

# reTURN the FAVOR

## Executive Summary of the 2013 Season

### INTRODUCTION

For millions of years, the Delaware Bay has played host to the largest concentration of breeding horseshoe crabs in the world. But since the early 1990s, the species has experienced a rapid decline due to overharvest. Making matters worse, thousands of horseshoe crabs die every year after being overturned by waves or getting stuck in bulkheads or other hazards. Due to existing policy to prevent the disturbance of migratory shorebirds, certain beaches are closed seasonally to human activity, making it challenging to rescue these crabs.

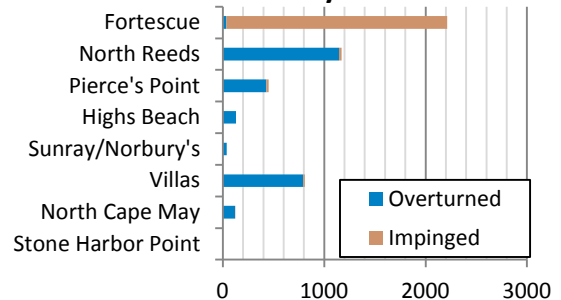
To solve this, the reTURN the Favor program was developed in May of 2013. Led by The Wetlands Institute and the New Jersey Division of Fish & Wildlife, it allows sanctioned volunteer groups to rescue stranded horseshoe crabs from closed beaches at times when shorebirds are unlikely to be present.

reTURN the Favor 2013 Project Totals		
	Total	Average
Rescue Walks	43	-
Rescue Walk Time	45 hrs. 17 min.	1 hr. 7 min.
Distance Traveled	43 km	1 km
Volunteers	153	5.1
Crabs Rescued	4,957	115
Males Rescued	3,637	85
Females Rescued	1,320	31

### RESULTS

A total of 43 reTURN the Favor walks were conducted at eight New Jersey beaches from May 17 to June 25. Each walk lasted an average of one hour and covered approximately 1 km of shoreline. In total, nearly 5,000 horseshoe crabs were rescued, an average of 115 crabs per walk. Over 2,200 crabs were rescued just at Fortescue Beach, most from rubble present along the shoreline. This result has identified Fortescue as a priority area for future beach restoration efforts.

### Total Number of Horseshoe Crabs Rescued by Beach



### VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers were recruited using several methods. Some rescue walk leaders were staff members from participating conservation organizations, while the others consisted of homeowners and local teachers. These leaders mainly recruited their own volunteers, with homeowners bringing along friends and neighbors while the teachers incorporated student help. Conservation organizations used existing volunteer bases and public outreach networks to recruit volunteers for the walks they led.

At the end of the 2013 season, an exit survey was administered to participating volunteers. The survey gathered feedback to improve the project in upcoming years and has been incorporated in the planning for 2014.

### SUMMARY

Ultimately, the inaugural season of reTURN the Favor was a success. With 5,000 adult horseshoe crabs saved in 2013 and a strong base of volunteers and protocols created, project organizers have an excellent foundation for building future seasons. All signs indicate reTURN the Favor will continue to grow, positively impacting both the horseshoe crab population and the volunteers working to save them.

[www.returnthefavornj.org](http://www.returnthefavornj.org)

