

TERN TRACKS

Newsletter of The Environmental Resources Network, Inc. (TERN) ~ www.tern.homestead.com

Summer 2015

Mid-season Loggerhead Sea Turtle Update for Georgia's Coast

Mark Dodd, NCS sea turtle program coordinator

July 8, 2015 — We are now approximately two weeks past the halfway point in the sea turtle nesting season, and the total number of nests suggest we are well on our way to another statewide nesting record. Below is a summary of loggerhead nesting in Georgia relative to past years through 5 July:

Year	Nests through 5 July	Total Nesting
2015	1,764	?
2014	768	1,201
2013	1,480	2,289
2012	1,514	2,241
2011	1,529	1,992
2010	1,190	1,760

Based on the mid-season total, we predict 2,500—2,800 loggerhead nests on Georgia beaches in 2015. The final number will depend on how strongly they finish up the season. In some years, nesting begins to decline significantly in the 3rd week in July. However, we have had seasons where nesting remained high through early August (2013). Regardless, this is a big year for us; one that is difficult to contemplate if you were on the beach in 2004 with less than 400 nests in the state.



In other important news, hatching season has officially begun in Georgia. We had our first nest hatch the night of July 5th on Ossabaw Island.

In other news, shrimp trawling season opened in state territorial waters on June 16. Trawler mortality is a major threat to the recovery of loggerhead populations. We documented a total of 135 shrimp trawlers during our aerial survey on opening day. This is slightly below the average of 146 trawlers over the last 16 years. Trawling effort was relatively evenly spread across the coast with the highest concentration of boats off Cumberland Island (n=36). The general fishing pattern was consistent with past years where trawlers made a couple drags along the beach without much success and moved back offshore within a day or two.

Sea turtle strandings were average for the week following the opening of shrimp season (n=10) with no large scale mortality event as we have seen in the past (35-40 strandings/week). We have only documented one nesting female mortality this summer (St. Catherines) which was prior to the opening of shrimping in state waters. Based on boarding data from Georgia DNR law enforcement, Turtle Excluder Device compliance has been relatively high this spring. Overall, the sea turtle nesting season is going very well with high nesting numbers and low mortality rates.

Biologists urge the public to assist in conserving loggerheads and other sea turtles. The following are some tips on what you can do to help protect Georgia's sea turtles:

- Do not use lights on the beach at night.
- Never disturb a sea turtle that is crawling to or from the sea.
- Once a sea turtle has begun nesting, observe her only from a distance.
- Do not shine lights in a sea turtles eyes or take flash photography.
- Do not touch or disturb nests or hatchlings.

To report a dead or injured turtle, or sea turtle harassment, call 1-800-2-SAVE-ME. (If the sea turtle is tagged, please include the tag color and number in the report if possible.)

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T.E.R.N.

The Environmental Resources Network

Friends of Georgia's Nongame Conservation Section

The Environmental Resources Network, Inc. (TERN) is the official friends group of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources' Nongame Conservation Section. Contributions made to TERN go directly to help fund important nongame plant and animal projects conducted in Georgia.

www.tern.homestead.com

President's Corner

This year's annual meeting at Eva Persons farm in Forsyth was a great gathering of TERN members to elect officers and welcome new board members Kim Kilgore and Joey Slaughter. We all extend our appreciation to past president Brock Hutchins for his many years of service leading TERN. Our board is committed to furthering the accomplishments that TERN has delivered over the years in supporting the Georgia DNR Nongame Conservation Section. We invite all of you as members to volunteer on the many projects that TERN supports, and you may contact Wanda Granitz, (478) 361-8144, for further information.

As you read this issue of our newsletter, I hope you will enjoy learning about the various projects that TERN supports. Our DNR – Nongame Conservation Section is doing a wonderful job looking after and enhancing our natural resources.

