



## BALD HEAD ISLAND CONSERVANCY, INC.

### *Sea Turtle Field Research Internship*

#### **SUMMARY:**

The Bald Head Island Conservancy Research Assistantships/Summer Intern Program is open to rising juniors, seniors and recent graduates from any accredited college or university, with majors in biology, marine biology, environmental science, or a related course of study. Due to student visa restrictions, only full-time international students may be considered.

Bald Head Island is part of a 12,000-acre island complex (Smith Island Complex) located at the mouth of the Cape Fear River in southeastern North Carolina, and consists of three forested peninsulas interconnected by a continuous beach strand: Bluff, Middle and Bald Head Islands. Bald Head Island features an upscale residential community of approximately 1,100 homes, with approximately 200 permanent year-round residents. The southern tip of the complex is Cape Fear, and includes ten miles of ocean beach. The island is accessible by a private passenger ferry from Southport, NC.

Funding for these internships is provided by Bald Head Island Conservancy, Inc. (BHIC), a non-profit organization founded in 1983. The Conservancy's mission is three-fold: conserving and preserving the natural resources of the Smith Island Complex and surrounding waters; providing quality environmental education for island residents and visitors; facilitating scientific research of benefit to the environmental resources of the area. As a part of this mission, BHIC operates a nationally recognized Sea Turtle Protection Program, and is the only non-governmental agency in North Carolina allowed to conduct flipper and PIT- tagging of sea turtles. In 2003, a collaborative project to attach satellite transmitters to eight nesting female sea turtles was initiated and has continued to be successful in 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008; this project will likely be continued in future nesting seasons.

Because of BHIC's long-standing commitment to this conservation program, Bald Head Island is used by U.S. Fish and Wildlife as an index beach for sea turtle nesting activity. The summer interns selected for this program are key to the success of this critical conservation/research program.

In addition, BHIC provides diverse educational programs and activities for the island community, and serves as an environmental monitor for the island ecosystems. The

summer interns are also involved in these diverse activities. Within a campus located at the east end of the island, BHIC's facilities include a modern four bedroom "dorm" (used to house the sea turtle biologist, summer interns, and visiting researchers), an administrative office, an education center, and the gift shop, Turtle Central, which underwrites much of BHIC's operation. In addition, BHIC owns a 21 acre nature preserve on Middle Island, and employs a permanent staff of 9 and a part time staff of 2. The internship is intended to give undergraduates not only research experience, but also experience in working at a small non-profit organization. While the majority of the summer will be spent conducting sea turtle patrols, interns will also work at Turtle Central, assist with educational programs, staff BHIC's information center, and help with various other office-oriented projects (such as mail pickup and envelope stuffing).

Interns will also conduct individual research projects. Little scientific research has been conducted on the island apart from that focused on sea turtles. The research projects will not only benefit the student, but also provide the island, residents and researchers with invaluable knowledge of the island and its inhabitants. Students will be expected to complete the research project and present the results to the community at the end of the summer. In addition students will write a proposal for future research in the format of the NSF's Graduate Research Fellowship.

While on Bald Head Island, the work of the sea turtle interns is supervised by BHIC's Sea Turtle Biologist, who is normally a graduate student in biology. In addition to supervising the summer interns and the Sea Turtle Protection Program, the Sea Turtle Biologist's duties also include collaborating with BHIC staff to coordinate and provide needed resources and leadership for other environmental programs and activities.

### **POSITION RESPONSIBILITIES:**

The interns perform their duties on the island at the direction of BHIC's Executive Director, Director of Education/Senior Naturalist and the Sea Turtle Biologist. Day-to-day supervision and coordination of the sea turtle interns shall be the responsibility of the Sea Turtle Biologist with the Director of Education/Senior Naturalist assisting as necessary. The Executive Director is the chief executive officer of BHIC, and has overall responsibility for management and day-to-day operation of the organization.

