FALL 2018

News and Appreciation from

CARETTA RESEARCH PROJECT

Caretta Research Project

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Calm before the storm

In the midst of another threatening hurricane season, you might think 'calm before the storm' refers to inclement weather. Instead, we're referring to the relatively low nesting season experienced on Wassaw this year and the prospects of a very busy 2019.

Nesting on Wassaw began on May 12th, just a few days behind the first nest in Georgia on Cumberland. Nesting concluded on August 13th with 153 nests in total. Although quite a bit higher than our 46-year average (~96 nests per season), this was 100 nests less than 2017 and 180 nests less than 2016. Not to worry! Because sea turtles tend to nest every 2-4 years – not every year – we expect occasional low turnouts, especially after two record-setting seasons. For this same reason, we are excited to see if the relative 'calm' of 2018 will be followed by a turtle 'storm' in 2019!

Wassaw welcomed 67 nesting turtles this year: 39 were new recruits to the nesting population, 23 were remigrants originally tagged on Wassaw in previous seasons, five were immigrants from other islands, and three were CRP's beloved Adopt-A-Turtles. All-in-all these turtles deposited 15,689 eggs, leading to the successful emergence of 7,877 hatchlings!



We are sincerely grateful for the XX dedicated volunteers that braved the elements this season and helped collect these important data.

Participate in 2019

Early registration to volunteer on the CRP will open for 2 weeks in December. Regular registration will open on Tuesday, January 1st. There are 102 available spots and they fill-up quick, so don't miss out this year! Please refer to our Facebook page or website for further information.

CALL (912-704-9323) or EMAIL (WassawCRP@aol.com) to reserve your spot on Wassaw and help study and protect loggerhead sea turtles!

BACKGROUND

Mission

It is the mission of the Caretta Research Project to ensure the long-term protection and full recovery of the Northwest Atlantic loggerhead population and the ecological roles that it plays through research, conservation and education.

Brief History

Stimulated by a noticeable decline in sea turtle populations, a trilateral collaboration between the Savannah Science Museum, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Wassaw Island Trust founded the Caretta Research Project (CRP) in 1972. Starting in 1973, CRP began monitoring the loggerhead sea turtle population nesting on Wassaw Island by marking individuals. Shortly thereafter, rigorous nest protection procedures were implemented to maximize hatchling production and bolster the population into the future.

Education and public participation have been at the heart of CRP from its origin. CRP established one of the nation's first "eco-vacations" available to the public. For over 40 years, participants have traveled to Wassaw to help patrol the beach in search of nesting turtles and protect their vulnerable nests. In turn, CRP strives to foster unique experiences that empower participants with knowledge and experiences that allow them to become ambassadors for the plight of the world's sea turtles.



Major Accomplishments Since 1973

- Helped produce an 8-fold increase in loggerhead nesting on Wassaw Island National Wildlife Refuge.
- Marked and studied 1,749 individual turtles throughout their reproductive lives.
- Protected and monitored 4,287 nests, leading to the successful release of 302,895 hatchlings.
- Involved 3,500 people from 44 different states and 6 different countries in hands-on sea turtle research and conservation.
- Provided data, support and infrastructure for conducting scientific research on sea turtles, leading to the production of 45 scientific publications and 25 research presentations.
- Trained 23 interns that have subsequently pursued careers in biology, environmental science and education.
- Connected more than 300 people with the lives of nesting turtles through the Adopt-A-Turtle program.

Caretta Research Project operates as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization under Savannah Science Museum, Inc.

Thank you to our Partners!

