






Always Question the Data posted by [Mike Berry](#)

On an earlier posting readers were directed to a information piece provided by the Southern Environmental Law Center explaining the reason for their current litigation. <http://www.southernenvironment.org/cases/hatteras/index.htm>
At that site SELC makes the following science based statement that they have given to the court, the media and general public time and again over the past number of months: "In addition to fishermen, daily beach goers are using their trucks and SUVs for convenient beach access. In their path are nests of shorebirds like the threatened piping plover and loggerhead turtle whose existence on the Seashore is imperiled by hundreds of vehicles per day. As a result, these species are declining at a rapid pace."

When I go to the "these species are declining" page intended to scientifically support the claim of species loss, http://www.southernenvironment.org/cases/hatteras/bird_decline.htm

I find a table showing photographs of beautiful birds and three columns of numbers that indicate what I can only describe as a "horrific" decline of birds.

| Bird | Population in 1995 | Population in 2007 | Percent decline |
|--|--------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
|  Gull-billed tern | 108 | 0 | 100% |
|  Black Skimmer | 454 | 0 | 100% |
|  Common tern | 739 | 18 | 97% |
|  Least tern | 464 | 194 | 58% |
|  American Oystercatcher | 41* | 20-22 breeding pairs | 49% |

The table is designed to be disturbing but to me as a scientist the table is highly questionable and misleading. Species populations do not disappear that way. I suspect/hypothesize there is something seriously wrong with this information as presented. And I am more disturbed that, without clear explanation and verification, the data are being accepted at face value by much of environmentally concerned public and government bodies such as the court.

For this data and these claims to be judged valid they need to be explained and to pass the normal test of scientific review.

Given the potential beach access loss to the public resulting from this disturbing data, the Southern Environmental Law Center, who is publishing this information, owes it to the public to answer the following questions:

1. Who is the specific author of this table bird population decline? What is their area of expertise?
2. Show us the raw or original data used to create this table?
3. From what studies were the numbers in this table taken?
4. Were the studies on which the table based peer reviewed or published? By whom?
5. What protocol was used to collect the data?
6. Where and when were the data collected ?
7. What quality control system and statistical analysis process was used in data collection?
8. Show trends: What were the observed population counts for 1996, 1997, 1998,1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006
9. Where is the loggerhead turtle and piping plover data?

Unless these questions can be answered sufficiently, claims of species loss related to ORV traffic based on this table should cease.

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