OREGON BLACK OYSTERCATCHER PROJECT

The striking Black Oystercatcher is a unique shorebird that spends its entire life on marine shorelines. As a top predatory species in the intertidal zone they are an indicator of ecosystem health. Because of their small global population size (<11,000), low reproductive rate, and dependence on rocky shorelines, they are listed as a “species of high concern” in several conservation plans including the Oregon Nearshore Strategy.

Project Objectives:
- Estimate nesting success and disturbance to nests
- Estimate breeding population size and distribution along Oregon’s coastline (completed!)
- Use findings to inform best management practices
- Promote community engagement & awareness

EFFORTS FROM 2015 - 2020

- ~900 abundance surveys conducted from 2015-19
- Over 300 nests monitored
- Over 90 community scientists
- >2000 people engaged on-site

Survey Methods:
- Since 2020 we have focused solely on nest monitoring
- We estimate nest productivity based on proportion of nests that fledged at least one chick
- Disturbance at nest sites is quantified so we can understand how predators, humans, and pets may impact nesting success
500-600 oystercatchers make their home in Oregon during the breeding season (spring and summer).

The highest density of oystercatchers is on the South Coast.

On average about 1 chick per nest hatches and 0.5 chicks per nest make it to fledging (able to fly). Demographic studies suggest this productivity is likely enough to sustain the population.

Chicks are more likely to survive on nests on offshore islands.

Human disturbance of nesting sites appears highest on the North and Central coasts.

Most common documented nest disturbances in 2020: other bird species (28), rival oystercatchers (18), humans (5), river otter (2), drones (1).

In 2020, despite challenges with Covid-19, 84 nests were monitored - most since the project began!

Conservation impact of this project:

- Publishing findings and contributing data to conservation planning efforts (e.g. Rocky Habitat Management Strategy in Oregon)
- Better understanding of intertidal ecology (e.g. data is contributed to the Multi-agency Rocky Intertidal Network)
- Minimizing human disturbance through targeted signage and outreach
- Building support for coastal conservation

What are we learning?

Get involved! Contact Joe Liebezeit (jliebezeit@audubonportland.org)
To learn more about the Oregon Black Oystercatcher Project visit: https://audubonportland.org/issues/community-science