SeaScripts

The Newsletter of the South Carolina Marine Educators Association

Spring 2008

It was a cold, wet, blustery Saturday in January of last year and I was standing on a beach access in Flagler Beach, Florida with members of the Marineland Right Whale Survey Project volunteer team. We were standing a 4 hour watch, from 8AM to 12 noon and so far we had seen no whales. I looked around at this dedicated group of retirees (including my Dad) and I wondered "Why do they do this?"

North Atlantic Right Whales are critically endangered animals, with less than 400 living members of the population. Right whales are so named because they were the right whales to hunt: they travel close to shore, have lots of fat, and float when killed. Thus, they were hunted almost to extinction. Today, although they are protected, they are still at the mercy of man. They travel from their feeding grounds in the North Atlantic to their birthing grounds in the Southeast US and traverse some of the most dangerous and highly navigated waters in the ocean.

The Marineland Right Whale Survey Project in Florida recruits volunteers to stand 4 hour shifts at regular points along the shores of northern Florida from January through early March. This year the project logged over 5600 hours of volunteer time and confirmed 37 sightings of right whales and one humpback. In the SEUS (from SC to Florida) 18 mother calf pairs and another 135 whales (mostly juveniles) were tentatively identified. Two right whale calves died during the season and washed ashore in northern Florida.

So, what does all of this have to do with us in SC? First, our waters are an important link in the migratory route of these endangered whales. Second, in Florida, the whales arrived early and left early this year, possible due to warmer waters along the coast. Third, some whales spotted off the SC coast this season never went further south. Is this a normal trend that we are just now taking note of or is this new behavior? What are the implications for these whales and for us in SC as waters continue to warm, especially along the coast? The issue of Right Whales has been raised as a part of planning for the new port in the city of Charleston. How will coastal areas respond if/when we turn to the oceans for sources of energy from waves, tides, currents, and wind? How will pollution and climate affect the food chain that supports these giant whales? These are all important issues for us as keepers of the oceans and protectors of its critters great and small.

Back to the cold volunteers! Why would people give up 4 hours on a Saturday morning for the small chance of seeing a right whale? I have been on many of these watches and have had the joy of seeing 5 right whales, one in the breaker zone and one which was breaching offshore. It was an amazing feeling to see these gentle giants up close.. These are rare occasions and most volunteers do not do this just to see a whale. They do so because they know that the data is essential to help track and document the population so that it can be protected and because they want to give something back to the oceans that they live near and love. But mostly they do so because it is the "Right" thing to do.

Sue Morrison
SCMEA President

This article is dedicated to Janet Eckstein, my mother, a dedicated whale watch volunteer for four years.

This month's Sea Scripts highlights animals of special concern and actions that you can take to help them.

Information and photograph provided by Joy Hampp and Jim Hain, Marineland Right Whale Survey Project This is #1622 and calf Feb 4, 2008. Photograph obtained under Scientific Research Permit No. 655-1652 issued by NOAA Fisheries

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A Plover's Plight

Keith McCullough
Naturalist, Charleston County Park & Recreation Commission

I'm sure I saw some movement over there near the dunes.

This was repeated in my head over and over as I scanned the south end of Folly Beach with my binoculars. It sounds a bit like the beginning of a scary story, and it actually is a scary story for the Wilson's Plover, the shorebird that caught my eye that day. The Wilson's Plover (*Charadrius wilsonia*) is often negatively affected by human activities on its nesting beaches.

Plovers are shorebirds that have relatively short beaks which are used to grab invertebrates from the surface of the sand. Instead of probing for food, they use their sharp eyesight to locate small crabs, worms, and insects. The Wilson's Plover can be seen scurrying about in short bursts near their nesting and feeding grounds. This, coupled with their disruptive plumage, explains why I kept seeing a flash of movement but no bird when I turned to look.

