

Summer of Opportunities '10

By: Amber Green

5:15, July 11 morning, I rummaged through my closet trying to figure out what it was I would be wearing that day, all while trying to fight the urge to curl back into my bed for an extra 10 min. On any other day, I would've been sleeping but instead I was getting ready to conquer my fears of being on a small boat, walking in knee deep water, and exploring the lives of USFWS biologists. I was doing all of this from one single opportunity given to me as a STEP Student at Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge.

My mind was racing. What would I be doing today? I had no answers. I'm an opportunist at heart, but embarking on an unknown journey that involved open water was kind of fear-provoking. In spite of everything, I was ready. We had met up at the administrative building, a few biology interns and I, and Eva, the captain of our ship and our lead explorer on this journey. Katie and Zach, biology interns from Cedar Island, Michael, my supervisor, and I, the clueless one, was on our way. Not long into the journey I realized that I would be doing much more on this adventure than what I had expected.

American Oystercatchers or AMOYs, as the biologist often referred to them, were our primary focus that morning. "AMOYs are listed as a threatened species in the state of Virginia", Katie later told me. "We monitor them so we have a better idea of how the population is doing as a whole." Before that morning I had no idea that AMOYs were classified as a species of high concern in shorebird conservation plans for the Eastern and Gulf coasts. There are major threats to these species that may alter their lives and the ecological unit of our shores. And, that morning I was involved with a plan to help these birds prosper once again.

Our goal was to monitor the reproductive success of these beautiful birds. During the process, we checked nests and broods (families) that were found earlier in the season. When found, we marked them with a GPS so we could locate them again and then make a map with all the GPS points. The purpose was to create a better understanding of population growth and survival rate. Once a chick fledged, we would mark it as a success and out of 66 nesting attempts; we had 62 chicks that fledged. Personally, that is a success story in my book.

Afterwards, the yearning to learn more was hard to ignore. While conducting additional research, I came across a conservation plan written in June 2007. The amount of compelling

information provided was enough to keep my interest in these birds and it made me want to explore the study other birds.

My summer at Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge is one to remember. I've labeled it as the summer of opportunities. During these past few months, I've had opportunities to learn, grow, have fun, make a difference, and help people from different areas that came here to experience nature in a way I never considered. Now, not only do I see the progress of the AMOYs as being successful, but I also see my summer as one too. One single trip on a boat opened my eyes to a bigger picture.