

2012 MOPL Tracking Protocol

The goal of tracking MOPL is to determine chick survival rates through 35 days post-hatch in different habitats.

Broods should be tracked ~ every 48 hours. The main goal is to count chicks; therefore, every effort must be made to spot chicks with the transmittered adult without disturbing them. They will hide.

Ideal weather conditions include temperatures ≤ 80 degrees (26.7 C), winds ≤ 20 mph (32.2 kph), and no rain. Attempts can be made in less than ideal conditions if necessary. Tracking can be done in early morning, evening, and cooler conditions than are ideal for nest marking.

Once you are close to the brood, do not spend more than 30 minutes tracking it - avoid over-heating MOPL and creating anxiety. If other nests need to be tracked, or it is becoming late in the day, do not spend more than one hour attempting to track a brood.

Take with you into the field:

- Past tracking datasheets with frequency, band code, and previous locations recorded
- Nest sheets and/or maps, if needed
- Receiver, antenna, headphones
- Spotting scope, binoculars
- Nest marking equipment, in case a new nest is found

Protocol:

1. Locate the adult's signal by tuning the receiver to its frequency and listening from a high point near the last known brood location. You may need to stand up in the back of the pickup truck or on the ATV and raise the antenna above your head, rotating it in all directions. Headphones will be helpful in the wind. Anything disrupting line of sight may also disrupt the signal (e.g., rolling landscape, dense crops).
2. Once the signal is found, try to triangulate the location of the brood from a distance. Avoid pushing or alarming the adult. Stay out of the adult's comfort zone. Stay on ATV or vehicle when possible (birds become more spooked by humans on foot). Always use the spotting scope and watch for movement from a distance. In pinpointing a specific location, it may be helpful to tune the receiver above or below the signal by 1 or 2 units, adjust the volume and/or the RF gain.
3. Once the brood has been located and chicks counted, record the time, your UTM, estimated distance and compass bearing from you to the brood, and habitat type, estimated vegetation height, and estimated % bare ground being used by the brood. After moving away from the brood (avoiding disturbance), complete the rest of the datasheet. Record the date, TRS QS, any recent farm activities or weather events, weather information, and status of the brood/transmitter (e.g., active nest, active brood, transmitter dropped, could not locate).