

Masonboro Island End of Nesting Season

Masonboro Island Reserve's summer volunteers gathered at the UNC Wilmington Center for Marine Science October 8th to learn about the results of their hard work. At the "End of Nesting Season Update," audience members learned about the summer's challenges and successes, and found out just how many of the protected sea turtle and shorebird eggs hatched and survived.

Overall, volunteers at the Masonboro Island Reserve logged over 1,000 hours this season, providing vital support to sea turtle monitoring, shorebird nest enclosure monitoring, and the inaugural Terrapin Tally citizen science program.



Green sea turtle hatchling, photo by Brooke Milligan

Sea turtle nesting season is not completely over, but visitors heard an update on nest data to date. So far, 15 nests have hatched on the Masonboro Island Reserve, with several more anticipated. One especially exciting fact about the 2014 nesting season is that no nests showed signs of predation from foxes, raccoons, or ghost crabs. Visitors also heard about some of the summer's special visitors, such as Junebug, the three-legged turtle that needed human help to dig her nest.



American oystercatcher chick

American oystercatchers, a shorebird of special concern, were another species closely monitored this summer. Masonboro Island Reserve provides nesting habitat for nearly 10% of the oystercatchers in North Carolina. Nests on the Reserve had a hatching success rate of 19.1%, consistent with hatching success across the state. Volunteers provided valuable help in setting up and maintaining nest site enclosures across the island.

The Terrapin Tally, designed to provide baseline data for future monitoring efforts, documented 144 terrapins across two days. Data from the tally showed several terrapin "hot spots" that are good candidate sites for future monitoring. Observers also learned the extent to which weather conditions, such as wind speed and tidal flow, affect terrapin observations.

This fall, the North Carolina Coastal Reserve staff will continue to host evening educational programs at the Center for Marine Science. The next program is Wednesday, November 5th; come learn about "Blue Crab Basics and Beyond" with guest speakers from UNC Wilmington and the Seaview Crab Company.