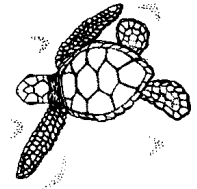


Turtle Tracker



Volume 9 – Issue 2

Volusia & Flagler Sea Turtle Volunteer News

Summer 2003

Weird & Wild Weather

This summer's weather has been some of the strangest I have ever experienced, and this probably is true for the sea turtles as well. Spring started out unseasonably warm, with no gentle transition from winter. The ocean warmed up fast and the sea turtles started nesting very early.

Shortly after the nests started hatching, the ocean became very cold for this time of year. Temperatures that should have been in the upper 70's to low 80's plummeted to the mid to upper 50's.

Since turtles are cold blooded ectotherms, meaning their bodies are dependant on the temperature of the surrounding environment, the cold water drastically slowed their bodily functions. Cold stunned hatchlings could not make their way out to the gulfstream waters and floated along in the coastal waters. Over 2,200 very cold hatchlings were collected along the shores of Flagler, Volusia and Brevard Counties. These turtles had to be held at the Marine Science Center until they could be sent offshore to the warmer waters of the gulfstream.

It is difficult to determine what effect this may have on the natural instincts that guide the hatchlings on their long trek and subsequent return to their nesting beaches when they mature. However, we did see an increase in disoriented hatchlings. The hatchlings were lingering near shore for too long, which made bright lights along the beach more visible and lured the turtles out of the water.

Not only did the cold water that hung around for weeks affect the hatchlings, it slowed down the nesting females. Our volunteers found more nesting females still on the beach in the early morning hours than ever before. Sea turtles usually can complete the nesting process in less than two hours and some of these turtles were reported on the beach for several hours. This not only tired the turtles out, but made them more vulnerable to predators. Sea turtle nesting also dropped off at this time and picked up again later in the season when the water warmed up. As a result, we saw more turtles still nesting late in the season. Our last nest is due to emerge the first week of December.

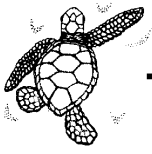


*Loggerhead returning to sea at daybreak after nesting
photo by Lori Ottlein*

There was also an increase in the number of diseased turtles that washed ashore at this time. The cold water itself may not have been responsible for the illnesses, but healthy turtles as well as sick ones are able to swim faster and stronger when they are not cold. There may also have been an overall increase in the number of strandings due to the turtles' inability to avoid capture in shrimp trawl nets and collisions with boats.

Another interesting anomaly of this summer was our extreme low tides. We usually see some fluctuation in tides even in the summer, but this year high tide looked like low tide. Even the highest tides were unusually low.

So what does this have to do with turtles? Nesting females were crawling out of the sea and laying their nests in the first soft sand they came to. Several of these nests were laid in the driving lanes of Daytona Beach. We had to relocate more nests than we normally would, because we knew the tides would eventually rise again. Also there was more hard white sand showing up on the beaches of Volusia and



Flagler Counties. At low tide it was possible to drive all the way north from Ponce Inlet to Flagler, where the red shelly sand is so thick and soft you can hardly walk in it, let alone drive in it. The hard packed white sand encouraged more people to drive on the beaches of Flagler County when they normally would not be able to, thus increasing the chances of disturbing more nesting females and running over more emerging hatchlings.

Because of the continued low tides, we hoped the nests laid low on the beach might still survive. Then came Hurricane Isabel. Even though Isabel only passed by several hundred miles offshore, she sent huge swells upon our beaches and sent the tides all the way up to the dunes and seawalls. Many of the nests laid low and not relocated became overwashed or completely washed out to sea. The surviving nests laid in white sand became hard packed as if in concrete and the bottoms of the nest cavities were soaking wet. Nests laid in the coarser red sand fared better because they drained more. Luckily the majority of the nests had already hatched. All in all, it was still another good year for sea turtle nesting in Volusia and Flagler Counties. Our next issue of the "Turtle Tracker" will give you the exact nesting totals for the season.

