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## **Mass Audubon releases results of tern survey in Nantucket Sound**

The proposed wind farm on Horseshoe Shoals in Nantucket Sound would be the first off shore wind farm in North America and one of the largest in the world. Few if any data are available to assess the possible risks that this offshore wind farm may pose to birds using the Sound. The Massachusetts Audubon Society, and the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative (MTC) are supporting information gathering to assist the Army Corps of Engineers in their NEPA review of the Cape Wind project in an effort to help address this information gap.

Realizing the importance for gathering as much information as possible to assess the potential avian impacts of the wind farm's construction and deployment, MTC provided funding to enable Mass Audubon to survey the Sound and its tern populations beginning in August of 2002. Now gearing up for the next year of surveys, Mass Audubon has just released their report summarizing findings from surveys conducted in late Spring 2003.

The data from Mass Audubon's boat and aerial surveys in 2003 suggest that terns are not as abundant in Horseshoe Shoals as compared to the rest of Nantucket Sound and the number of terns using Horseshoe Shoals was highest in mid-May and was lower in June and July. Their results suggests that the Shoals is more important as a stopover point or "refueling" area for terns migrating through Massachusetts, than as a feeding area for locally nesting terns. Perkins is quick to add, however, that this information is from only one year and is not definitive. Because bird behavior can change from year to year, it is vital to evaluate the use of the Sound over at least three years.

"Our main objective," explains Simon Perkins, field ornithologist with Mass Audubon, "is to estimate the abundance and distribution of common and roseate terns on Horseshoe Shoals within the breeding season." By monitoring the birds' behavior, such as feeding habits and flight patterns, the organization hopes to determine how and when these birds use the Sound and the nature of any impacts a wind farm could have on avian populations.

Between May 15 and July 31, 2003, Mass Audubon conducted thirteen boat surveys on Horseshoe Shoals and three aerial surveys across a broader area over Nantucket Sound. The boat surveys were designed to assess the use of the Shoals by newly arrived migrant terns and resident terns foraging from their

colonies. The aerial surveys provided an overview of the distribution of terns within the sample area of Nantucket Sound on a given day. "Our focus was on two tern species in particular—the Roseate and the Common. We looked at the Roseate Tern because approximately 50 percent of the North American population of this federally endangered species breeds within Buzzards Bay. The Common Tern was studied because of the large populations in the area—in 2003, approximately 10,000 pairs of common terns nested at Monomoy Island NWR, Chatham.

The Massachusetts Technology Collaborative has committed funding the tern surveys through the fall of 2004 in accordance with the anticipated completion of the Cape Wind Draft Environmental Impact Statement that is being coordinated by the Army Corps of Engineers New England Division.

"The second year of the study will be completed this spring," Perkins says. By beginning a bit earlier this year, Mass Audubon hopes to expand the survey time and gain additional information on the use of Horseshoe Shoals by migrating terns. "We also plan to increase the number of aerial surveys this year."

Ultimately, Mass Audubon hopes that this survey, in conjunction with other important studies they are conducting, such as how the area is used by wintering sea ducks, will provide a clear and nonbiased evaluation of the avian activity in and around the site of the proposed wind farm. "I think the work we are doing here," says Perkins, "is very important, not only because of the data it will provide, but also because the Cape Wind project has become the test case in North America for off shore wind power and all eyes are upon it. We hope our work will serve as an example of the environmental assessment standards that should be adhered to whenever and wherever projects like this are being considered. Whatever the outcome, we want to make sure that the decision on the proposed wind farm is based on the best available scientific research and evidence."

Funding has also been provided by the Island Foundation and Foundation M.

The Massachusetts Audubon Society is the largest conservation organization in New England, concentrating its efforts on protecting the nature of Massachusetts for people and wildlife. Mass Audubon protects more than 30,000 acres of conservation land, conducts educational programs for 250,000 children and adults annually, and advocates for sound environmental policies at the local, state, and federal levels. Established in 1896 and supported by 68,000 member households, Mass Audubon maintains 43 wildlife sanctuaries that are open to the public and serve as the base for its conservation, education, and advocacy work across the state. For more information or to become a member, call 800-AUDUBON (283-8266) or visit [www.massaudubon.org](http://www.massaudubon.org).