



GEORGIA

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

WILDLIFE RESOURCES DIVISION

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COMMISSIONER

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GOS Grant Committee,

This is a brief update of our 2016 activities funded by our 2014 Terrell Avian conservation Grant. Using funds from this grant, we were able to hire a trapper in early January of 2016 and have them work through May. They were able to recruit a number of volunteers to assist with trapping activities through the entire time period.

In 2016 we focused our predator control efforts primarily on Raccoon Key (Ogeechee River mouth), and Egg Island, Little Egg Island and Little Egg Island Bar (Altamaha River mouth). Raccoon Key (Figure 1) is adjacent to Ogeechee Bar, a very small but highly productive super-tidal sand bar that can support large mixed species seabird colonies, as well as up to 7 pairs of nesting American Oystercatchers. At extreme low tides, raccoon are able to cross exposed mud flats from Raccoon Key to Ogeechee Bar, so trapping efforts were concentrated on the portion of the Key closest to the low tide passage to the bar. Trapping on the Altamaha (Figure 2) included the small cluster of three islands that all support raccoon populations that depredate nesting birds on Little Egg Island Bar. Little Egg Island Bar supports up to 17 pairs of nesting American Oystercatcher and typically a small mixed species seabird colony as well.

Several other bars such as Pelican Spit and St Catherines Island Bar are further from upland sites and have essentially no terrestrial predators. Generally our offshore bars tend to produce a disproportionate number of Oystercatcher chicks compared to our large islands. This was most dramatically evident in 2015 when productivity was four times higher on offshore bars than barrier islands or shell rakes (Figure 3.). Due to their smaller size it is also more feasible to control predators when they threaten these sites.

Trappers took 69 trips between January 3 and May 30. 24 Raccoon and 2 wild hog were removed from the trapping sites. Trapping effort on the Ogeechee River proved highly successful, with no evidence of Raccoon making it to Ogeechee Bar all season. This allowed the bar to fledge oystercatcher, gull-billed tern, black skimmer, and least tern chicks from the bar.

Little Egg Bar efforts were less successful, and despite the number of raccoon taken, there was still significant nest loss to raccoon predation on Little Egg Bar during 2016. We still have roughly \$16,000.00 left in this grant and we plan to focus on the Altamaha in 2016. We will establish several bait stations in winter and hope to remove many raccoons at night with the thermal scope purchased through this grant.

Please let me know if you would like more information about our trapping efforts in 2016. I plan to submit a final report summarizing the three years of trapping we have been able to conduct with this grant.

Sincerely,

Timothy Keyes

Figure 1. Ogeechee River Mouth showing Raccoon Key and Ogeechee Bar



Figure 2. Altamaha Delta, showing Egg Island, Little Egg Island, and Little Egg Island Bar.



Figure 3. 2015 Oystercatcher Productivity by habitat type. (number of chicks per nesting pair).

