



# Oystercatchers at Risk



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# What is an Oystercatcher?



- A large black, brown, and white shorebird with an orange bill
  - Shorebird = birds commonly found along sandy or rocky shorelines, mudflats, and shallow waters





# Where Do They Live?

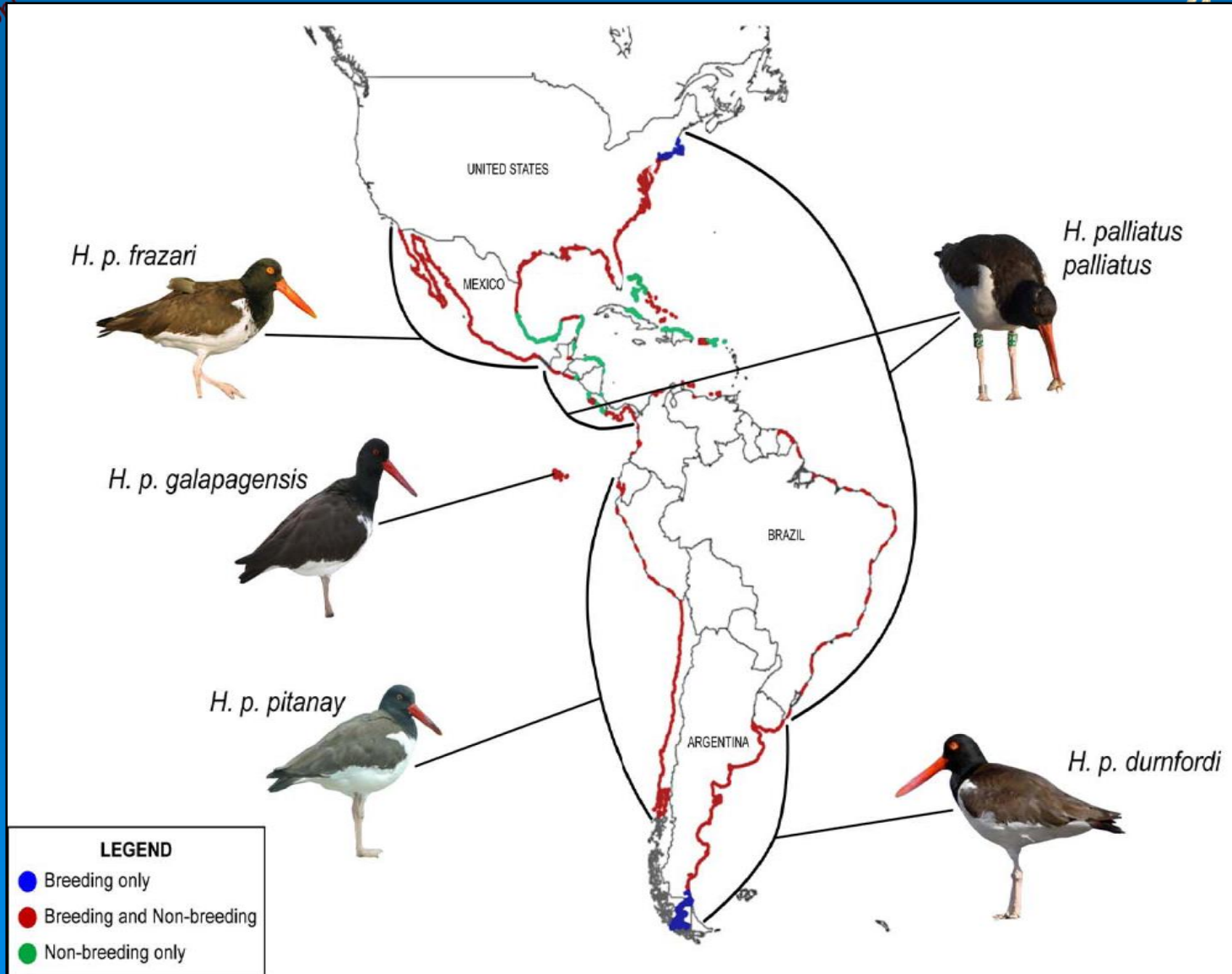


Can only live in the coastal zone (salt water but not off shore)