After wintering as far away as the northern part of South America, the Wilson's Plover arrives to the South Carolina coast to breed and nest. Their nest consists merely of a small scrape in the sand above the high tide line usually near broken shells and debris. Year after year they face the increasing problems of habitat loss and nesting disturbances. Although little data are available on its estimated population size, it is well understood that this plover will quickly abandon its nest when disturbed by potential predators. This most often occurs from dogs that run free on the beach. Here are a few things we can do to help the Wilson's Plover:

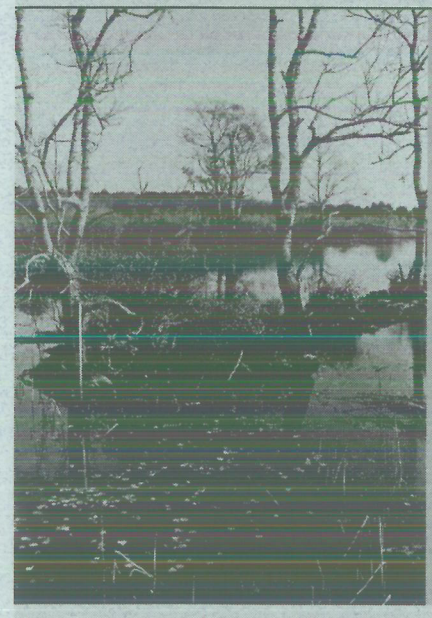
- **Keep your dog on a leash.** Remember, your dog doesn't have to catch the bird to harm it.
- **Follow and observe the rules of posted nesting areas.** Staying out of these areas will help increase nest success. The first time a nest is spotted is usually right after it has been stepped on.
- **Do not feed gulls.** Gulls are predators of eggs and chicks. Feeding them will only draw more of them to the nesting area.
- **Educate others that we share the beach with nesting shorebirds.** We could lose these animals simply by not being aware of how our actions affect them!

When I finally was able to focus my binoculars on the Wilson's Plover, I was enthralled. How many times had I walked right past this bird or its nest? Let's work together to give future generations the opportunity to marvel at these amazing shorebirds.

Photograph courtesy of Jeff Mollenhauer

The SC Shorebird Project is a partnership between SC Audubon, SCDNR, Coastal Conservation League, US Fish and Wildlife, SC State Parks, Coastal Carolina University, and Charleston County Park & Recreation Commission.
Visit www.scshorebirdproject.org to learn more.

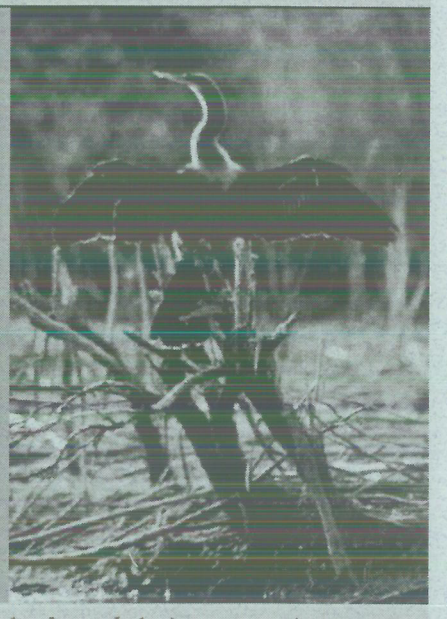
Your **P.A.S.S.** to a Watershed Weekend!



SCMEA Fall Conference

October 10-12, 2008
Litchfield Beach & Golf Resort

Pawleys Island, SC



Join marine educators from across the state to explore SC's watersheds and their connection to our coast. Registrants receive educational resources such as support for integrating current research in the classroom, lesson plans, recertification credits, and much more!

SCMEA offers travel awards to attend the Fall Conference. Please fill out an application in this month's Sea Scripts and return it to Ruth Truluck by August 20, 2008.

NMEA NEWS

The 2008 National Marine Educators Association (NMEA) conference is in Savannah, Georgia! Register now for this exciting, educational, and fun conference! Check out full details at http://www.nmeaweb.org/savannah2008/

Full Registration (including meals) ends June 1, 2008.
Late Registration rates (meals not included) become effective June 2 until July 21, 2008.
Individuals registering after June 1 will not receive meals or be able to purchase conference organized meals at the last minute. Non-member registration fees will be higher.

