

Turtle Tracker

Protecting nesting sea turtles in Florida's Volusia and Flagler Counties.



Photo provided by Flagler Live

Flagler Beach Mayor Alice Baker, right, awarding certificates of appreciation to FB Turtle Patrol volunteers.

Congratulations to Flagler Beach volunteers

Provided by Flagler Live

They're detectives of the sands: They start their work at dawn, riding ATVs on the beaches on mornings from May to September, looking for what they call "fresh crawls"—telltale signs of a turtle nest (unless it's a "false crawl"). They then literally stake the nest's ground. You've seen them on Flagler's beaches: four stakes and reddish ribbon around them, demarcating the no-go zones for all but turtles.

It takes a lot of dedicated work

but a lot of people, all of them volunteers organized under the non-profit umbrella of the Volusia-Flagler Turtle Patrol.

On Thursday evening, Flagler Beach mayor Alice Baker recognized the Flagler Beach Turtle Patrol before the city commission, awarding certificates of appreciation to a dozen volunteers, and to cheers from the commission and an audience of about 30. (Coincidentally, "Colors of the Sea," a new art show featuring Rick Cannizzaro's vivid paintings of sea turtles, was

opening at virtually the same time this evening around the corner from the commission, chambers, at Ocean Publishing, across from the pier. The show is on display through the end of the month.)

"I know Flagler Beach does love their turtles," volunteer Lori Ottlein said. Ottlein, familiarly known as the city's Turtle Lady, won a national conservation award from the Orlando chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution in March. "We really do have a lot of support from Flagler Beach."

Turtle Facts:

The largest leatherback ever found was in Wales in 1988. It was an 8.5-ft-long male weighing 2,020 lbs!

Leatherbacks can dive to depths of 4,200 feet (1,280 meters)—deeper than any other turtle—and can stay down for up to 85 minutes.

Bonfires on the Beach

By Beth Libert

On July 28, 2011 the Flagler Beach City Commission unanimously approved adding a ban on fires on the beach to the existing lighting ordinance. This will prohibit fires on the beach from May 1 through October 31, effective immediately.

This is a very important step forward for sea turtle protection in Flagler Beach! Hatchlings have very strong natural instincts which help them find the ocean. They are guided to the sea by the sound of the surf, the slope of the beach and the natural glow of the horizon from the sky reflecting off the water. This natural glow is always there even when there is no moon. If there is another artificial light source that is brighter, the hatchlings will be drawn towards this rather than the ocean. Flashlights, torches and even fires will disorient hatchlings as well as streetlights, porch lights and interior lighting. Hatchlings have even been drawn into burning fires, that is how strong their instincts are. Please be sure your lights are shielded or turned off during nesting season. You can also use amber or red lights in place of regular light bulbs.



Photo by Lori Ottlein

Look at those Leatherbacks

By Beth Libert

This sea turtle nesting season we are experiencing a record number of leatherback nests in Volusia and Flagler Counties. Considering we might only have one or two nests the whole season, we are very excited about the 13 nests we have in Volusia and the 13 in Flagler. The higher than usual leatherback nesting is also happening in other nearby counties.

So why are we experiencing so many leatherback nests in Florida? Some researchers believe the females are finding better food supplies and this is giving them the nutrition needed to produce more eggs, thus laying more nests. Their favorite food is cannon ball jelly fish and there has

been an overabundance of these lately. Another theory is the decline of natural predators such as sharks, they are becoming more endangered themselves, due to the fishing industry.

While leatherback nesting is up in Florida, a serious decline has been seen in some of their most popular nesting beaches such as Costa Rica. It could be the leatherbacks are abandoning historic nesting beaches that have been overwhelmed with poaching and tourism in search of safer habitat. No one knows for sure, but time will tell if this is just a fluke or the beginning of something much more significant. Either way Florida is thrilled to have so many majestic leatherbacks on our beaches.

Foxy Fellas

By Beth Libert

Last year we experienced a high incident of sea turtle nest depredation in Ponce Inlet and Wilbur by a fox family. These foxes were living in Lighthouse Point Park and destroyed dozens of nests. Besides the damage they do to a nest when they dig it up to eat the eggs, they also open the nest up to other predators such as ghost crabs and fire ants. Screens on the nests couldn't keep them out and nobody would trap them. We were very concerned we would have the same problem again this year. This has not happened. A few paw prints were seen early in the season in Ponce Inlet but no depredation.

What happened to the fox family? We don't know for sure, but it looks like they may have moved up town, to Ormond Beach. Foxes are known to run up to 6 miles an hour all night long in search of food. Perhaps they were on the run one night and discovered how good life could be at the country club north of Granada.

When nesting began in May we started seeing numerous fox prints on the turtle nests between Granada and Neptune. Shortly after that they started getting into our turtle nests. No major destruction, just a few eggs here and there. So far they have gotten into



Photo by Dr. Sam Cromartie

12 nests and we have put screens on these and other nests nearby. For some reason this has worked to keep them out when it didn't work in Ponce. Sometimes you can see where the fox has followed the turtle up to nest and then back to the sea, but then for whatever reason they don't dig in that nest.

Beach walkers in the early morning have reported seeing the foxes. One of our turtle patrol volunteers from Flagler Beach who works in Ormond has seen them 4 times at the intersection of the Neptune beach approach and A1A on her way home. They have been spotted at the local church, so obviously they are Catholic. It seems everyone has seen them except me. I have been sent photos so now I know there are at least two of the cute little devils, possibly three.

I love all wildlife and have a

great appreciation for these foxes. However, I don't appreciate their taste for sea turtle eggs. Besides the fact that they are killing a protected species, I am worried about the welfare of the foxes. They appear to be very thin so they may not be getting adequate food. Also, I do not want to see them killed crossing busy A1A. I feel they would be better off out in the country where the food they need would be more plentiful and they wouldn't be dodging cars. They may also become a nuisance to residents and some people may take matters into their own hands and do bad things to these beautiful creatures.

A trapping plan has finally been approved by Volusia County. Soon traps will be set in the vicinity of the Neptune beach approach. Hopefully, these foxy fellas will soon have a new, safe home.

Volusia Flagler Nest Count

As of August 1, 2011

	Loggerheads	Leatherbacks	Greens
Volusia (N. of Inlet)	240	13	7
Flagler	213	13	23

Leatherback

Loggerhead

Green

Sea Turtle

Hatchling

Nest

Egg

Ocean

Kemps Ridley

Patrol

Crawl

Hawksbill

Beach

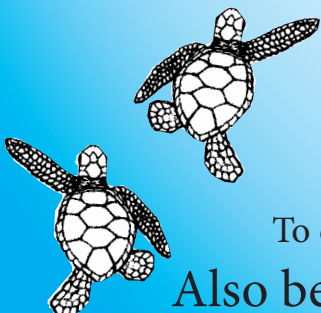
Chamber

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R	G	T	T	A	E	P	R	G	L	A	H	Z	A
A	U	K	I	H	V	Q	A	E	E	I	W	R	T
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Volusia Flagler Turtle Tracker Newsletter

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