# Where Do They Live?



## LEGEND

- Breeding only
- Breeding and Non-breeding
- Non-breeding only





# Where Do They Nest?



- Texas oystercatchers nest on bay islands
- On the ground in shelly substrates
- The “nest” is just a scraped out bowl in the shell
- They lay 1-3 eggs
- Male and female incubate
- Eggs hatch in 26-28 days
- Chicks are precocial







# Typical Nest Site



















# How Many Are There?



- Total population about 43,000 individuals
- *H. p. palliatus* (ours) is about 20,000 individuals
- Estimated to be 11,000 in U.S.
  - app. 700 on the Gulf Coast (excluding Florida)
  - app. 500 in Texas, 150 in Louisiana







# Why Are They Important?



- Keystone species at top of marine food web
- Indicator of the health of oyster reefs
- Oysters are extremely important to marine systems
- Serve as surrogate species for many others





# What Are The Threats?



- Low population size
- Confined to the coastal zone
- Low reproductive success
  - hatching success = .30 to .50
  - fledging success = .30 to .50
  - adult survivorship = .50 to .90
- Delayed breeding (3+ years)







# Natural Threats

## Predators



2011-05-09 22:57:27 M 4/5 78°F



WWW.RECONYX.COM

2011-04-24 23:34:28 T 76°F



WWW.RECONYX.COM



# Natural Threats

## Non-native predators







# Natural Threats Overwash



Regular tide

20 knot south wind







# Natural Threats

## Starvation



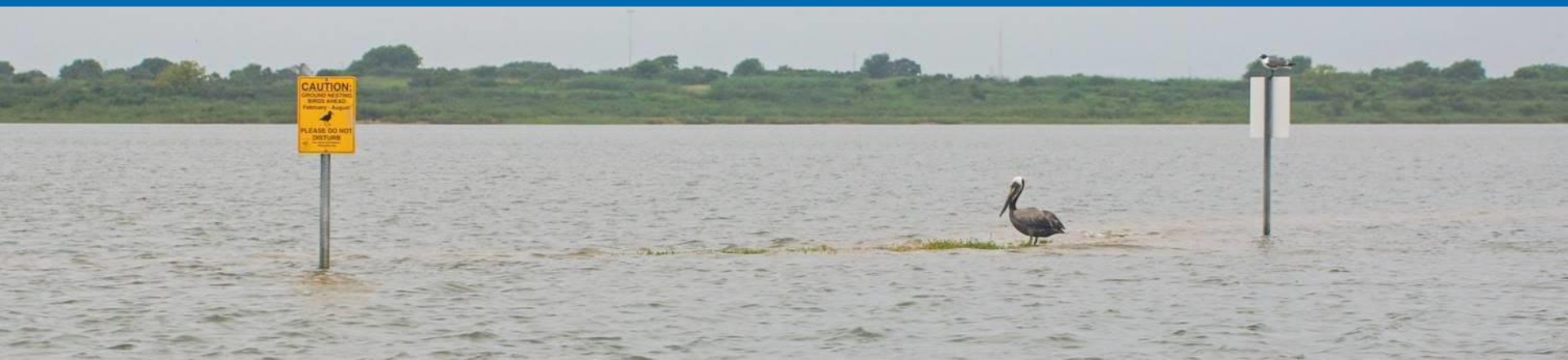




# Natural Threats Erosion



Island Erosion Rates from 2009 to 2015			
West Galveston Bay		Jones Bay	
Island	% Loss	Island	% Loss
Jigsaw	-45.05	N. Fat Boys	-58.62
Struve Luci	-36.20	S. Fat Boys	-38.64
Marker 52	-11.10		
South Deer	-10.44		





# Human Disturbance







# Human Refuse







# Results of Nine Field Seasons



- First nest found in January/February
- Last nest found in June
- Last chicks fledged in July/August
- Percent nests fledging chicks 8 - 62%
- Productivity range .14 - .78
- Many pairs remain on territory year round
- Males rarely switch territories, but females often switch mates