The conference hotel is the Savannah Riverfront Marriott.
Rooms are going fast so make your reservation now.
Contact the hotel at 1-912-233-7722.
Let's all support NMEA and our Georgia neighbors, GAME!
See y'all in Savannah!

Using **Literature** and Stories to Teach Science

Ideally, everyone would be as enthusiastic about science as we are, but obviously this is not the case. I think science educators need to look to literature and stories to reach those students who have a strong affinity towards "touchy-feeliness"

Kevin Kurtz

I like books. When I was kid my family members used to introduce me as, "This is Kevin—he reads a lot," as if it was my one distinguishing characteristic, and this tendency to use all my free time holding a book ten inches from my face continues to this day. Despite all this time spent reading, it was not until this past year that I began to consider seriously using literature in the classroom to teach science. Based on my recent experiences, I am now a believer, not only in the ability of books and stories to teach science, but also of their necessity as a science education tool.

As an environmental educator who originally planned to be a classroom teacher, I always felt that one of the advantages of environmental education is it is a lot easier to keep a student's attention when you are holding a live horseshoe crab than when you are holding a textbook. When I went back into classrooms this past year, bringing nothing with me but a book to read to the students, I was initially worried about my ability to hold the students' attention without having a live animal to show them other than myself. I soon realized, though, that my fears were unfounded. The book I read to them was just as engrossing to the students as a live sea star had been in the past, and based on the evaluations of the teachers and myself, was just as effective in conveying information that the students retained.

That a book could be that engrossing to students was exciting to learn (particularly since I had written the book I was reading to them), but it was not until I began hanging around a bunch of graduate level English students that I began to realize why literature may be necessary as a method to teach science. Amongst the English students and professors, I quickly became aware of attitudes towards science that usually ranged from indifference to outright hostility. Though some of this stems from the politics of academia where science usually receives more funding than the humanities, it also stems from an affinity amongst those who enter the humanities, which for lack of a better term, I will call touchy-feeliness. People in the humanities tend to be interested in ideas and situations that are human-centered and are personal in nature. Science, which often decentralizes humans and which involves a lot of impersonal data, tends to leave them cold. In my experience, this is not just a phenomenon of the over educated. When I was an educator at the South Carolina Aquarium, I was always excited when a visitor was interested in the scientific findings about the animal we were discussing, but they were much more likely to ask me "What is the animal's name?" (meaning did we give the hermit crab I was holding a nickname, such as Prickly Pete) and "Does the animal like me personally?" For many guests, their interest in the animals was strongest for animals that could be anthropomorphized.

Ideally, everyone would be as enthusiastic about science as we are, but obviously this is not the case. I think science educators need to look to literature and stories to reach those students who have a strong affinity towards "touchy-feeliness", those who need a personal, human connection to become interested in the subject at hand (I am not the first person to notice this particular learning style. Carl Jung called this type of learners "feelers" and Bernice McCarthy called them "innovative learners." The term "touchy-feeliness" is more fun, though.). Science has a leg up on other subjects because it offers many opportunities for hands-on activities, but the content information is often delivered through textbooks, which tend to be

very general and kind of dry. I remember that learning science in high school was very similar to learning a foreign language, because a lot of what we learned was mainly new vocabulary (such as what is the difference between an "ion" and an "isotope"), and rarely did we have the opportunity to learn about cool specific examples of the concepts we were learning. I do not think I really started making the connections to the real world that science provides until I became an adult and start guiding my own learning. Stories can help make those connections for the less-motivated student and provide the human-centered, touchy-feeliness that some students require.

The best examples I have of how this can work are from my own limited experience. Most first graders can understand that "shelter" is a place where an animal goes to be safe. A story about a young fish that travels to the salt marsh because it can use the shelter of the *Spartina* grass to avoid the large predators of the ocean, allows the students to connect the concept to a real example. It is a story I have told that multiple students have responded to. If the story also includes an illustration, the visual learners in the classroom also receive a concrete representation of the idea.

