

the NATURALIST CORNER

Brought to you by Peggy Potts and Cathy Ruff
Coastal Master Naturalists

FEBRUARY 2016

As graduates of the Coastal Master Naturalist Program offered through the Clemson University Cooperative Extension, we would like to share our excitement and enthusiasm about the many wonders of nature that can be enjoyed and experienced in the lowcountry. Through this monthly column, we will share our observations, sightings, and characteristics about a variety of nature topics, such as common insects, migrating birds and butterflies, wildflowers and plants and more. Basically, anything in nature is fair game to learn about and explore.

We also encourage you to share your observations and experiences so that we can learn about our natural world together. Please feel free to send in pictures and/or information of anything you find interesting by emailing Peggy Potts at ppotts@charlestoncounty.org.

The World is Your Oyster! By: Peggy Potts



Any month containing the letter "R" in it means oyster season is underway. Most of us look forward to oyster roasts, which are held almost everywhere we look in our neck of the woods. But as we enjoy this delicious shellfish, keep in mind the importance of oyster shells to our ecosystem.

Oyster reefs are an important component of our marsh system. They maintain water quality by removing pollutants and they protect the saltmarsh from bank erosion. They reduce wave energy and trap silt so the marsh can expand.

Oyster reefs can potentially get higher over time and can adapt to rising sea levels. Many small invertebrates hide in the oyster reefs, which attract larger animals. Oysters and reefs provide a wonderful habitat for fish and shellfish.

However, according to studies as noted by the Nature Con-

servancy in "Shellfish Reefs at Risk," globally, 85% of reefs have been lost, making oyster reefs the most impacted marine habitat on the planet.



The South Carolina Oyster Restoration and Enhancement (SCORE) program consists of community volunteers who work with scientists to restore and monitor oyster habitat along the SC coast. Volunteers can help with shell recycling, bagging, and building of new oyster reefs with the recycled oyster shell bags. By recycling oyster shells you can help promote oyster growth and create habitat that supports shellfish harvesting. There are recycling sites set up by The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) and you can check their website for locations.

You can also find out more information on volunteering with SCORE by visiting their website at <http://score.dnr.sc.gov/> or emailing score@dnr.sc.gov.



Charleston County Greenbelt Program

Oyster reefs can be seen around Dupre Island, which is accessible by boat. The Greenbelt Program provided funding for this property, which is part of the Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge. When you visit, take a picture and post it to Instagram using the hashtag #ccgreenbelt.