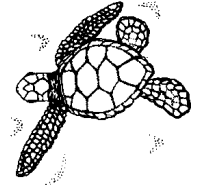


# Turtle Tracker



Volusia & Flagler Sea Turtle Volunteer News

Volume 6 – Issue 3 & 4

Fall & Winter 2000

## Diamondback Terrapins

Over the years we have rescued many sea turtles, and that's not unusual for a sea turtle volunteer organization. Every now and then, we get called to rescue other species of turtles, such as gopher tortoises, box turtles, sliders and soft shells. Some of these turtle rescues are quite interesting, and we are always ready to be of assistance.

Recently, Wes Hewson, the park manager at Lighthouse Point Park, called me for a turtle with a hook in its mouth. The turtle in distress turned out to be a diamondback terrapin. I took the turtle to my veterinarian, who often helps us with injured turtles. He removed the fish hook from the turtle and gave it some antibiotics to aid in the healing process.

Diamondback terrapins (*Malaclemys terrapin*) are beautiful turtles that live exclusively in coastal waters, brackish marshes, estuaries and lagoons. They are found all the way from Cape Cod to Florida and Texas. They are usually 5 to 10 inches in length and have thick heads and legs, covered with spots. Their carapace is strongly inscribed with rings on the plates. The center plates are raised, and this is where the name "diamondback" comes from.

As is true with several species of turtle, the females are nearly twice as large as the males and have larger heads. Diamondbacks are mostly carnivorous and often scavenge their food. They are active during the day and burrow in the mud at night. They hibernate in the winter and sometimes come out on warm days to sun themselves.

From the late 1800's until the 1920's diamondback terrapins were considered a gourmet food item and were farm raised in the southern states. The farming of these turtles may have saved them from extinction. Today however, the diamondbacks are becoming endangered from being accidentally caught in crab traps while looking for food.

If you ever see any species of turtle in distress, please call us at the numbers on the back page, and we will respond to rescue it or tell you what needs to be done to help the turtle.



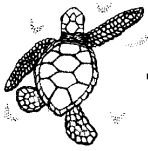
*Diamondback terrapin with fish hook in mouth*

## Florida Coastal Cleanup 2000

The 14<sup>th</sup> annual Florida Coastal Cleanup took place on September 16, 2000. The cleanup is part of the International Coastal Cleanup where more than 75 countries participate.

Every year volunteers all over Florida turn out to clean beaches, riverbanks and waterways. Last year 37,527 volunteers in Florida scoured 1,830 miles of beaches and waterways, collecting an amazing total of 753,780 pounds of trash. While marine debris is found in all of the world's oceans, 80% of the debris found on beaches is washed, blown, or dumped from shore. Much of this trash comes from inland sources dumped into rivers and streams that flow into the sea.

The Florida Coastal Cleanup is about much more than just removing trash from our beaches. By using detailed, standardized data collection cards to record the trash, volunteers gather valuable information about the types and sources of debris found. All of this data goes to the Center for Marine Conservation where it is analyzed and tracked every year. In addition to making our beaches cleaner and healthier, cleanup data has been used to help ratify an international treaty regulating ocean dumping, initiated a storm drain stenciling program,  
*continued on page 2*



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pressure industries to comply with anti-dumping laws, and encourage communities to solve solid waste problems.

Some of the more unusual items found include: bathtub, false teeth, lawn mower, Mr. Potato Head, satellite dish, rowing machine, unopened UPS package, parachute, vcr, typewriter, beanbag chair, toilet seat, front door. The 12 most common items found are called "the dirty dozen".

**The Coastal Cleanup Dirty Dozen**

Debris Items	Total Number	Percentage of Total Collected
1. Cigarette Butts	172,297	22.30 %
2. Caps, Lids (plastic)	52,615	6.81 %
3. Plastic Pieces	44,358	5.74 %
4. Foamed Plastic Pieces	36,816	4.77 %
5. Beverage Bottles (glass)	35,880	4.64 %
6. Food Bags, Wrappers	34,729	4.50 %
7. Beverage Cans	32,152	4.16 %
8. Straws	27,507	3.56 %
9. Paper Pieces	25,919	3.35 %
10. Bottle Caps (metal)	24,211	3.13 %
11. Beverage Bottles (plastic)	22,702	2.94 %
12. Cups (foamed plastic)	16,894	2.19 %
Dirty Dozen Totals	526,080	68.09 %



Cleanup volunteers weighing trash

[Volusia Turtle Patrol has coordinated the Coastal Cleanup in Ponce Inlet & Wilbur by the Sea for the last 12 years. This year 64 volunteers collected 2,602 pounds of trash from the beach.]

