

JAMAICA BAY, GATEWAY NRA: CITIZEN SCIENTISTS LOOK OUT FOR JAMAICA BAY'S TURTLES

Russell L. Burke: One of the appeals of Jamaica Bay is the turtle population. The earliest records of terrapins here are from the seventies, when some of the Park Service people started recording data on the number of terrapins they saw in the water and the number they saw in land. And in the twelve years that we've been studying them, they've gone down by about thirty percent, so the number of nesting females has gone down quite a bit, in a very short period of time.

This is one of the places where visitors record the turtles that they see and a lot of time, they're seeing turtles that we didn't see, and so actually I go through the records every year, uh, to find out, um, some of things we've missed.

Citizens Science is a big effort to get non-specialist involved in science. Part of it is to demystify science, to show people that anybody can be a scientist, and it's also an effort to enlarge the amount of data that scientist can work with.

Liz Reif: There's actually two predated nests here. Having more people around, increases your chances of finding a nesting terrapin on the trails, so we have a wide range of volunteers. We have volunteers that are school kids, um, to people that are retired and they just like to do this for fun.

Typically volunteers will start out at our field station, and will scan the water for turtles that are emerging from the water and looking to nest. The first measurement that we'd normally take on these terrapins is a measurement of the shell. We do shell measurements. We also mark the turtle with a pit tag, which is very similar to the microchips that people place on their dogs and cats.

Liz Reif (demonstrating tagging): The pit tag is injected via the spring-loaded syringe and it usually goes right back in (point to the north side of the turtle shell), on the side.

Russell Burke: To know these turtles is to love these turtles. They're wonderful creatures and they have a tremendous impact on the people who come here. It's a great place to study them. It's very accessible to my students and my volunteers. They can get out here really easily. And the Park Service folk are great.

Liz Reif: Seven annual ide. It tells us that this turtle was at least six years old.

Devorah Fein: I love being out here; it's really beautiful, it's so peaceful, it's a great place to work. In ninth grade, I became interested in environmentalism. That's why I e-mailed Dr. Burke. I am glad to get out here, helping with research that can preserve this.

Liz Reif (pointing to the water): I see two terrapin heads out on the water.

Shannon Ronquillo: Last week I learned how to distinguish if the turtle was going up or if it's going down. I never knew that a high school student could work as a volunteer here. I never knew that.

Ellie Miele: We need to bring New Yorkers to the water, to the shore, to the forests, to see that nature's happening here, to see that there are egrets and herons and owls and fish and frogs. The younger they are when we bring them, the better the chances are that they'll develop a sense of stewardship, connection, and be adults who will cherish and preserve and study the nature that surrounds our great city that we might not be able to survive without.