For high school students, a novel may have a similar effect. An example I can give that is appropriate for high school kids is *The Surrounded* by D'Arcy McNickle, which came out in 1936. This novel, set on an Indian reservation at the beginning of the twentieth century, describes the struggles of Native American characters who want to return to their former hunter/gatherer way of life, but find it impossible because their environment has been changed and the native wildlife populations have been reduced. This novel, taught in conjunction with science concepts of territoriality, predator/prey relationships, populations, communities and human relationships to the environment, can bring a human face to science concepts. By thinking of the scenes in the novel as a series of teachable moments, teachers can engage those students who are not inclined towards science, in discussions that explore science concepts from the human centered perspective that they require.

Stories can be a useful teaching tool even for the students who love science. We all like stories or we would not spend so much time telling jokes, reading books and watching TV shows and movies. Our attraction to stories is so great that some anthropologists, folklorists and English professors think our scientific name should be "*Homo narrans*," which translates roughly into "the humanoid that tells stories." Science educators need to take advantage of this almost universal attraction to stories. I realize now that those live animals at the Aquarium I would educate people about were just part of the reason the kids were engrossed in the discussion. There were plenty of live animals at the Aquarium and in general they were lucky if they received more than 10 seconds of attention from a kid and 20 seconds from an adult. When I was discussing the animal, though, the attention extended far beyond 10 seconds, and I think this was because not only were they seeing the animal, but they were also hearing stories about them. The stories were all oral and drawn from my research and experiences, but they were still stories and still valid education tools that could be used by anyone.

Based on my own experiences, I encourage educators to start looking to use more stories, both written and oral, to enhance their science teaching. However, I do not want to ignore the experiences of other educators just because it contradicts the perfect, theoretical world I have created in my head. If you have used books and stories to teach science and have the time, please e-mail me a brief description of your successes and failures with this approach as well as your suggestions of book titles that have worked best for you. My e-mail address is kevkurtz@gmail.com. I am planning on participating as an instructor in a teacher workshop on using the arts to teach science this fall and your feedback will help me prepare my presentation. The workshop will be organized by COSEE South East and will be held in the Charleston area on Saturday, September 6, 2008, so save the date! More details to come soon.

Kevin Kurtz is a former SCMEA board member and Sea Scripts editor. Kevin is currently seeking a PhD in English Literature at the University of Oregon.

Diamondback Terrapins:
Catching Their Breath

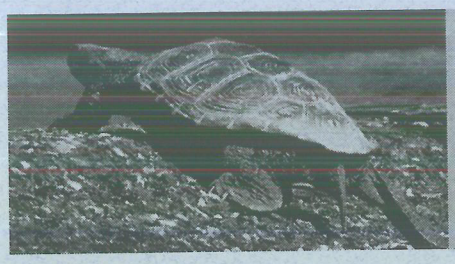
Text by Shelley Dearhart
Education Programs Instructor,
South Carolina Aquarium
Photographs by Lindsay Abbott

Take a minute, try and imagine yourself sitting on a dock along a tidal creek. The sun is beginning to set and a nice breeze is whistling through the *Spartina*. You can hear the snapping shrimp pop their pincers in the water just underneath where you are sitting. Are you feeling relaxed? You should be. Below the surface of the water, a salt marsh resident is not feeling so relaxed. A curious diamondback terrapin has found itself trapped inside a crab trap. All it can do now is wait for someone to relieve it from this underwater prison that will ultimately lead to the turtle's death if not retrieved shortly.