**Coastal Friendly Awards 2000**

This year kicked off a new coastal awareness program called the Coastal Friendly Awards Campaign. This program was created by the by the Sea Turtle Survival League (STSL), the educational outreach program of the Caribbean Conservation Corporation. The program is designed to encourage more responsible management of coastal properties, and in the process, raise awareness about those properties doing their part to protect coastal habitats. Award categories include hotels, motels, condominiums, retail stores, restaurants and coastal community developments.

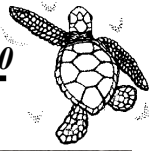
Businesses are eligible for the awards if they agree to display educational materials, as well as reduce beach front lighting during sea turtle nesting season, use native landscaping, and protect the health of the beach dune system. Winners will be acknowledged and will receive a certificate of recognition for their efforts to become coastal friendly.

In Volusia County, 95 businesses were approached by members of the Turtle Patrol offering educational door hangers, table tents and place mats containing information about sea turtles. Most businesses welcomed the literature and in some cases requested more. However, there were seven businesses that refused literature: the Ocean Sand Motel, Radisson Resort, Shamrock Motel, Sun & Surf Motel, Corvette Inn, Daytona Beach Hilton and, last but not least, the Plaza Resort and Spa.

Unfortunately for the sea turtles, the Plaza Resort was the site of a very bad hatchling disorientation event, where several hatchlings died. The lights from this property guided the hatchlings away from the water, and some made it as far as Atlantic Avenue where they were run over by vehicles.

The Coastal Awareness Campaign is funded through a grant from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Advisory Council on Environmental Education. For more information about the Coastal Awareness Campaign, or to learn how you can make your beachside home or business more coastal friendly, please contact Dan Evans with the Sea Turtle Survival League at (352) 373-6441.

**Thank you to all the businesses that participated in this year's Coastal Awareness Campaign! Winners will be announced in the Spring Newsletter**



## Price of Progress *by Beth Libert*

One of the most wonderful things about living in Florida is all the diverse wildlife that surrounds us. I have lived in the Town of Ponce Inlet for over 20 years and have seen this sleepy little fishing town become a community of condominiums and million dollar mansions. Ponce Inlet used to abound with wildlife such as foxes, wild pigs, turkeys, skunks, bobcats, deer and many other creatures. Slowly all the animals are losing their habitat and being destroyed or relocated.

One of the greatest pleasures I always enjoyed driving through town was seeing the gopher tortoises wandering the sides of the road or munching on vegetation on the right of way. We used to have hundreds of gophers living peacefully among the residents, and some these tortoises were several decades old.

In the last few years, there have been numerous incidents where these gentle creatures have been hit by vehicles speeding through town, or they have been dug up by land clearing machinery. I have had the unpleasant task of responding to many of these incidents, and it always breaks my heart to see these poor defenseless creatures being injured or killed.

One of the largest populations of gopher tortoises in Ponce Inlet used to live between Atlantic Avenue and Peninsula Drive just north of the police department. This area has been completely leveled in the year 2000 to make way for a multimillion dollar private marina complex and golf course. Other animal lovers and I tried to catch as many gopher tortoises from this property as possible before the bulldozers moved in, but it was impossible to get them all.

The last gopher tortoise call I responded to was one of the most horrible things I have ever seen. The back part of this large gopher tortoise's shell had been torn off by a piece of land clearing equipment. All the vital organs were exposed and the poor creature was still alive. I rushed it to the Spruce Creek Wildlife Rehab Center to be put out of its misery.

The loss of gopher tortoise habitat is beyond repair in Ponce Inlet, and our quiet little town will never be the same. People have a right to develop their property, it's just a shame that helpless animals who have called this land their home are the ones who suffer in the name of progress.



*Gopher tortoise fatally wounded by land clearing*



*Harbour Village construction site*

## Donations to Help Other Creatures

The Turtle Patrol often rescues other animals besides turtles. Sick and injured birds and mammals are taken to Mary Keller (the bird lady) or Dee Ann Snyder, the founder of the Spruce Creek Wildlife Center. These two women, with the help of their families, devote endless hours to the care of injured and abandoned wildlife.

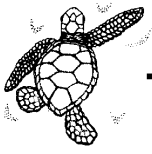
We can never thank them enough for all they do, but we did want to help out with their efforts. So, the Volusia Turtle Patrol donated \$1,000.00 to each of these selfless individuals to improve their animal care facilities. Mary Keller used her donation to build a new flight cage for juvenile and recuperating birds. Dee Ann built more cages to house animals.

