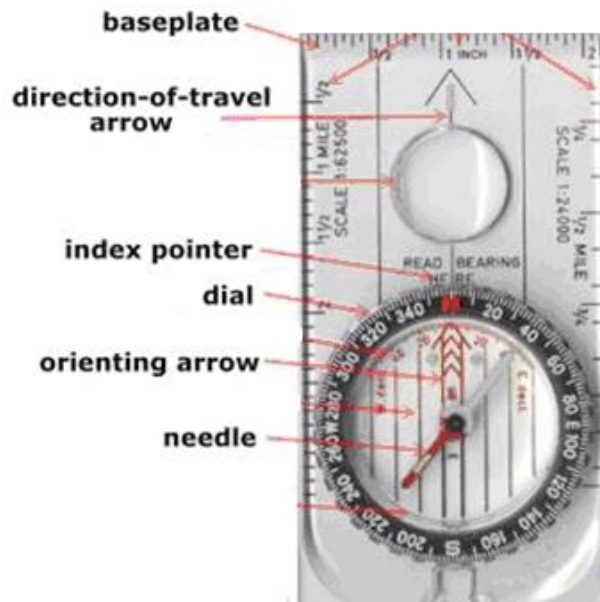


*PSSS compass (with Velcro strap provided in PSSS Survey Kit) can be attached to a spotting scope to accurately measure bearing to a bird. **Please read and record the bearing to which the red needle points.** NOTE: line-up "N" on compass bezel with forward pointing arrow and place on a level location on top of the scope. Compass can also be hand-held if surveyors do not use a scope but great care should be used to point the compass directly towards the bird.*

Calculating “bearing” *cont’d*

Please refer to image below for names of compass parts.

- 1) Make sure that the red "N" on the dial is aligned with 0° and the *index pointer*. The N must be aligned with the *index pointer* for all bearings you record.
- 2) Turn the entire compass (not the dial) until the *direction-of-travel arrow* points to the bird. Make sure to hold your compass steadily in your hand so the *baseplate* is level. [Scope users: please attach the compass on top of the scope - using the included elastic Velcro strap - with the *direction-of-travel arrow* pointing directly forward. Make sure the *baseplate* is level. Rotate the scope until the bird is directly in the middle of the view.]
- 3) Record the number on the dial to which the red *needle* points (*in the example below, you’d record 222°*).



Q: I am familiar with how to use a compass so why can't I just record the actual bearing to the bird?

A: This method was developed so that surveyors who use spotting scopes can have a “hands-free” method of measuring bearings. For those surveyors who do not use scopes, we request that you still use this method so that all data records are consistent. Handheld, this method is still easier than rotating the dial to measure the actual bearing with each observation.