Diamondback terrapins are a small estuarine species of turtle found along the eastern coastline of the United States, from Massachusetts to the Gulf of Mexico along Texas. Their color may range from a whitish to olive colored skin with distinct black markings all over. Their name derives from the diamond-like shaped scutes on their carapace. Terrapin populations have been in decline since the early 1900's. As the primary ingredient for turtle soup during this time period they neared extinction due to the vast numbers that were harvested. Eventually moratoriums were enacted in certain states along the terrapin's range to allow these populations to rebuild themselves. Harvesting is only one potential factor affecting the diamondback terrapin's status 100 years later. Other potential threats are road strikes, habitat destruction, pollution and as described in the scenario above, mortality due to drowning in crab traps. Researchers are working hard to determine where South Carolina terrapin populations remain so that we are able to establish the most efficient methods to protect this estuarine species. One example of this is the development of the bycatch reduction device (BRD or excluders).

This small rectangular device modifies the size and shape of crab trap openings with the intention of reducing the number of terrapins caught as bycatch. Studies have shown that BRDs reduce the terrapin catch without affecting crab catch. Research is being conducted in order to find the best design to eliminate the potential threat of terrapins drowning in crab traps.

There are many ways that you can help terrapins. If you enjoy recreational crabbing, obtaining a BRD is easy. You can contact the South Carolina Aquarium with a request for as many excluder devices as you need for *FREE!* If you are not an avid crabber, tell someone you know who does crab about excluder devices and talk to them about terrapins. When you are driving in coastal areas, keep a sharp eye out for terrapins crossing the road because you might be saving more than just the turtle you see. Female terrapins are often struck on the road as they are looking for a good nesting site. Finally, you can be a steward of the environment by eliminating your contribution to pollution as well as cleaning up litter you encounter. Whether you begin by using canvas bags on a visit to the grocery store in lieu of plastic, join a community beach or marsh sweep, pick up litter on a casual walk down the beach, modify your crab trap with a BRD, or simply help spread the word about excluders and why we need to protect terrapins, you can take a minute and rest assured that you have just helped in the effort to let a diamondback terrapin catch its breath.



For more information or to obtain your free set of bycatch reduction devices, please contact:
Shelley Dearhart
South Carolina Aquarium
843-579-8565
sdearhart@scaquarium.org

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Photographs by Lindsay Abbott

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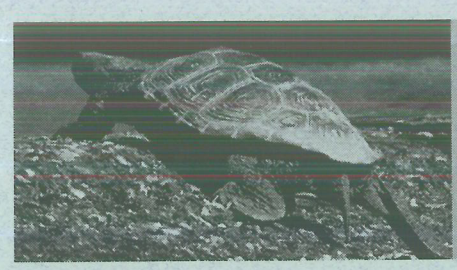

For more information or to obtain your free set of bycatch reduction devices, please contact:
Shelley Dearhart
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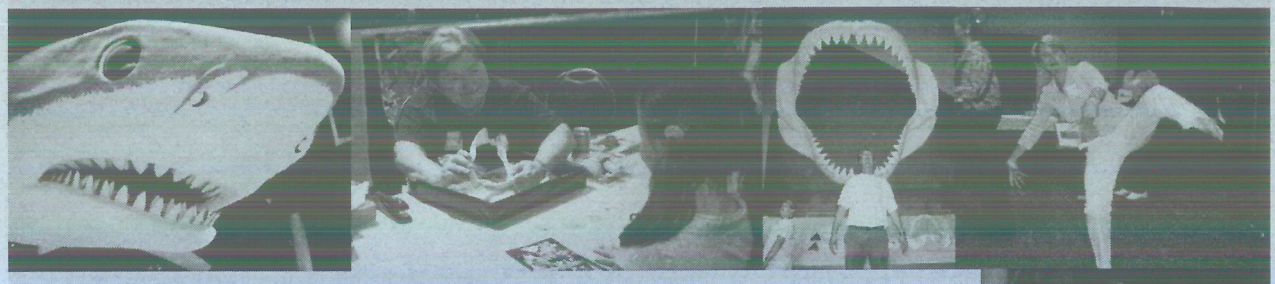
Snapshots from the Spring Mini-Conference
Columbia, SC



The 2008 spring mini-conference was held at the South Carolina State Museum in Columbia. The day began with a plenary session in which scientists from across the state presented research findings and participants discussed ways to incorporate this information into classroom lessons. After lunch Colette Dryden and Amanda Johnson got everyone moving with an activity about sea turtles and the hurdles that they must overcome to survive. The day was rounded off with a chance to explore the museum and a behind-the-scenes tour. Many thanks to all of the presenters, the SC State Museum, and Elaine McClure for helping to organize the day!

