## INTRODUCING NORTH CAROLINA'S AMAZING COAST: NATURAL WONDERS FROM ALLIGATORS TO ZOEAS

BY TERRI KIRBY HATHAWAY

When I first read *Georgia's Amazing Coast* in 2005, three thoughts popped into my head. First, Georgia and North Carolina have a ton of coastal animals, plants and habitats in common. Second, although the two coastal areas have many similarities, Georgia has a number of plants and animals – many presented in the beautifully illustrated plates of that book – that differ from what exists in the Tar Heel State. Third, there should be a similar book for North Carolina. So now it is 2013, and our book is finally here!

As the book title indicates, North Carolina's coast is an amazing place. Its distinctive location makes the coastal area extra special. Cape Hatteras is the dividing line between two biogeographical regions, which means that along the Tar Heel coast, one can find both northern and southern species of flora and fauna. North Carolina is the northern extent for the range of many southern species and, conversely, the southern extent of the range for many northern species.

For example, American lobsters and spiny lobsters can both be found in North Carolina waters. The American lobster (*Homarus americanus*) is commercially fished along the New England coast, but it also appears seasonally off the Outer Banks. Meanwhile, the spiny lobster (*Panulirus argus*), abundant in the Florida Keys, has been harvested by divers along the southern end of the North Carolina coast. As another illustration, both northern and southern species of bayberry occur in North Carolina's coastal plain. Northern bayberry (*Myrica pensylvanica*) is found in areas stretching from Canada to North Carolina. Southern bayberry (*Myrica cerifera*), also known as wax myrtle, exists along the Atlantic Coast from the Florida Keys to southern New Jersey.

The American alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*) reaches the northern extent of its range around Dare and Tyrrell counties in northeastern North Carolina. The golden silk spider (*Nephila clavipes*) is a southern species whose range is expanding northward, from Charleston, S.C., in the 1980s, to Myrtle Beach, S.C., in the 1990s. Evidence of this species breeding in southeastern North Carolina was found around 2004. Could this range expansion be evidence of a changing climate?

There are other physical differences between the northern and southern coasts of North Carolina. Off Cape Hatteras, the warm waters



of the northward-flowing Gulf Stream meet an inshore branch of the Labrador Current, which flows south, bringing cold waters from the North Atlantic. The collision of these currents creates the dangerous shoals that have made the waters around Cape Hatteras become known as the Graveyard of the Atlantic.

This book is not only for those who live near the coast but also for those who have ever visited our beautiful North Carolina beaches — walking, swimming, fishing, beachcombing or otherwise enjoying our state's coastal resources. I hope that this peek into some of the incredible habitats, plants and animals will pique your curiosity and make you want to explore the shore and discover more about *North Carolina's Amazing Coast.* 

The above is an excerpt from North Carolina's Amazing Coast, published by University of Georgia Press. Enjoy the following poster. *Continued* 

# NORTH CAROLINA'S AMAZING COAST: NATUR



# COMB JEËËY

Throw a stone into the sea on a moonless night and you might see a striking green glow emanate from the water. This bioluminescence is brought to you by comb jellies, globular, transparent organisms that look a lot like jellyfish, minus the signature sting. The eight rows of iridescent color that run along a comb jelly's body are actually cilia, hairlike structures it beats against the water inside its body cavity to move about. Underneath each row are specialized organs where a chemical reaction occurs to produce light. The egg-shaped pink comb jelly is common in North Carolina, especially in Pamlico Sound and the Cape Fear River area. To keep its little light shining bright, the pink comb jelly feeds on sea walnuts (*Mnemiopsis leidui*), a smaller species of comb jelly.

Pink Comb Jelly Beroe ovata

## us arms, oday enough — don't nave suckers. Instad, its filet feet have rounded or pointed tips, perfect for sticking in the sand to pole itself across a surface or look for food. The margined sea star prefers small clams, often eaten whole, but just because it's a star doesn't mean it has class. After a meal, it regurgitates the shells, along with read other indirectible meteriolities. sand and other indigestible materials Margined Sea Star Astropecten articulatus

vou all?

Barred Owl Strix varia

MARGINED SEA STAR

its arms, oddly enough — don't have suckers

This chatty raptor uses its big

Inis chatty raptor uses its big mouth for more than just hootin' and hollerin'. It can capture and eat prey as large as an opossum or rabbit. Even screech owls are on its list of munchies! These large drautch.com birds large, gravish-brown birds are recognizable by their round, puffy heads and light and dark horizontal barring across the breast. Barred owls are found throughout North Carolina preferring mature forests near the streams or floodplains of larger water bodies, such as the French Broad, Roanoke, Neuse, and Cape Fear Rivers. Listen for their distinctive calls — "Hoo-hoo-to-hoo-oo, hoo-hoo to wha-aa" or "Who cooks for you? Who cooks for

- at night and during the daytime on overcast days, especially in the winter during their breeding season

Not content just to be a star,

Not content just to be a star, this species stands out as one of the fastest of its kind in the Southeast. It can cruise nearly 30 inches per minute along the sandy bottoms of offshore areas from

offshore areas from

North Carolina to the pics. Unlike sea

stars that live on rocky surfaces, the margined sea star's tube feet —

located on

# ALE WONDERS FROM ALEIGATORS TO ZOEAS

## BEANKET FEOWER

Tough but cheerful, this hardy flower tolerates drought, thrives in sandy soil, and doesn't put up a fuss in full sun. Its daisy-like flowers blossom throughout the summer and fall, "blanketing" sand dunes and roadsides in hues of reddish orange and yellow. The jaunty blooms belie hairy stems and ragged leaves below. Other common names include fire-wheel and Indian blanket, but Hatteras and Ocracoke Islanders call it the Joe Bell flower. Legend has it that Joe Bell, son of a distinguished family from mainland Washington, North Carolina, fled to Ocracoke with a broken heart. He was often seen wandering the beaches with bunches of blanket flowers. Despite his reclusive tendencies, islanders took care of Bell, leaving baskets of food on his doorstep. When neighbors retrieved the baskets, they were filled with blooms. When Bell died, he was found in his fishing boat, surrounded by his signature red-and-yellow flowers.

#### Blanket Flower Gaillardia pulchella

# SEA ROACH In the the information of the provided of the prov



### NUTRIA



## RED-COCKADED WOODPECKER



#### ĽUGWQRM

ugworm Arenicola cristata

Lugworms rarely leave home, so if you'd like to meet one, you'l have to go calling. Fortunately, their lodgings are cay to find in North Carolina marshes. At low tide, look for a small succer shaped depression near a twisted coil of smd. Just below is a greenishblack lugworm, living in Just below is a greenishblack lugworm. Ni the like mouth secretes a sticky substance designed to trap food particles in the sand. It sucks in water to lead and irrigite it gills. After swallowing organic matter along with lots of sand, the backward and forward by contracting and expanding its body, using bristles on its middle to grip the walls of its burrow.

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