

reTURN the FAVOR

Executive Summary of the 2014 Season

Results are preliminary and represent all data submitted to the reTURN the Favor program through August 14, 2014.

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, reTURN the Favor was developed in May of 2013. Sanctioned by the New Jersey Division of Fish & Wildlife and led by multiple conservation groups, reTURN the Favor utilizes volunteers to rescue stranded horseshoe crabs on both closed and open New Jersey beaches at times when shorebirds are unlikely to be present.

RESULTS

Seven conservation organizations sponsored one or more beaches, organizing volunteers to conduct rescue walks at their selected beach(es). Independent volunteers conducted walks at two additional sites. In total, rescue walks occurred at seventeen different New Jersey beaches in 2014.

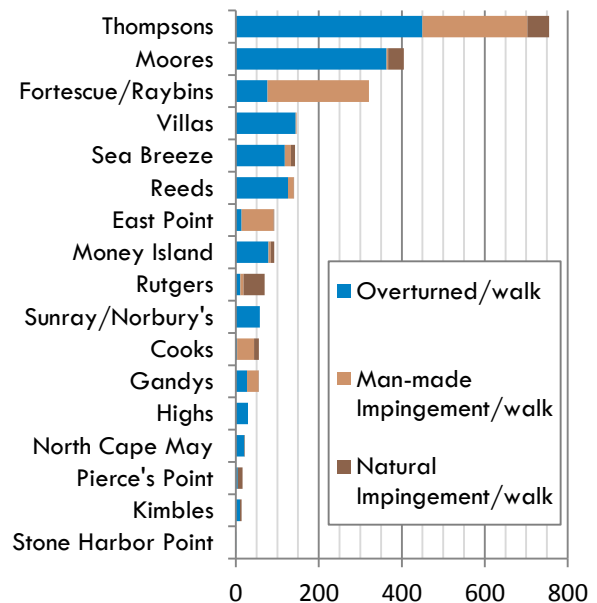
reTURN the Favor 2014 Project Totals		
	Per Walk	Total
Rescue Walks	-	219
Rescue Walk Time	1 hr 3 min.	225 hr.
Distance Traveled	1.1 km	240 km
Volunteer-Hours	3.5	746
Crabs Rescued	144	31,461

The average rescue walk was carried out by three volunteers, lasted about one hour, and covered about 1 km of shoreline. In total, more than 200 rescue walks were conducted and over 31,000 crabs rescued. Most crabs (74%) were simply overturned, but significant numbers were caught on man-made (22%) and natural (4%) hazards.

Volunteers identified hazards at several beaches that were regularly trapping large numbers of crabs. These areas (including sections of East Point, Fortescue, and Cooks Beach) will be targeted for future restoration work.

Thompsons Beach was not sponsored by a conservation organization in 2014, but had high numbers of both overturned and impinged crabs. It will be recommended for sponsorship next year.

Average Number of Horseshoe Crabs Rescued per Rescue Walk



SUMMARY

The results of the second season of reTURN the Favor far exceeded both those of the inaugural season and the pre-season goals set for 2014. Through two seasons, volunteers have now rescued more than 36,000 breeding age horseshoe crabs that likely would have been lost. Every indication is that reTURN the Favor will continue to grow and become a vital part of both horseshoe crab conservation and the Delaware Bay community in 2015 and beyond. ♦