For more information or to make a donation contact:

**Mary Keller (birds only) 252-2794**

**Spruce Creek Wildlife Rehab Center 761-0731**

***Thank you ladies for all your dedicated hard work!***



## **TRUST**

*The sea produced an ancient form  
with aquatic wings for soaring  
that gouged the sand away from the tide  
above the ocean's pouring.*

*She abandoned hope to trust the past,  
heaved forth the future and at last,  
buried it and left.*

*Now, two moons hence, little turtles pip,  
with soft struggling bodies hatching.  
The sands ensconce as eggs are ripped  
by contorted masses scratching.*

*The siblings toil at a common chore  
to whittle ceiling into floor,  
until at sand's surface just short of sky,  
the unsettled lie, becalmed.*

*The tangled turtles wait  
as heat of day abates  
and cool of night prods  
their reluctance away.*

*At dusk the fits and starts begin  
and through claw and strain,  
above their heads sand rains again,  
and yields to sky of night.*

*This army boiling in the night gains might,  
and in waves, pours forth to see the sight.  
Soft flippers patter and wipe sand from view  
that eyes might seize upon the cue.*

*And then eyes do, they catch the glow  
and every hatchling keen  
rushes on to the goal they know  
but they have never seen.*

*As if clockwork toys tightly wound  
they keep their pace and bearing tight,  
for unless the sea is quickly found,  
they will not survive the night.*

*They choose their erring paths  
with neither doubt nor anticipation,  
and their consistency deals them life or death  
with quiet resignation.*

*Thus, night wanes and sights of light remaining  
scatter throngs persistent  
and about the dune abundant obstacles restraining,  
divide the dying from the spent.*

*Weakened few reach the sight they sought,  
a deceptive brightness reassuring  
where trusting forms are caught  
by the sight of lights alluring.*

*Dawn now dries their searching eyes  
and death now rests the weary.  
Might fate have been more kind  
to travelers more leery?*

*Were these turtles to awaken,  
could they sense their mother's plight  
having left her young forsaken  
owing confidence in light?*

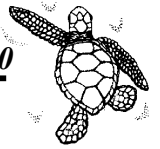
*Past's light offered not such bitter seas  
nor played such deadly roles  
to guide hatchlings on to sights like these  
electric lights on poles.*

*Might we masters of the light adapt,  
forgo complete control,  
and lessen obsolescence  
lest our presence take its toll?*

*To tread on earth with darkness soft  
leaves not the night asunder  
and preserves the stars and the moon aloft,  
and obsoleted wonders.*

*Blair E. Witherington*

*[Blair Witherington is a highly respected research biologist for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission at the Florida Marine Research Institute in Melbourne, and is co-author of "Light Pollution on Sea Turtle Nesting Beaches"]*



## Sea Turtles and Lighting 2000

Another sea turtle nesting season has passed and with it the senseless deaths of more hatchlings. There were a total of 54 documented sea turtle nests that disoriented in the year 2000. An estimated 2,500 hatchlings were disoriented. This number is down from the 60 nests that disoriented in 1999.

It's true, progress in enforcing Volusia County's lighting ordinance has been made. However, hundreds of hatchlings were disoriented again this season, with an unknown number of them being lost to ghost crabs, birds, dehydration or run over by vehicles on the road. Many of the properties involved in these disorientations are repeat offenders. They are properties who have been warned of their problem lighting, but have never been taken before code enforcement board or fined.

As of December 2000, only one property has ever been fined for violating the eleven-year-old lighting ordinance. The Econo Lodge, at 295 S. Atlantic Avenue in Ormond Beach, was originally ordered to pay a \$9,500 fine for their lights illuminating the beach. After an excuse to the Volusia County Code Board that the owner had an uncooperative manager and a mix-up over the nesting season's end, the Code Board reduced the fine to a mere \$3,000. This after being documented as being in violation of the lighting ordinance for years.

For the first time since there was a lighting ordinance, the Turtle Patrol did not do a comprehensive lighting survey. We reported numerous violations to County staff, but at the end of the season most of these properties were still illuminating the beach. One such property was the Plaza Resort and Spa. There was a sea turtle nest just north of the hotel, and we were afraid the hatchlings would crawl to the lights of the Plaza so we reported the lights to County staff several times. Needless to say, the lights were never fixed and when the nest hatched, approximately 75 hatchlings crawled towards the lights of the Plaza and up the beach ramp under the hotel. Several hatchlings were found crushed on Atlantic Avenue.

There is no easy answer to the lighting problems on Volusia County beaches. More diligent enforcement and public education are the only hope, and as always, we look forward to things improving next year.



*Hatchlings crushed on Atlantic Avenue*

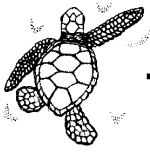
## Festivals and Public Education 2000

One of the Turtle Patrol's main objectives is public education. We believe through educational awareness, people will learn to respect and cherish their environment.