The following organizations help Caretta Research Project pursue its mission

US Fish & Wildlife Service

Georgia Department of Natural Resources
&
Georgia Sea Turtle Cooperative

The Nature Conservancy

Brewer Marketing Group

Your Wedding Film
by David Troth Wright

Ms. Mallory Adventures

University of Georgia Marine Extension & Sea Grant

100 Miles

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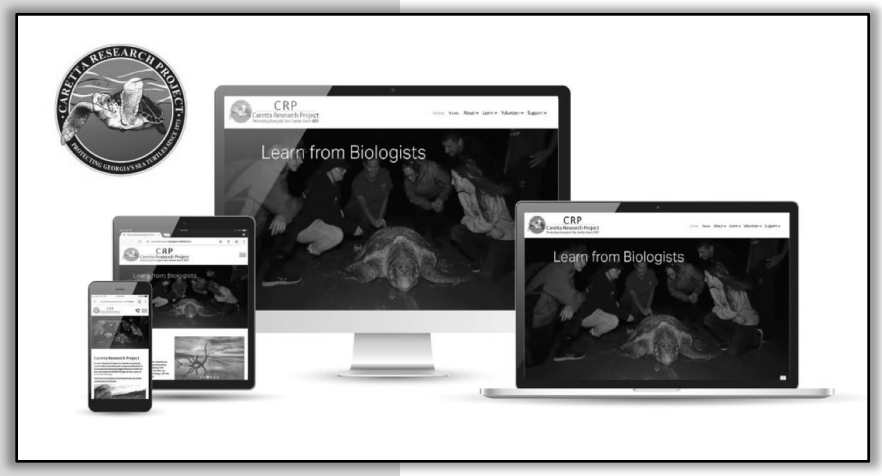
Caretta Research Project Launches New Website

Greater accessibility on more devices, expanded content, and a more complete and visually exciting experience

In August 2018, CRP launched a new website, which features our new promotional video created by long-time CRP volunteer and videographer David Troth Wright

The Staff and Board of Caretta Research Project were excited to announce the launch of our new website in August. Like our previous site, this is your one-stop-shop for all things CRP, but with a number of exciting new features. Teaming up with Brewer Marketing Group, a Low Country-based marketing firm, CRP sought to develop a new website to achieve three main goals. First, we wanted to increase the find-ability of CRP online and the accessibility of our website once found. Second, we wanted to expand and reorganize the content of our website to display a more complete picture of CRP and increase functionality. Last, we wanted to present a more visually exciting online experience, especially for those visiting the project website for the first time.



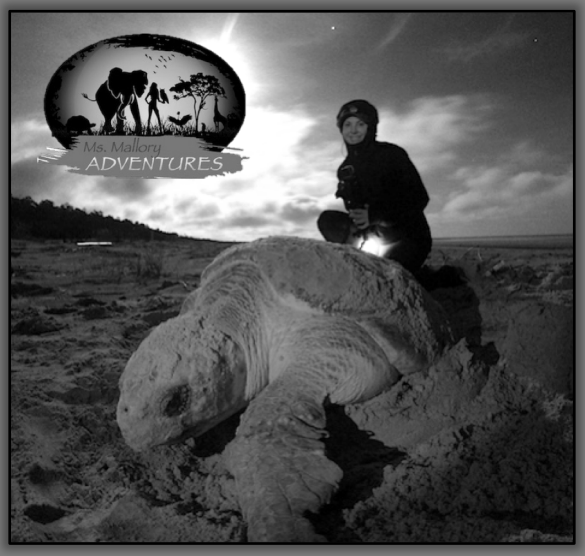
We are thrilled to say that we have achieved these goals and more! We are confident that this website will bring more people to life-changing experiences with sea turtles and guide CRP into the future. We encourage everyone to go the website, have a look around and please share the link with anyone you think might be interested.

www.CarettaResearchProject.org

Going Social

Another highlight of 2018 for CRP was working with social media guru and science communication star Ms. Mallory Adventures. Ms. Mallory joined CRP on Wassaw during the nesting and hatching season, and did two Instagram 'takeovers' in which she posted awesome videos, fun facts, myth busters and giveaways from CRP's account.