Thank you for your support,
Brooks Schoen
President

TERN Funded Project Update

Rusty Garrison, Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center program manager

Camp TALON 2015 was held the first week of June and this year's camp was the most successful since its inception in 2009. We had an overwhelming response from prospective campers, and for the first time, a waiting list. A total of fifteen campers attended ranging from ages 12 to 18 years. Six were new to the camp and eight were returning campers. One camper joined us on scholarship from Apalachee Audubon of Tallahassee, Florida. Two returning campers served as TALON interns, and did an excellent job.

This year's itinerary included field trips to Gould's Inlet (St. Simons), Little St. Simons Island, Altamaha WMA, Wassaw Island NWR, Jekyll Island, Sapelo Island, and Harris Neck NWR.

Once again, we used Epworth by the Sea on St. Simons Island as our base camp. Julie Duncan served as camp director, health supervisor and environmental educator. Wildlife biologist, Dr. Bob Sargent (GOS) organized all field trips, speakers, naturalists and guest educators for each location. He also taught evening classes specific to bird identification, songs/calls, migration and flight.

On the last night, campers took a written and bird song identification test, and submitted their journals for evaluation. Top scoring new and returning campers received their choice of a new pair of binoculars, manuals, guides, or birding CD/DVDs. Everyone went home with a prize to help them enjoy and continue their birding, wildlife, and ecology education.

Message from NCS Program Manager

Jim Ozier, program manager, NCS Forsyth office

Like many of you, I eagerly await migration season for the characteristic flush of bird activity. Living tides of our summer resident birds ebb southward in the fall to be replaced by our cold season contingent. And the flow reverses and re-establishes in the spring. Probably the migration spectacle I most anticipate is the transient passage of sandhill cranes, whose origin and destination lie beyond my horizons, allowing only opportune moments for appreciation. Not many noisy flocks pass within my view that don't entice me to pause and pretend to be among them, measuring the timeless through an ever-changing landscape. Cranes seem to be somewhat whimsical in many aspects of their behavior, but they are organized and purposeful in migration – their very survival depends upon them making these arduous annual trips accurately and on schedule. They are in constant communication, and each member of the flock exerts leadership from the point position for a term, then gets a chance to rest as another cycles to the front.

As with cranes on a journey, an active, successful organization is best served through periodic rotation of leadership. Brock Hutchins has served faithfully as TERN's president for the past several years, and under his guidance TERN continued to raise much-needed funds to support priority NCS projects, ultimately surpassing the milestone million dollar mark! Now, like those that preceded him, Brock is stepping aside and giving someone else an opportunity to keep moving TERN forward. I'm sure I speak for everyone in sincerely thanking Brock for his service and leadership; and we look forward to his continuing service on the TERN board.

Brooks Schoen, longtime TERN board member, has accepted the torch and begins his term as TERN president. Brooks has always been very active in his role as a board member, and was recently instrumental in prompting critical legislative action to improve the fee dispersal structure for the wildlife license plates. Again, I'm sure I speak for all in wishing Brooks the best in his new leadership position. TERN is fortunate to have individuals like Brooks and Brock to propel the flock onward, and I look forward to continuing to work with both of these fine gentlemen to enhance Georgia wildlife conservation efforts through TERN!



At the May 16 annual TERN membership meeting, Brock Hutchins was awarded artwork by coastal Georgia artist Lydia Thompson from chair of the nominating committee, Stacia Hendricks, for leadership as TERN president for six years. Brock, all of your TERN friends thank you for your service!

Also, Atlanta Magazine recently named TERN board member Stacia Hendricks one of the "Secrets of the Georgia Coast." Congratulations Stacia!

TERN has benefited greatly because of these two members efforts.

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Friends of Georgia's Nongame Conservation Section

TERN is a 501 (C)(3) corporation. All donations to TERN are 100% tax-deductible.

Save the Date!

**Weekend for Wildlife
Sea Island, Georgia
January 29-30, 2016**

*Visit www.weekendforwildlife.com
this fall for registration and event details*