Photos from top left to bottom right: A giant shark welcomes visitors to the museum, Elaine McClure shows an Earth Day visitor some modern day shark jaws, Scott Meister checks out the model of a megalodon jaw, Sue Morrison imitates a net as she tries to ensnare sea turtles in a turtle hurdle game, Elizabeth Vernon tries out the museum's segway, and Ruth Truluck and Connie Leverett are happy participants in the day's activities.

NSTA Report
Submitted by Colette Dryden, SCMEA Chapter Representative

Being able to attend the National Science Teachers Association's (NSTA) annual conference is just one of the many perks of being Chapter Rep. for SCMEA to the National Marine Educators Association (NMEA). NMEA holds their mid-year Board meeting the day prior to the commencement of NSTA.

NSTA was held March 27-30 in Boston, Massachusetts. I attended NMEA's mid-year Board meeting on March 26. At this meeting, we discussed the new standard operating procedures and new scholarship rules and deadlines. NMEA is financially stable and the board has decided to increase scholarship funds so more people can attend our annual conference in the summer.

NMEA also had a "Whale of a Share-A-Thon" on March 27. The Share-A-Thon was very well attended. Many thanks to Lundie Spence for providing posters, newspapers, and activities to share at the Share-A-Thon. The teachers were very enthusiastic about these resources! After the Share-A-Thon, NMEA sponsored many concurrent sessions during the course of the day.

From all accounts, NSTA was, once again, a great success! It is a great way to network with colleagues from around the world. Since over 15,000 teachers and educators attend this annually, you're sure to meet someone to learn from. Next year, NSTA will be held in New Orleans March 18-22.
Mark your calendars now!

Fred James SCMEA Travel Award
Application Due: August 20
Notification: September 6
$200 Travel Assistance to SCMEA conference

Name _____
Occupation _____
Place of Employment _____
Address _____
_____
Work Phone _____ Home Phone _____
E-mail _____

Are you currently a member of SCMEA? Please note that membership is a condition of the grant. ___yes ___no

Are you a member of the National Marine Educators Association? ___yes ___no

Applications will be judged solely on the information provided on this form. Please type or print answers to questions below neatly on the back or on a separate sheet of paper. Applications received after the deadline will not be eligible.

1. Briefly define your professional role as it relates to marine/aquatic education.
2. Have you attended any marine education workshops, courses, conferences, etc., before? If so, please list a representative sample. Indicate if you made presentations and the topics.
3. Are you planning to present a paper or workshop at the conference? If so, please describe.
4. Please briefly describe your reasons for wanting to attend the SCMEA conference.

Statement of responsibility: I am very interested in attending the SCMEA Conference and agree to submit a copy of my registration receipt and proof of attendance. I understand that my receipt of the award is dependent upon my submittal of the proof of my attendance.

Signature _____ Date _____

Please mail completed form to: SCMEA Travel Assistance Award c/o Ruth Truluck, 982 Planters Curve, Mt. Pleasant, SC 29464, by August 20th. Late applications will not be considered. THIS HONOR WILL BE AWARDED SOLELY ON THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ON THIS FORM. ADDITIONAL MATERIAL WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED.

SCMEA Renkas Marine Education Grants
Application Due: August 20
Notification: September 6
Maximum Award: $250.00: one to six awards are given each year.

Name:_____
Occupation:_____
Home Address:_____
_____
Home Phone:_____ Work Phone:_____ email:_____

Reference Information
Name:_____
Address:_____
_____
Home Phone:_____ Work Phone:_____

Applications will be judged solely on the information provided on this form. Please type or print answers to questions below neatly on the back or on a separate sheet of paper. Applications received after the deadline will not be eligible.

