The Coastal Waters Consortium Presents:

Scientist Spotlight

Megan Hart

What is your role as a scientist for CWC?
I am a graduate student that is conducting research within the Coastal Waters Consortium. My main focus is on the effects of oil from the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill on the saltmarsh ecosystem through studying the nest success of Seaside Sparrows in Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana.

Can you summarize your oil spill research and describe any surprising findings you have come across?
I am studying nest survival of Seaside Sparrows between oiled and unoiled sites. We search for and observe Seaside Sparrow nests to assess nest survival. We compare nests between sites to assess differences in survival and have found higher daily survival on unoiled plots. I am also conducting a study of nest failure and have found that mink and marsh rice rats are two nest predators.

What is your educational background?
I graduated with my Bachelor's in Biology from Austin Peay State University and I am in the process of obtaining my Master's degree in Biology from Austin Peay State University.

What inspired you to become a scientist?
I am extremely fortunate to have been raised in a science oriented family. From a very young age, I had the opportunity to be out in the field and observe my father conducting research on rare, threatened, and endangered species. These early experiences instilled in me a love and respect for the value of nature. I decided from then on that I wanted to make a difference and help protect nature through studying the effects we as humans have on it.

Can you describe what you enjoy the most about conducting scientific research?
Perhaps the most enjoyable aspect of research for me is getting to share my findings with the general public and other scientists who are interested in my work. It is really gratifying to share my hard work and findings from my field seasons and explain why we need to be concerned about studying the Seaside Sparrow. This outreach allows people to realize the effects from humans can be wide-reaching and impacting a wide variety of organisms, which can in turn impact us.

The Coastal Waters Consortium's mission is to assess the chemical evolution, biological degradation, and environmental stresses of petroleum and dispersant within Gulf of Mexico coastal and shelf ecosystems.

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