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Underwater robots search for answers to save marine life

Rashad Midani/WBTW

The REMUS runs on set courses, and can act like a porpoise by coming to the surface.

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By RASHAD MIDANI
WBTW News 13 Reporter/Photojournalist
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Grand Strand researchers are using underwater robots to help prevent a blow to South Carolina's tourism industry. Coastal Carolina professors say in 2004, they noticed a large amount of flounder being caught, and were alarmed.

All the people involved in this project hope to preserve one of the grand strand's important resources; it's marine-life. The fish suffer from low oxygen levels, and researchers say it can lead to a couple of different effects.

Dr. Thomas Grothues, a Research Assistant Professor with Rutgers University says, "It can either sweep fish in front of it like a broom as they move to get out of the way of that advancing low oxygen; or if they get trapped in it, it can make them lethargic, stress them out, and eventually kill them."

What the REMUS can do is essentially act as a robot submarine. It's been roaming the ocean the last few days to help figure out exactly what contributed to a large flounder catch in 2004.

Dr. Eric Koephler with CCU says the conditions for marine life in 2004 were almost very damaging.

Dr. Koephler says, “If the oxygen concentrations would been much lower than that, that would have been a massive fish kill, and it would have had a totally different impact on our tourism economy here in the state.”

The crew working on the project also has another robot called the Glider. Dr. Koephler is also using a device called a Data Flow. It’s already shown low oxygen conditions in shallow water and water close to shore. He says they’re still taking in the results from the REMUS, and will hopefully find this robot to be very insightful.

Researchers also say the REMUS can be left alone in the water for 22 hours on a charge. It runs on set courses, and can act like a porpoise by coming to the surface.

Reader Reactions

Posted by (Drew) on July 13, 2008 at 9:10 am

I have lived on the ocean front in the unincorporated area of Horry County for the past 12 years. For the first ten years I saw dolphins near shore almost every time I looked. I haven’t seen any in the past two years and I’ve been looking almost every day.
Perhaps your experts, that are using the submarine to monitor the marine life, could shed some light on this matter.
I would think that the low oxygen content in the water would not be the cause, because Dolphins are mammals.
Thank you.

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