1.Are you currently a member of SCMEA ? Please note membership is a condition of the award. ___Yes ___No
2. Are you a member of the National Marine Educators Association? ___Yes ___No
3. Briefly describe your professional role as it pertains to marine/aquatic education.
4. Briefly describe the goals, methods and time frame for your project and how SCMEA funds can assist your project.
5. Who is the target audience for your project?
6. How will you evaluate the success of your project?

Statement of Responsibility: The information is accurate to the best of my knowledge. As a condition of the grant, I agree to write an article describing the project for the benefit of other educators (the article will be published in *Sea Scripts*). I agree to inform the Scholarship Committee in writing of any major changes in my project in a timely fashion. I also agree to use the funds as described and will make every effort to acknowledge SCMEA in any publicity directly related to the project.

Signature:_____ Date:_____

Please mail completed form to: SCMEA Renkas Marine Education Grants c/o Ruth Truluck, 982 Planters Curve, Mt. Pleasant, SC 29464 by August 20. Late applications will not be considered. THIS HONOR WILL BE AWARDED SOLELY ON THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ON THIS FORM. ADDITIONAL MATERIAL WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED.

SCMEA Marine Educator of the Year Award
Nomination Due: August 20th

Notification: at Business Meeting of Annual Conference (Nominators notified by September 6th)

Nominee Information:

Name _____

Occupation _____

Place of Employment _____

Address _____

_____

Work Phone _____ Home Phone _____ email _____

Nominator Information:

Name _____

Occupation _____

Place of Employment _____

Address _____

_____

Work Phone _____ Home Phone _____ email _____

On a separate sheet, please give your reason for nominating this individual, being as specific as possible. What programs, in-services, activities, curricula, grants, etc. has this person developed, taught and/or implemented which further educates and stimulates interest and awareness about marine/aquatic environments and the organisms that live in them? Please include any other information you feel is pertinent to this person's qualifications as an outstanding marine educator. Continue as necessary.

Please mail completed form to: SCMEA Educator of the Year Award c/o Ruth Truluck, 982 Planters Curve, Mt. Pleasant, SC 29464, by August 20. Late applications will not be considered. THIS HONOR WILL BE AWARDED SOLELY ON THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ON THIS FORM. ADDITIONAL MATERIAL WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED.

Marine Happenings

Charleston Harbor Fest

Charleston Harbor Fest is scheduled for May 16-18, 2008 in Charleston, SC. The festival this year will be a true harbor-wide celebration of the sea because it has expanded to include locations on both sides of the harbor.

This year includes a Water Action Village Expo at Patriots Point and a Maritime Village at the Maritime Center and in Ansonborough Field that will highlight traditional maritime activities. There will also be tours of Tall Ships including the Amistad and the Sprit of South Carolina, a children's village, an education village and much, much more.

Access to the festival is FREE and for more information please visit: www.charlestonmaritimefiestival.com

SCMEA calendar

May 30
SCMEA Board meeting at the Caw Caw Interpretive Center, Charleston

July 21-24
NMEA Conference in Savannah, Georgia

August 20
Deadline to submit applications for SCMEA awards

October 10-12
SCMEA Fall Conference at Litchfield Beach and Golf Resort, Pawleys Island

Contribute today!

You can contribute to Sea Scripts in many ways:

- Write an article
- Send in announcements of workshops, trainings, and events
- Send us a photograph of yourself, your class, or a group of SCMEA members reading Sea Scripts

Please send all submissions to bburkett@ccprc.com

SCMEA

Naturalist Knapsacks

Myrtle Beach State Park will be offering backpacks to park guest full of gear such as binoculars, field guides, story books, and activities that patrons can use in the park on their own throughout the day. The back-packs are based on two themes, beach and forest. Backpacks will be available starting June 3, 2008.

For more information contact Myrtle Beach State Park at 843-238-0874 or visit www.discoversouthcarolina.com