

# 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fund Grant

A Program to Learn  
about Endangered  
Species Rescue

North Topsail Beach,  
North Carolina

Jonas Johnson



SEA TURTLE CAMP TOPSAIL ISLAND, NC 2024



# WHO

## Sea Turtle Camp

- North Topsail Beach, NC
- immersive, hands-on, feet-wet experiential education for youth to learn marine biology
- mission: to cultivate a love and respect for the ocean by building confidence and developing character while inspiring coastal
- conservation through safety, fun, and learning!

work in partnership



## Karen Beasley Sea Turtle Rescue and Rehabilitation Center

- Surf City, NC
- created to provide injured sea turtles with the love and care necessary to rehabilitate and release them back to the ocean
- Seeks to provide an experiential learning site for students of biology, wildlife conservation, and/or veterinary medicine from around the world





This is one of the many loggerhead sea turtles that is being rehabilitated in the hospital.



# WHAT

- Worked closely with the interns at the Karen Beasley Sea Turtle Rescue and Rehabilitation Center
- Did seining and species identification
- Participated in a dogfish dissection
- Enjoyed a behind-the-scenes tour at the North Carolina Aquarium
- Earned fifteen hours of community service credit by volunteering at the Karen Beasley Sea Turtle Rescue and Rehab Center - cleaning the facility, cleaning sea turtle tanks, and assisting with turtle feeding and care; and leading outreach activities to public visitors of the sea turtle hospital
- Explored the salt marsh and learn its vital role in the food chain/conduct species identifications
- Boogie boarded and swam in the Atlantic Ocean
- Studied dune/beach ecology
- Kayaked in the salt marsh





This is a picture of one of the hospital's employees releasing a kemp's ridley back into the wild after swallowing a fish hook and having to have surgery to remove it.



This is a picture of me cleaning the hospital as part of our community service time.



This is a picture of me helping to dissect a spiny dogfish.

This is a picture of me and my friend seining in the salt marsh for small pinfish and crabs.



This is a picture of our group getting a behind the scenes tour of the aquarium at Fort Fisher.

This is a loggerhead named Musica who is in for having a hook in her stomach.

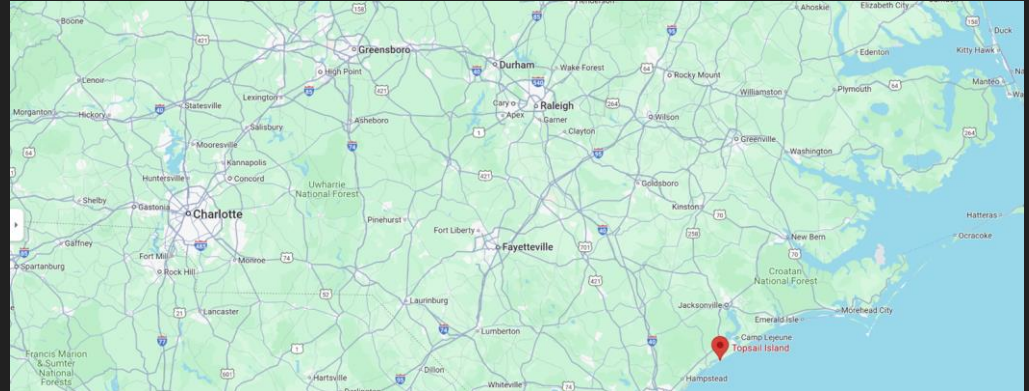




# WHERE



N Topsail Island is just south of the outer banks of North Carolina. It is a barrier island in the same chain as the Outer Banks. It is a very densely populated island, and that has a large effect on the sea turtle population and especially the hatchlings.



# WHEN

I was able to attend this camp in July and August between my freshman and sophomore years. Because it was the height of summer, it was warm enough that the ocean was a comfortable temperature and that let us do more oceanic activities. It also allowed us to view a release that would not have been possible in colder weather.



# WHY



I wanted to do this program because it was a great opportunity to work with an endangered species. Sea turtles are beloved by a lot of people and it was neat to study them and their environment.

Only one in 1,000 sea turtles make it through their first year. One in 10,000 sea turtles survive to adulthood. So this program is important because it cares for an animal that is really struggling due to human causes like by-catch (caught in fishing nets unintentionally), climate change, boat injuries, and plastic or fishhook consumption.

This program felt especially meaningful when I got to participate in a “stealth release,” a private release not announced to the public. Both of the turtles released survived injuries they could not have healed from in the wild. Everyone was cheering for them, and it was really powerful.





This is a picture of a kemp's ridley sea turtle I got to see being released back into the ocean after being in the hospital for swallowing a fish hook.

# HOW

**How** the 21st Century Fund grant made this program happen for me:

The grant from the 21st Century Fund made my trip possible. There were a lot of side expenses of traveling beyond the cost of the program, so I felt really lucky to have the grant give me this opportunity that my family could not have provided without it. Because the 21st Century Fund exists, I was able to seek out opportunities I would not have thought were possible otherwise. (I would not have even looked for a program like this!)





## How it went:

- I was a little disappointed I did not get to do more with nesting sites, but my time was filled in with interacting with live sea turtles, which was really cool. I learned a lot about the different species of sea turtles and the ways sea turtles are at risk because of different environmental factors.
- We were always busy so my time felt well spent.
- I felt it was worth it to do all the things it took to get to do this program. In addition to applying for this grant, I made and sold reusable bags, and worked picking blueberries to fund my trip.



## How this experience informs my future:

- Doing this program taught me I don't want to do veterinary science but I would rather deal with the causes of the issues.
- I can see myself studying other ocean ecosystems.
- I'd also like to do more service work. I learned that service work is pretty easy when you are helping a good cause.