Our collaboration with Ms. Mallory was an exciting step towards broadening CRP's outreach and education capacity through social media, and we hope to continue working with her into the future. You can follow her @ms.malloryadventures



RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT

Comparing Apples to Oranges

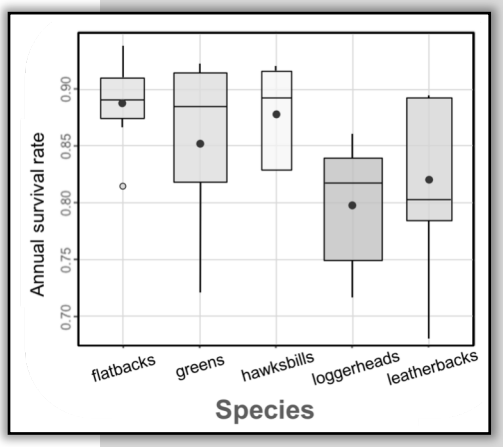
New Perspectives on Adult Sea Turtle Survival

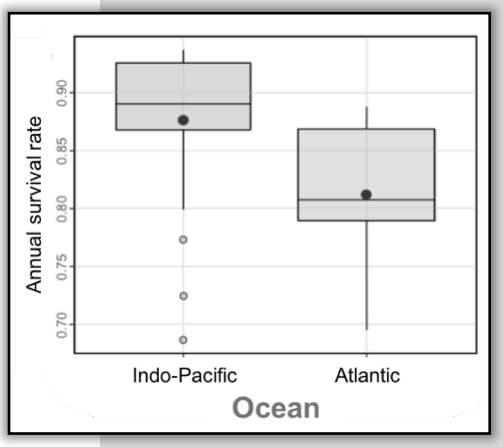
"Sorry Charlie, you're comparing apples to oranges again" might be something you hear during a lubricated verbal squabble at a bar. But, it's an important concept to consider in sea turtle science as well. If scientists compare seemingly similar pieces of biological information that were collected in different ways, then they could be comparing apples to oranges and might be led astray.

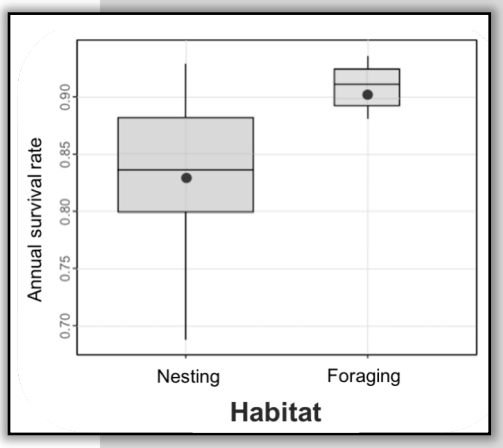
In an article published in *Scientific Reports* this year, CRP Research Director Dr. Joseph Pfaller and his coauthors revealed this potential problem when comparing adult sea turtle survival rates, an important demographic parameter for sea turtle conservation worldwide. The authors found that loggerhead and leatherback turtles in the Atlantic Ocean tend to show lower survival rates when compared to other species in the Pacific Ocean *(top two panels)*. This might suggest that Wassaw's loggerheads have heightened annual mortality, which viewed in isolations would be cause for concern.



However, the authors also found that different estimation methods tend to generate higher versus lower survival estimates (e.g., foraging ground > nesting beach; *bottom panel*). Because different methods tend to be used in different oceans and species, comparing many of the current adult sea turtle survival rates would be like comparing apples to oranges. These findings will have important ramifications for future of sea turtle conservation measures on a global scale.







Research Publications & Presentations

Pfaller JB, Chaloupka M, Bolten AB, Bjorndal KA (2018) Phylogeny, biogeography and methodology: a meta-analytic perspective on heterogeneity in adult marine turtle survival rates. *Scientific Reports* 8:5852.

Pfaller JB, Chaloupka M, Bolten AB, Bjorndal KA (2018) Phylogeny, biogeography and methodology: a meta-analytic perspective on heterogeneity in adult marine turtle survival rates. International Sea Turtle Symposium, Kobe, Japan (oral presentation).