The public school system and local festivals are great ways to teach children and adults alike about sea turtles and the environment. This year we exhibited at the Manatee Festival in Orange City, Halifax/Indian River Cleanup, Earthfest 2000 in Port Orange, Earthday 2000 at Washington Oaks State Gardens, River Fest at Gemini Springs, "I Am a Scientist" at Discovery Elementary in Deltona, and Port Orange Family Days. We also did presentations to the Kiwanis Club of Holly Hill, the Museum of Arts and Sciences Summer Learning Institute, the Volusia County Herpetological Society, Volusia County Junior Lifeguard Program, Pine Trails Elementary, Port Orange Elementary, Halifax Behavioral Services, Christian Outreach Science Sunday School, Brownie Troop from Orlando on the beach in Ponce Inlet, and the Matanzas Women's Club.



*Arden enjoying a "turtle" at Earthfest 2000*



## **What Do those Turtle People Do in the Off Season ?**

The official end of the sea turtle nesting season is October 31. Sometimes though, we still have nests on the beach into as late as the first weeks of November. This year we had two green turtle nests hatchling in November. One year we even had a loggerhead nest that didn't hatch until the first week of December.

So, let's assume the nesting season ended on schedule, does that mean we all take a vacation and enjoy having a "life?" No, unfortunately for some of us, turtle season is a year round project.

Now that turtle season has ended, it's time to sort through the thousands of stakes we use for marking nests, clean and bundle the good ones, and discard the bad. We have to clean up the turtle trucks and all the equipment. You can only imagine the amount of sand that accumulates in six months time. Next, it's time to round up our three ATVs, plus two privately owned ones for maintenance.

George and Nancy are in charge of routine vehicle maintenance, and all the ATVs need to be stripped to clean the rust and repaint parts. All the fluids have to be changed and each unit is checked over for any problems. We purchased three new ATVs this year, but the bolts and other parts are already rusty. As we put the ATVs back together, we are installing stainless steel nuts and bolts, so hopefully it will be easier to get them apart next year.

Besides routine maintenance, we are still on call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year for strandings of sick and dead turtles. That means holidays and special occasions too! On Christmas day we had a live juvenile green turtle come in at Daytona and another one the day after. With dead turtles you usually have some leeway time to respond, but a live turtle needs immediate attention. Sea World couldn't take these two particular turtles, so they had to be driven to the Marinelife Center in Juno by Nancy.

The so-called "off season" is also one of our busiest times of the year for festivals and fund raising. We exhibit at local events to promote public educational awareness, and we work at the Daytona International Speedway to raise money to support our cause. The Speedway helps local non-profit organizations raise money through running souvenir and food stands, with a percentage of the profits going to the volunteer organization.

In addition to our volunteer activities, some of the turtle volunteers actually work in the off season to make a living to support their turtle habit. Our fearless leader refinishes woodwork on yachts to make ends meet. Another volunteer delivers pizzas during speed weeks and bike week, she also volunteers at the Central Florida Zoo. Some lucky volunteers do travel and enjoy life, but they are always ready when May 1<sup>st</sup> comes.

We are always busy doing something that ultimately benefits those precious sea turtles, and everyone looks forward to the first nest of the next season.

***For more information on volunteering, contact Beth Libert at the number on the back page***



*Salvaging a dead leatherback turtle for research*



*George Keaton working on Turtle Patrol ATV*

### ***Editor's Note:***

***I sincerely apologize for the delay in publication of the Fall & Winter 2000 Newsletters.***



## ADOPT A SEA TURTLE NEST



### Help Save a Threatened Species!

Sea turtles have been nesting on our beaches for over 100 million years. The population of these ancient mariners has been greatly depleted by loss of nesting habitat, incidental catch by fisheries and exploitation for sea turtle products. Without the help of people like you, they could face extinction in the near future.

By adopting a sea turtle nest, you will provide funding to the nonprofit Turtle Patrol and show your support for the protection of an endangered species.

Sponsorship Fee \$20.00

Adopter Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City, State \_\_\_\_\_  
Zip \_\_\_\_\_

**Please make check payable to:**  
**Volusia Turtle Patrol**  
**4738 S. Peninsula Drive**  
**Ponce Inlet, FL 32127**

Here's what you will receive when you adopt a sea turtle nest:

- \* official adoption certificate
- \* one year subscription to the Turtle Tracker
- \* sea turtle educational packet
- \* nest watching guidelines
- \* nest success evaluation report
- \* 2 bumper stickers

If you really want to get involved, you can do a "Hands On" adoption!

This actually involves baby sitting a sea turtle nest. You will go to the beach in the evening to check "your" nest, and report back to the Turtle Patrol if there are any problems. You will provide valuable protection for the nest, and you may even be lucky enough to see the hatchlings emerge from their nest and crawl to the sea!



Regular Adoption \_\_\_\_\_

Hands On Adoption \_\_\_\_\_

