

NC island's mysterious birth appears on NASA satellite images

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Satellite images reveal a new barrier island forming off the coast of Cape Hatteras National Seashore in North Carolina. Credit: NASA Earth Observatory

NASA has released satellite images that show North Carolina's newly formed Shelly Island was born in November.

The photos, acquired by the Operational Land Imager on the Landsat 8 satellite, show the sands that grew into the island first registered in November 2016 in the shoal area off Cape Point.

A second image, taken in January 2017, shows waves were clearly breaking on the shallow region off the cape's tip, NASA said. The site of those breakers is where the island eventually formed.

The third image, taken this month, shows the island clearly formed, and nearly a mile in length.

"What exactly causes a shallow region to become exposed is a deep question, and one that is difficult to speculate on without exact observations," said geomorphologist Andrew Ashton in a NASA report on the island.

One possibility, he said, is [water](#) levels going down after storm-driven waters piled up sediment to near the surface.

Shelly Island came to the nation's attention about two months ago and has become known for being mysterious and forbidding, including news on July 14 that a World War II-era military training device washed up on shore. The device was shaped like a torpedo and prompted an evacuation of the island, which is popular with tourists.

The island got its unofficial name, Shelly Island, because it is littered with numerous and well-preserved shells. But it is also a treacherous place to visit, with a deadly current separating it from Cape Point. The waters in the channel are known to be popular with sharks.

Experts say the island could be swept away by the next big storm off the coast. Until then, the property is under the jurisdiction of Dare County.

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