



October 2016

Thousands of Pounds of Trash Removed from Rookery Islands



Nesting black skimmers.

As the summer draws to an end and our local colonial nesting waterbirds fledge their last offspring, the work of Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program (CBBEP) Coastal Bird Program kicks into high gear. The fall and winter are packed with all things necessary to prepare the rookery islands in the Coastal Bend for the next nesting season. CBBEP biologists work diligently on the islands, tackling everything from installing nesting platforms and informational signage, to planting woody vegetation and exotic plant removal. One of the most important efforts, however, is the removal of harmful trash and debris.

Trash that washes up on the shores of rookery islands is very harmful to birds and other wildlife that utilize these habitats. Pieces of plastic are often mistaken for food and birds can easily become entangled in discarded fishing line or injured by hooks and lures. "Colonial nesting waterbirds and their young face a host of challenges, but perhaps the most devastating are casualties that occur from discarded fishing lines and tackle due to entanglement," said Stephanie Bilodeau, Conservation Biologist with the Coastal Bird Program, "These types of casualties are preventable and why we prioritize removing these materials from the rookery islands and shorelines that the birds utilize," said Stephanie.

Removal of the harmful trash from these remote islands is a big job, however, and requires a fleet of boats and captains to accomplish. So the Coastal Bird Program, in conjunction with US Fish & Wildlife Service, began hosting Rookery Island Clean Ups back in 2006 to engage volunteers from the public, as well as agencies and non-profits with a natural resource management to help clean the shorelines of these important waterbird rookeries. The effort has grown considerably, this year marking the 10th year of the Upper Laguna Madre Rookery Island Clean Up, as well as the inaugural effort for the Lower Laguna Madre Rookery Island Clean Up.



Stephanie Bilodeau and one of the boat loads of trash and debris from the Lower Laguna Madre effort.

Thousands of pounds of trash you say? Yes thousands of pounds of trash was removed by volunteers from sensitive rookery island habitat during this year's clean up! The Upper Laguna Madre effort removed 1,250 pounds of bagged trash as well as larger items such as buckets, pallets, 55 gallon drums, and crab traps. The Lower Laguna Madre effort removed 800 pounds of bagged trash as well as buoys, chairs, a porcelain toilet, and even a kitchen sink!



"We are fortunate here in the Coastal Bend to have so many willing to dedicate their time to the protection of our colonial nesting waterbirds," said David Newstead, Director of the Coastal Bird Program, "These efforts will go a long way in giving species such as black skimmers, great blue herons, and roseate spoonbills, and their young every advantage next spring," David said.



Upper Laguna Madre Clean Up Crew.



Lower Laguna Madre Clean Up Crew.



This year's event sponsors were Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, Texas General Land Office, Audubon Texas, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and Doc's Seafood and Steaks. To learn more about the efforts of the Coastal Bird Program and the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program visit www.cbbep.org.



The Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program is a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting and restoring bays and estuaries in the 12-county region of the Texas Coastal Bend. For more information about the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program, contact Kathryn Tunnell at (361) 336-0304 or ktunnell@cbbep.org.

This report published in October 2016.

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