Washbacks Everywhere

As reported in past years, when the wind blows and the ocean becomes rough, we often start seeing large quantities of sargassum seaweed washing onto our beaches. With this seaweed usually comes post-hatchling sea turtles known as "washbacks."

It has been my experience that the number of washbacks fluctuates from year to year. Last year we only had a couple dozen come in, but this year the Marine Science Center received almost 200 washbacks. Our volunteers were constantly responding to calls all over Volusia and Flagler. These, on top of all the cold stunned hatchlings we had been picking up for weeks, tired us out. However, this year we had some extra help collecting these tired little turtles.

As part of Volusia County's continuing efforts to make their Habitat Conservation Plan for sea turtle protection successful, a Washback Watchers Program was started. Volunteers were recruited and trained by Volusia/Flagler Turtle Patrol, South Volusia Sea Turtle Society and Volusia County Staff. The

volunteers were instructed on when, where and how to search the beaches for washbacks. Zone captains notified the volunteers when large quantities of seaweed started to accumulate on the beach. In addition to the washback watchers, the Beach Patrol also searched for washbacks prior to opening the beach to vehicular traffic. Special containers were provided for collecting the washbacks and larger containers were put at the lifeguard stations to hold the turtles until they could be transported to the Marine Science Center.

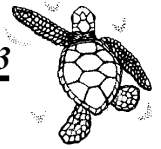
This cooperative effort between the turtle patrols, washback watchers and county employees undoubtedly increased the number of turtles rescued from the beach. These turtles would not survive if left in the seaweed. They would be eaten by predators, die of dehydration or be run over by cars.

We also received numerous reports from well meaning beach goers who picked up washbacks and put them back into the ocean. This is not the best thing you can do if you encounter a washback. These turtles are usually exhausted from being tossed around in a rough ocean and have washed in from as far as 40 miles offshore. Many are also sick, emaciated and missing pieces of flippers. They need time to regain their strength and unlike new hatchlings, they lack the instinct and energy to swim back out to sea. Once they are strong and eating well, they are returned to the ocean by boat. If you find a washback or hatchling, take it to a lifeguard station.



Loggerhead washback with algae and barnacles

Thank you to everyone who helped collect washback turtles and cold stunned hatchlings this season. If you would like to be a Washback Watcher next year, please contact Jennifer Ricks Volusia County's HCP coordinator for more information at 386-239-6414 ext. 34



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 \$25.00

Adopter Name _____

Address _____

City, State _____

Zip _____ Phone # _____

Please make check payable to:

Volusia/Flagler 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 (**hands on adoptions**)
- * nest success evaluation report
- * picture of your nest
- * 1 bumper sticker

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

This actually involves babysitting 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 _____

Adoptions requested after August 15 will be filled the following nesting season.

Yes, I would like to help sea turtles!

Name _____

Address _____

City/State _____

Zip _____

Telephone _____

Annual membership \$15.00 _____

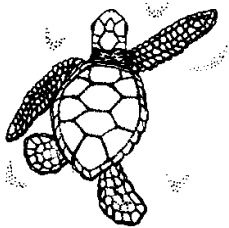
T-shirt total (add \$3 shipping) _____

Other donation (greatly appreciated) _____

Total enclosed _____

Shirt Style	Size	Color	Quantity	Total

Please make checks payable to Volusia Turtle Patrol and mail to the return address below.



Turtle Tracker
 Volusia Turtle Patrol, Inc.
 4738 S. Peninsula Drive
 Ponce Inlet, FL 32127
 (386) 763-0977

*Web site address: turtlepatrol.com
 email: VFturtlepatrol@aol.com*



All T-shirts are sturdy, 100% cotton with beautiful, original design by award-winning artist Mary Anne James. Short sleeve: *White, beige, sage, daffodil, blue or gray, please specify design on front or back with pocket logo* Sizes M, L, XL \$15.00



Children's Shirts \$10.00
 Sizes XS, S, M, L
 Design from handmade quilt by the Hand Quilting Class of Flagler County Adult Education
White, Yellow or green
Please add \$3.00 shipping & handling and allow 1-2 weeks for delivery