

## Communities Create Horseshoe

By Glenn Gauvry, Director, Ecological Research & Development Group



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Radio wave receivers stationed along the coast allow scientists to better understand the movements of horseshoe crabs throughout the spawning season.

**T**he Delaware Bay encompasses the world's largest horseshoe crab spawning habitat and foraging area for migrating shorebirds en route to their Arctic breeding grounds. However, the vast majority of this statistically significant habitat runs along the shoreline of coastal communities.

If we are to be successful in protecting the horseshoe crab species, it is essential to inform and engage these bayshore communities as conservation partners, because they are the ultimate stewards of the habitat these animals depend on for survival.

To address this concern, the Ecological Research & Development Group (ERDG), a non-profit organization whose pri-

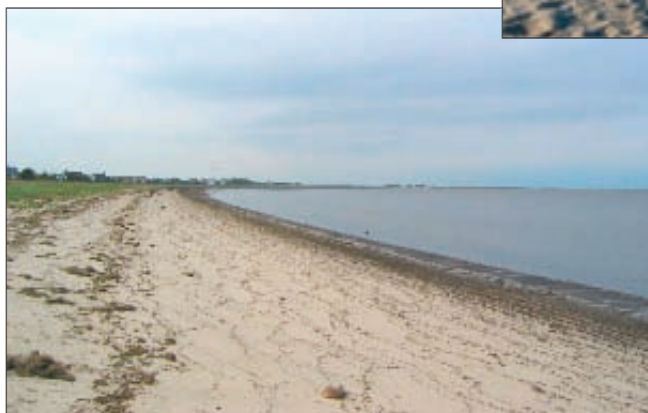
mary mission is the conservation of the world's four remaining horseshoe crab species, started a community-based horseshoe crab sanctuary program in 1999.

Horseshoe crab sanctuary status in the State of Delaware is facilitated by a little-used shellfish regulation known as "S-56," which has since been changed to a horseshoe crab regulation, "HC-9." Under this regulation, "Any land owner(s) may register their land with the State to be designated as a horseshoe crab sanctuary for a period to be specified by the land owner(s)."

With support from Andy Manus, the former director of fish and wildlife for Delaware's Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC), as well as DNREC's Director of Fisheries, Charles Lesser, ERDG was able to craft this overlooked shell-



Interpretive signs depicting the life cycles of horseshoe crabs can be found at each of the five horseshoe crab sanctuaries organized by the ERDG.



Approximately 14 miles of Delaware's coastline has been designated as horseshoe crab sanctuary, and communities around the world are taking notice.



# Crab Sanctuaries

fish regulation into a community conservation program. The challenge was, and will continue to be, articulating property rights, for many fear that by agreeing to sanctuary status, they will, in some manner, forfeit some of their rights as property owners. Since many inland bay, coastal communities are not incorporated, communal sanctuary status requires approval from each individual homeowner.

In 2000, then Governor Thomas Carper attended ERDG's dedication ceremony to recognize the community of Broadkill Beach as Delaware's first community-based horse-

shoe crab sanctuary. Since that time, ERDG has also established horseshoe crab sanctuaries at Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge (Fowler Beach), Slaughter Beach, Kitts Hummock and Pickering Beach, protecting over 14 miles of prime horseshoe crab spawning and shorebird-foraging habitat. Through funding provided by the Partnership for the Delaware Estuary, ERDG was also able to design and install interpretive signs for each sanctuary, all of which depict the life cycle of this remarkable mariner.

As a result of funding provided this year by the National Fish

and Wildlife Foundation, ERDG's Community Sanctuary Program will expand into New Jersey, with four communities ready to begin the process. However, unlike Delaware, New Jersey does not have a regulation in place to support this program. Therefore, it will be necessary to investigate state and community local law for each community, so an effective regulatory vehicle can be established to accomplish sanctuary status.

For the past three years, ERDG has also been working in Asia, home to three of the world's four remaining horseshoe crab species. Plans are now under

way for the first Asian horseshoe crab sanctuary in Orissa, India.

For those communities who have come to admire this ancient mariner, its survival represents a story of remarkable evolutionary success who, unlike ourselves, has managed to harmonize with the environment it depends upon for survival for over 250 million years. And, by its survival, it contributes significantly to the balance of nature.

For more information about the ERDG and its horseshoe crab conservation work, please visit [www.HorseshoeCrab.org](http://www.HorseshoeCrab.org). ■