

## Barrier Islands What?

By Natasha Paris

Do you know what a barrier island is? We know barriers are objects that block something or keep something out. An island is a piece of land surrounded by water. So a barrier island is an island that protects the coastline from storm damage and gives some wildlife a habitat. A barrier island is usually a long and narrow piece of land made of sand.

Barrier islands run along the eastern coast of North America in places such as Florida, New Jersey and North Carolina. They are also on the gulf coast like in Louisiana. There are many different habitats on barrier islands. A **habitat** is a place where a plant or animal is usually found and where it can obtain all the resources it needs to survive. The different sections of a barrier island are as follows; ocean, dune, backdune, salt marsh, bay and mainland. A dune is a hill that has sand stacked up by the wind and the backdune is the back part. A salt marsh is the flat piece of land that is a



result of the overflow by salt water. The bay is the small body of water that is away from the main, larger body of water. These different sections provide habitats for different organisms. For instance fish, spiders and organism eggs are usually near the ocean or dune sections. However when a barrier island's size decreases they definitely provide fewer habitats. Some organisms that live on the island beach habitat are burrowing worms, scavenging crabs, seagulls and pelicans. Organisms that live in the dunes are terns and many types of crabs.

The organisms that live on barrier islands found a way to survive in the harsh conditions there, so they basically **adapted** to their surroundings. These harsh conditions are always-changing winds, blowing sand, and the dryness. It's hard for organisms to survive when their habitat is affected and altered constantly. Not only do animals live on barrier islands humans do to.

People actually build homes on barrier islands to live in or just use as a vacation home. Do you think this is such a smart idea? I'll let you read the rest of this article before you make a decision on this question.

Coastal Storms can severely damage barrier islands. Even though the natural environment affects them constantly; the natural environment being waves, high tides winds, etc. Coastal storms most definitely impact the shape and form of the island the most. A coastal storm also causes erosion of the dunes and can completely destroy the dune system if the storm is really severe. Even though a barrier island could disintegrate (wash away) in one large storm (Yes, you heard me correct, one storm can make a barrier island disappear!) The barrier island can easily restore itself in about a year or two.

There are some examples and names of different barrier islands. For example, hurricane Andrew in Louisiana made the Isles Dernieres lose 3/10 of the island. At first when the island deteriorates it is not physically obvious that the island is gone. However, the wave currents increase because the island is gone. Raccoon Island is a barrier island that is in Louisiana, which disintegrated then later restored itself. Boston Harbor, Massachusetts and Ocean city, Maryland are barrier islands. Ocean City is a very popular beach resort but I don't know why because it got hit many times by coastal storms. The biggest storm to hit Ocean City was the Ash Wednesday northeaster of March 1962. The storm affected Ocean City severely. The waves were breaking the boardwalk, water was going through ground floors of hotels, it was a disaster. Many people felt hopeless because they were without electricity for four days and many of their homes were damaged.

Cape Cod which is in Massachusetts is not technically a barrier island, but it acts like one. Cape Cod is a peninsula that protects Massachusetts from large coastal storms just like a barrier island would. The Cape has all the different sections of a barrier island and just about the same organisms as well.

So to wrap, a Barrier island is a piece of land that is composed of sand and it helps prevent coastal storms from severely damaging the mainland. Coastal storms can do a lot of damage to a barrier island especially the habitats of the different organisms that live there. So now do you think it's smart to build on a coastal island? I don't because a barrier island is the first thing that gets hit if a coastal storm occurs. Do you really want to risk getting your house destroyed because that is what could happen?