

# Sea Turtle Monitoring at Masonboro Island Reserve

The 2015 sea turtle nesting season is finally winding down. Throughout the course of the summer, staff would rise with the sun a few days every week to walk the entirety of Masonboro Island in search of sea turtle nests. Altogether, staff, interns, and volunteers discovered 17 sea turtle nests on the island this year; 15 loggerhead sea turtle and two green sea turtle. Of those 17 nests, 13 hatched. The most recent nest at Masonboro was discovered on August 6th, but hatching is still underway. Success rates have been good overall, with the biggest and most successful nest having 144 loggerhead hatchlings. Excavations will continue into October as hatchlings mature and head to the sea.



Reserve staff monitor sea turtle nests at Masonboro Island Reserve

This time of year also means saying goodbye to all our summer staff and interns who so diligently monitored and protected the nests all summer. When asked about their experience, two interns shared the following thoughts:



Erica Malpass, Sea Turtle Assistant, excavates a loggerhead nest at Masonboro Island Reserve

*"This internship has been one of the most fulfilling opportunities of my life. Being able to be out on Masonboro at least twice a week learning how to apply field research on real life issues, such as the protection of sea turtle nests, was an extraordinary experience. I was able to learn more about sea turtle nesting patterns, differences between their tracks, and how to correctly identify and protect them. I learned how to use the GPS to track where the nests were, how to identify signs of predation, and how to properly take an egg sample for future genetic testing to better understand female preferences on where they will lay their eggs. This internship has made me realize my passion for conservation and research and is an experience I will never forget!"*

- Mackenzie Todd, Sea Turtle Monitoring Intern

*"I feel so incredibly honored to have interned with the N.C. Coastal Reserve for the sea turtle monitoring program on Masonboro Island this summer. I have always been fascinated with sea turtles, but actually being able to see their nests up close and ensure they are protected made it something else entirely. One experience that stands out is when Becah and I were excavating a nest on the last day of my internship and we were able to rescue a hatchling that hadn't made it out with the others. Its front left flipper was slightly*



A loggerhead hatchling makes its way to the Atlantic Ocean.

*deformed, but it didn't stop the turtle - it was determined to make it out to sea and it did! Just knowing that I've been a part in helping these endangered creatures have a chance to survive is amazing. Not to mention, all the other staff and interns also contributed to my wonderful experience as an intern."*

- Rachel Shoemaker, Sea Turtle Monitoring Intern



*A loggerhead hatchling finds its way to the Atlantic Ocean.*

On behalf of the Reserve staff, we'd like to thank Erica Malpass, Anna Robuck, Tara Early, Becah Delp, Mark Winneberger, Rachel Shoemaker, and Mackenzie Todd for their help during nesting season. We wish them luck with their next adventures! We'd also like to thank the many volunteers who joined us on our monitoring walks each morning.

If you want to learn more about results from nesting season, please join us October 22 for a presentation on the 2015 nesting season to be held at the UNCW Center for Marine Science from 6:30 – 7 p.m.