Pfaller JB, Williams KL, Frick MG, Shamblin BM, Nairn CJ, Girondot M (2018) Genetic determination of tag loss dynamics in nesting loggerhead turtles. International Sea Turtle Symposium, Kobe, Japan (poster presentation).

Thank you to our generous sponsors!

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ANNUAL CELEBRATION & FUNDRAISER

Celebrating 46 years of Sea Turtle Conservation on Wassaw National Wildlife Refuge

On Oct 24th, Caretta Research Project hosted its 5th Annual Sea Turtle Celebration and Fundraiser. Under the beautiful live oaks and Spanish moss of Isle of Hope, the Staff and Board were joined by over 150 people to enjoy a night of live music, delicious food and drinks, beautiful artwork and immense generosity. Glasses were raised to celebrate the project's past success and help support it into the future. All proceeds from this event go directly to helping CRP accomplish its mission of preserving sea turtles on the Georgia coast for years to come.

Special thank you to Juha and Holley Jaakola for hosting the event at their beautiful home. Big Bon Pizza provided delicious gourmet pizzas that kept everyone well fed and the Savannah Country Day Jazz Quartet filled the evening with fantastic music. To everyone that joined us that night and to everyone that supported this event from afar, the Staff and Board of CRP send our deepest appreciation for making this event both memorable and successful.



Please enjoy more photos of the event on our website

Thank you to our generous auction donors!

Amphibian Air, Ashley Blalock Designs, Blackhawk Fly Fishing, Patricia Branning, Betsy Cain, Staci Cannon, Caretta Research Project, Christine Hall Photography, Collins Quarter, Colorboxx, Al Cook, Cool Savannah Tours and Gifts, Found Jewelry, Heritage Golf Group, LLC, Linda Howard, Diane Kaufman, Mountain Khakis, Bellamy Murphy, Optimal Hearing Systems, Inc., Mrs. Kelley Parker, Mr. Dave Peterson, Joe Pfaller, Satchell, Savannah Philharmonic Orchestra, Albert Seidl Fine Art Gallery and Studio, Ridley Stallings, Georgia Walters, Ruth Weimar, Sallie White, Wilderness Southeast and Sarah Yates.

GET INVOLVED

Here are ways to get involved:

- **Participate in CRP** and get hands on experience protecting sea turtles
- **Make an individual donation**
- **Make a corporate matching gift**
- **Organize an Honorarium or Memorial** to remember a special person in your life
- **Shop the CRP Store**

  Check out the COOLDRI long sleeve shirts in navy blue, light blue and white (NEW)







- **Join *Captains for Caretta*** and use your boat to transport people and supplies to and from Wassaw Island in the summer
- **Attend CRP's Annual Fundraiser**

Caretta Research Project is a public non-profit charity that does not receive funding from the state or federal government.

All research, conservation and education efforts depend on generous contributions of resources from people like you.

- **Adopt-A-Turtle** for your classroom, a loved one or yourself

CRP's Adopt-A-Turtle Kit is a wonderful gift idea for birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas and other special occasions. Pick from a list of turtles that have faithfully nested on Wassaw Island during previous seasons. Once adopted, each turtle's nesting activity can be tracked during the season from the Turtle Activity page on our website.



Kits include:

(1) List of adoptees and an adoption form
(2) Glass sea turtle ornament
(3) Picture of a nesting loggerhead
(4) CRP decal

Thank you to our *Captains for Caretta*

Mr. and Mrs. Christopher Carroll
Mr. and Mrs. Rolfe Glover IV
Mr. and Mrs. Philip Grainey
Dr. and Mrs. Joseph Gussler
Mr. and Mrs. Wes Lanier
Mr. and Mrs. Gabe Pitt
Mr. and Mrs. Joe Powers
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Dr. Chris Walls

Other special thank you's

Donna Edwards – In memory of Dr. John Hungerpiller
Mr. and Mrs. George Mendonsa – In memory of Hadrienne Mendonsa
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USFWS and GADNR now listed under "Thanks to our Partners" on page 2

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