

Painted Bunting Breeding Survey

in the North Inlet-Winyah Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve

Spring 2023

This project is designed to gain an understanding of number of Painted Buntings that use the edges of the North Inlet marsh as nesting habitat during the breeding season. Point counts at 0.3-mile intervals along a prescribed route will be used to gather this information. A point count is a tally of birds detected by sight and/or sound from a single observer from a station for a specified period of time. Point counts for Painted Buntings were conducted during the 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2022 breeding seasons. The plan is to continue and expand this breeding bird survey so that changes in numbers over the years can be detected for this species of high concern in South Carolina.

Point Count Survey Information and Guidelines:

1. The survey points are marked with flagged wooden stakes on the left side of the roads at 0.3-mile intervals, starting with 0 (intersection of Crabhaul and 3rd Boundary Roads), and running along Marsh Road to Clambank Rd, terminating at Clambank Landing with mile marker 3.3. Station numbers should be recorded along with start times at each noted on the field data sheet. It is also important to complete the top portion of the data sheet with date, observer(s) and weather conditions.
2. All surveys should conclude no later than 10:00 am, preferably before 9:00 am. Completing the route with 5 minutes of listening at each of the 12 stations takes approximately 1.5 hours. Be careful driving on the dirt roads and try not to block access for others. There are safe pull-off areas close to many of the stations that you can use.
3. As you approach each station, note any Painted Buntings on the data form that you see or flush within 50 meters of the station stake. Once at the station, note the start time on the data sheet and begin listening and looking for Painted Buntings for a total of 5 minutes, making separate notations in the space for up to 3 minutes and the 3–5-minute period, and in the appropriate distance columns (0-50m and greater than 50 m.) During the listening period it is recommended that the observer turn and face different directions. Note that the same male may continue to sing during the entire 5-minute period so it counts as one bird. You can put it down for both time periods but make a note in the comments section if you think it was likely the same bird.
4. If more than one person is conducting the survey, it is helpful to have one listen very carefully and record observations while another keeps track of and communicates when the 3- and 5-minute times end. If teams are working together on several surveys during the season, for consistency, the same person should be designated to listen and record the Painted Bunting information.
5. At the conclusion of the survey, make a copy of the completed data sheet to leave it in Jen Plunket's mailbox at the Baruch Marine Field Laboratory. As soon as possible, enter the data in the online form at anecdata.org.