# Nest Locations

Small islands/spits not connected to mainland

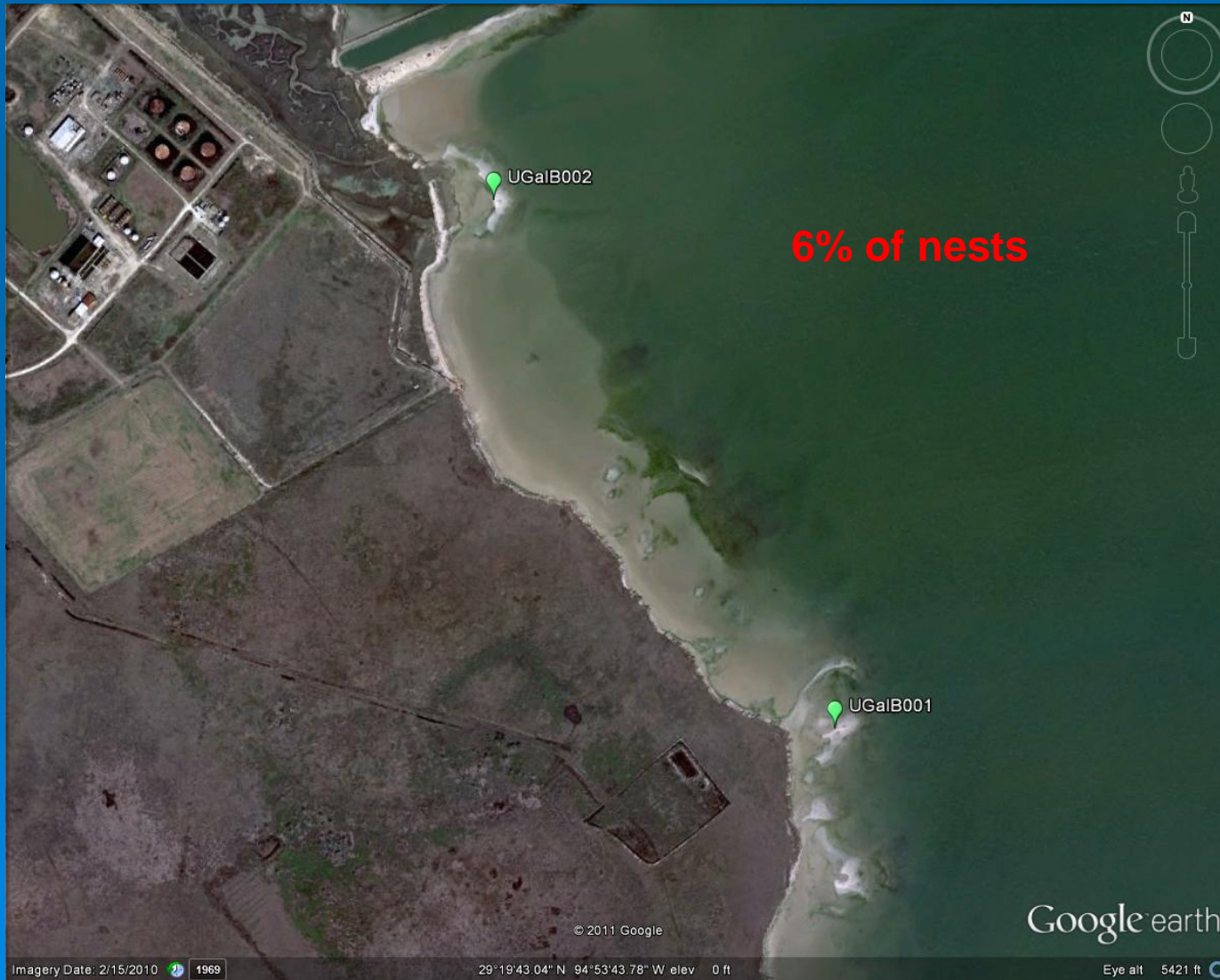






# Nest Locations

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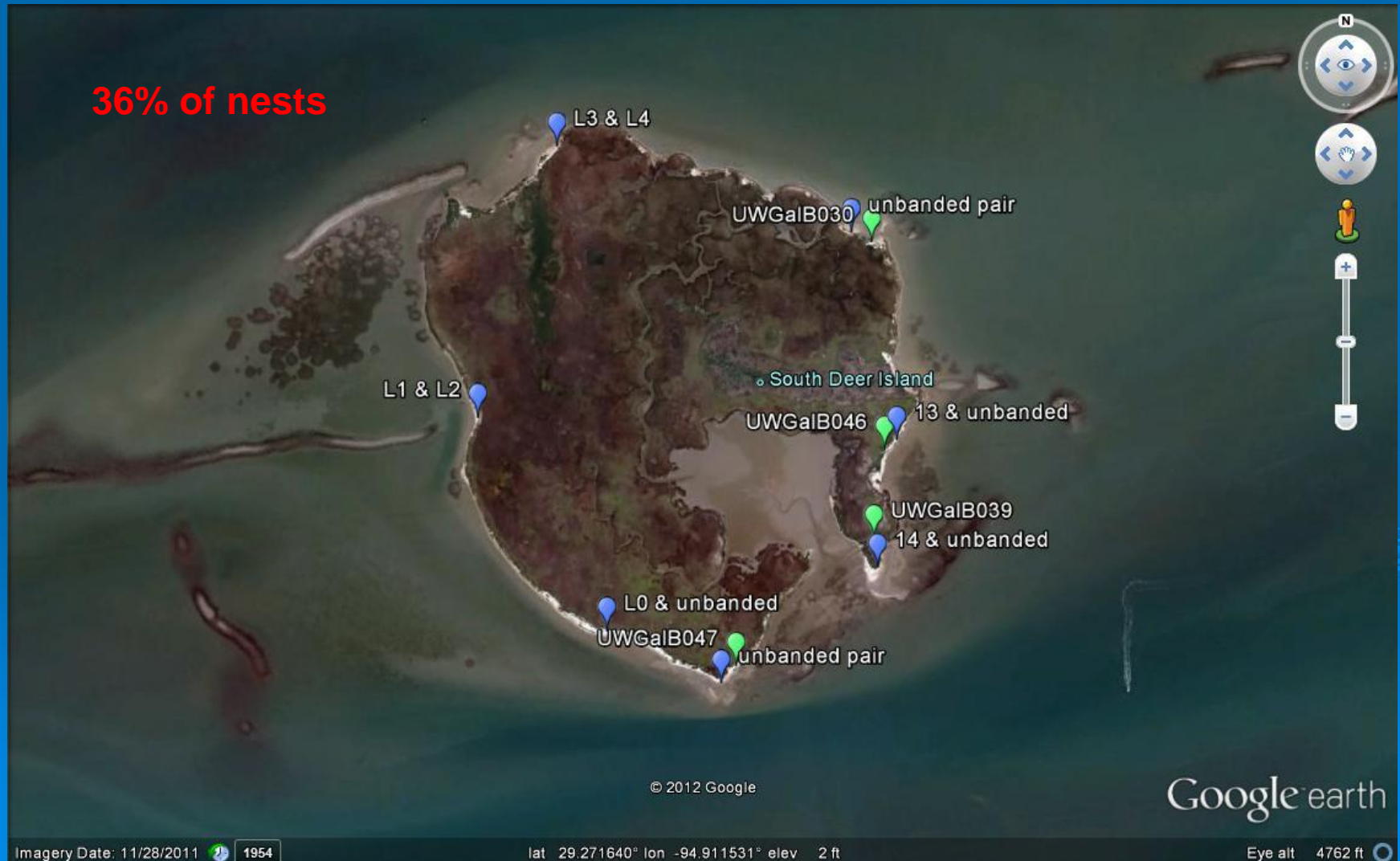


# Nest Locations

## Large Islands



36% of nests







# Nest Locations

## Mainland





# Signs



## CAUTION: NESTING BIRDS AHEAD

**It is a violation of state and federal laws to disturb nesting birds**

"U.S. Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 and Parks and Wildlife Code 64.002.(2)(1,2,3)"

**Violators will be prosecuted**

**Nesting season:  
February - August**

**To report violators call  
Texas Parks & Wildlife  
1-800-792-4263**



American Oystercatcher



Reddish Egret



Least Tern



Black Skimmer



## CAUTION:

**GROUND NESTING  
BIRDS AHEAD**

**February - August**



**PLEASE DO NOT  
DISTURB**

**For more information:  
[www.gcbo.org](http://www.gcbo.org)**



24 x 36

18 x 24





# What About the Future?



## Habitat, Habitat, Habitat!

- We are working with a number of agencies to create new oystercatcher nesting habitat
  - Galveston Bay Area Master Naturalists
  - Galveston Bay Foundation
  - Texas Parks and Wildlife
  - US Fish and Wildlife Service



# Major Sponsors



## Partners



## Supporting Organizations







# Questions?