Interns receiving summer research assistantships must assume the following responsibilities:

- Conduct nightly (9 PM - 6 AM) beach patrols on foot or via all terrain vehicles (when available) in order to intercept nesting sea turtles, as a part of the Sea Turtle Protection Program. Take necessary measurements and flipper and PIT tag all nesting females, record all pertinent data, and protect eggs using a wire cage dug into the sand.

- Assist as needed with BHIC's various educational programs and research projects, including giving sea turtle lectures to the general public, kayak trips and assisting with camps.
- Assist with other duties as necessary including working in Turtle Central, the Information Center and various office tasks.
- Be able to work in less than favorable conditions such as intense heat & humidity and bugs (mosquitoes and no-see-ums).
- Develop, execute and present individual research project.
- Prepare a follow-up proposal based on the individual research projects.
- Promote and practice stewardship of BHIC's facilities, properties, and research equipment.
- Participate as needed in special events of BHIC during his/her tenure on the island.
- Live in BHIC's dormitory during their service period, generally mid-May through mid-August.
- Understand and agree to the documents "Procedures for Naturalist and Intern Program", and "Dormitory Regulations and Advice" prepared by BHIC.

#### **SELECTION PROCESS:**

A selection advisory committee is composed of the Executive Director, Director of Education/Senior Naturalist, Environmental Education Coordinator and Sea Turtle Biologist. The current Director of Education/Senior Naturalist is responsible for announcing the availability of summer assistantships, receiving applications, interviewing candidates, scoring and ranking applications in accordance with the Application Protocol for Research Assistantships. **All candidates selected for the internship must undergo a background check at the expense of the Conservancy.**

#### **SELECTION CRITERIA:**

Selection criteria for the research assistantships is as follows:

- Outstanding undergraduate student (rising junior or senior) or recent graduate at an institution of higher learning
- Candidates for the assistantships will be judged on:
  - Research and academic potential
  - Character and leadership
  - Public relations and communication skills: outgoing, helpful and positive personality; maturity and leadership abilities; comfortable with public speaking; the ability to handle sensitive situations in a tactful and diplomatic manner
- An expressed interest or background in conducting biological research, and a willingness to work in a field environment that can be physically challenging
- Ability to be a team player as well as work independently, and willingly perform a variety of tasks as needed

**TERM:**

The term of the sea turtle research internship is for a period of three months: from mid-May to mid-August, 2010, subject to undergraduate academic schedules. **Interns should be able to arrive on BHI on the weekend of May 15/16, though a day or two of flexibility may be allowed depending on academic exam schedules and be able to stay until August 15, give or take a day.** Applicants who have graduated may have the chance to extend their stay through the fall as we typically keep one intern on for the fall months. Arrival in mid-May provides for a training period of approximately two weeks prior to the start of actual research and/or educational duties by the interns on the island. The research interns serve at the will of BHIC, and the positions may be terminated by BHIC at any time.

**FUNDING:**

The stipend to be paid for each recipient of the Bald Head Island Conservancy Sea Turtle Internship shall be \$1,200 per summer, paid bi-weekly; this amount is pre-taxes. In addition to the stipend, each intern is provided living quarters in the BHIC dorm, weekly ferry tickets for trips between the island and the mainland, and parking for a vehicle at the mainland ferry terminal.

**ASSESSMENT:**

The sea turtle interns' in-service performance shall be assessed by the Sea Turtle Biologist, Director of Education/Senior Naturalist and the Executive Director, and shall be forwarded to appropriate academic sponsor.

**APPLICATION DEADLINE:**

The deadline to receive applications for 2010 summer internships is February 12th, 2010. Follow application directions very carefully, as incomplete applications will not be considered. Please *mail* your application to the address below; email is NOT preferable.

*If you desire more information about the  
Sea Turtle Internship,  
please contact:*

Maureen Dewire, Director of Education/Senior Naturalist  
Bald Head Island Conservancy  
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