



Oyster shell recycling effort enhances Nueces Bay bird nesting sites

Those oyster shells from yesterday's dinner are becoming tomorrow's birds' nest thanks to a recycling and crushing program by the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program.

Bird nesting islands are eroding throughout the Coastal Bend, resulting in declining bird populations. Protecting and improving existing nesting sites is a prime goal for CBBEP. With the help of several partners, including Audubon, CBBEP developed a plan to collect, crush and redistribute oyster shells

for Black Skimmer nest sites.



David Newstead, a CBBEP project manager who spearheaded this effort, first coordinated with Water Street Restaurants to recycle and store their shells, thus keeping them out of landfills and

reducing waste costs. The Port of Corpus Christi Authority allowed CBBEP to store the shells on some of its land and maintained road access to the shell pile.

Newstead then researched crushing machines. Through funding from a grant Audubon received from the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation Shell Marine Habitat Program, he purchased one specifically designed to spit out the proper size pieces and began shoveling the shells through the crusher.



Newstead and several other CBBEP staff and partners shoveled and crushed bucket after bucket of oyster shells. The crew, including some from the U.S. Fish and



New Island now has a new layer of crushed shell which should make it a more suitable site for Black Skimmer nests.

Wildlife Service, spread about 275 buckets of crushed shell on New Island in Nueces Bay, covering an area approximately 30 by 40 feet.

The island is a prime nesting site for Black Skimmers that make a depression in the shell bed to place their eggs. Currently the island has too much clay in the substrate which causes nest depressions to fill with water when it rains, which drowns eggs and chicks.



With new shell material, Newstead expects more skimmers to nest and increase survival rates. He estimates 250 nesting pairs could use the site with the new shell bed.

If the skimmers do use the area successfully, Newstead said he has more shell to crush and add to other nesting sites.



Photos: CBBEP



The oyster shoveling crew (above) included Newstead, center, and Tim Anderson, (left) Chad Stinson, Beau Hardegree and Jace Tunnell (right).

“Hopefully the birds will be happy and we’ll be able to do more of this in the future,” he said.

Skimmers begin nesting in April. Nesting birds are easily disturbed and can be disrupted when people get too close.

Please help protect the nesting bird population by maintaining a safe distance. If you see birds reacting to your presence, you are too close and need to move away.



Learn more about the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program at 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. CBBEP is partially funded by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

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