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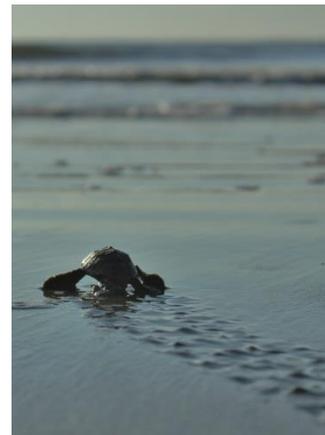
Sea Turtle Activity on Wassaw NWR

Reported by Kris Williams

GREAT year for loggerhead sea turtle (*Caretta caretta*) nesting in Georgia! As of August 19, GA has recorded 2,274 loggerhead, only 17 nests from the record set in 2013 (2,291)! Wassaw NWR is also having a great year, documenting 217 nests, making it our second highest year recorded since 1973. At least 105 individual turtles have been identified on Wassaw, and 70% are new turtles who have never been tagged before. Additionally, four of the turtles have nesting histories that started back in 1996! Ninety-seven of the nests have emerged to date, releasing over 7,000 hatchlings into the water.



The *Caretta* Research Project (CRP), a hands-on research, conservation and education program that has been protecting the threatened Loggerhead sea turtles that nest on Wassaw NWR, is currently in its 43rd season! The CRP began in 1973 as a cooperative effort between the Savannah Science Museum, the USFWS Savannah Coastal Refuges, the Wassaw Island Trust, and is one of the longest continually running saturation-tagging programs in the world. The primary goals of the CRP are to: (1) conduct research on the population trends and nesting biology of loggerhead turtles, (2) protect and monitor loggerhead turtle eggs and hatchlings, and (3) educate and involve the public in research and conservation efforts of the loggerhead turtle.



The longevity of the CRP is critical to long-term preservation and management of loggerhead turtles in the Northwest Atlantic Ocean. Because loggerhead turtles can take 25-35 years to

reach sexual maturity, only long-term projects – like the CRP – are capable of thoroughly assessing the conservation status of this threatened species. For this reason, the long-term dataset amassed by the CRP was recently sought out and utilized by government agencies during the development of the Loggerhead Recovery Plan drafted in 2009. The enduring commitment of CRP staff, volunteers, and supporters has helped managers critically evaluate the status of this population and implement conservation measures to ensure the long-term preservation of these amazing creatures.

The CRP also has a longstanding commitment to education and community involvement. People from all over the world have participated on the project, and our mission to involve volunteers in all research activities is truly unique among other research projects. We encourage full participation of volunteers in nightly beach patrols, nest protection, and data collection, and we train volunteers as potential scientists. Such community involvement is critical for increasing public awareness and appreciation of the value of scientific research in conservation and management. CRP volunteers are also directly involved with saving sea turtles by protecting eggs and hatchlings that would otherwise have been lost to erosion or predation. Lastly, but mostly importantly, CRP volunteers return to their hometowns all over the world with the knowledge and experience to be ambassadors for the plight of our world's sea turtles.

After 43 years, the CRP has tagged 1,491 turtles, protected nearly 3,700 nests containing about 420,000 eggs, involved and educated over 3,000 volunteers, trained 22 interns who have gone on to other environmental/educational careers, and published more than 50 scientific papers in collaboration with innumerable academic institutions.

We will start to take reservations for the 2016 season in December. If you are interested in participating on the project or in being a boat captain to help transport people and gear to and from Wassaw throughout the summer, please contact Kris Williams at wassawcrp@aol.com.