

HELP PROTECT OUR SEA TURTLES



Sea turtles are marine reptiles that have roamed the seas since the time of dinosaurs. Three species of sea turtles, loggerhead, green, and leatherback, nest on our beaches every year, April through September. The East Coast of Florida is the second largest nesting site for loggerhead turtles in the world. While loggerheads are the most common sea turtle nesting here, every other year we get a few green and leatherback nests.

Loggerheads, named for their large heads, are brownish orange in color, weigh 200 – 350 pounds and measure 3 feet in length.

The main threats to the survival of the loggerhead population in Florida are drowning in shrimp boat nets and loss of habitat. Pollution is also an increasing problem. Many sea turtles die each year from ingesting trash and debris such as balloons, plastics, styrofoam, tar balls and other non-degradable materials. Sea turtles often mistake plastic bags and balloons for jellyfish, one of their favorite foods. Others become entangled in discarded fishing line, ropes, nets.

- Support the enforcement of turtle excluder devices (TEDS) and gill net regulations.
- Protect nesting beaches and feeding grounds.
- Dispose of trash properly.
- Support laws to minimize dumping of pollutants and solid waste into waterways.
- Participate in beach cleanups.
- Share your knowledge with others.

Thank You For Your Help!

Nesting Turtles

The female turtle usually crawls ashore at night to lay her eggs in the soft sand. She is especially vulnerable at this time and can easily be discouraged from nesting by artificial beachfront lighting or human harassment. When she finds a safe place to nest, she will dig a nest cavity with her rear flippers and lay an average of 100 soft leathery eggs that resemble ping-pong balls. After laying her eggs, the female turtle thoroughly covers the nest to hide it from predators and returns to the ocean. She has no maternal instinct toward her young, but may return to nest again in 14-day intervals, several times a season.



Loggerhead laying eggs

- Do not disturb turtles crawling to or from the water.
- Do not touch the turtle or crowd around her.
- Do not shine flashlights on the turtle or take flash photos.
- Discourage others from harassing the turtle.
- Do not disturb tracks left by nesting turtles, these tracks help to distinguish species.
- Turn off or shield beachfront lighting.
- Contact one of the organizations listed in this brochure for assistance.

Nests

The eggs must incubate undisturbed for 50 to 70 days before they hatch. If the eggs are moved during the incubation period, the embryo may dislodge from the shell and the turtle will die. If a nest is uncovered, it may become contaminated and not hatch. Severe tidal inundation can also cut off the oxygen supply to the eggs and kill the nest. A safe, stable habitat is critical for sea turtle nesting success.

All known nests on our beaches are marked with four stakes, survey ribbon and a sea turtle nest sign. However, even the most diligent sea turtle monitoring program misses nests.

- Keep away from sea turtle nests.
- Stay out of soft sand areas at the base of dunes.
- Do not disturb nest markers or barriers.
- Support dune conservation and restoration.
- Report unmarked turtle tracks to the turtle patrol.
- Contact the turtle patrol or beach patrol if you see someone disturbing a nest.



Green turtle tracks and nest

Hatchlings

Hatchlings usually emerge at night in a united effort and crawl toward the water. This crawl is believed to imprint a memory that enables them to return to the same beach 15 to 20 years later to reproduce. On dark beaches, the hatchlings are drawn to the natural glow of the horizon. Artificial beachfront lighting draws hatchlings away from the ocean. Hatchlings wandering the beach are weakened and often die of dehydration or fall prey to predators. Once the hatchlings make it to the water, they have a difficult life ahead. It is estimated only one in 1,000 to 10,000 hatchlings will survive to adulthood.



Loggerhead hatchling

- Keep lights from shining onto the beach at night, turn off or shield exterior lights, draw your drapes.
- Do not use flashlights on beach at night.
- Do not drive vehicles in soft sand area where tire ruts can trap hatchlings.
- Fill in holes that may trap hatchlings.
- Do not put stray or disoriented hatchlings in the water, they may be too weak to survive.
- Alert the beach patrol about any stray hatchlings.
- Contact one of the organizations listed in this brochure for assistance.

Dead or Injured Turtles

Many accidents befall sea turtles every year. Several are accidentally drowned in shrimp trawl nets. Some are caught on long lines by commercial fishermen and some are hit by boat propellers. Others die of natural causes such as disease. The study of these dead turtles is very important to sea turtle conservation.

- Report any sea turtle (dead or alive) to the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission's Law Enforcement and Volusia/Flagler Turtle Patrol.
- Leave dead turtles alone and call the turtle patrol.
- Try to stay with live turtles until help arrives.
- Keep live turtles wet.



Loggerhead injured by boat propeller



Green turtle with fibropapillomas

Turtles Accidentally Caught

It is inevitable that recreational fishermen will come in contact with sea turtles. They are easily caught on hook and line and in nets. If you should hook or entangle a turtle, you need to know how to handle the situation for your safety and that of the turtle.

1. Do not cast your line where you see turtles surfacing.
2. If you hook a turtle, gently bring it close to you.
3. Use a dip net or firmly hold the front flippers to lift the turtle out of the water.
4. Cut the line close to the hook and remove any line that has wrapped around the turtle. Avoid getting too close to the turtle's mouth, they can bite.
5. Do not try to lift the turtle above the water by pulling the line, this could cause further injury. If the turtle is too far away from your boat or fishing pier, cut the line as short as possible.
6. Do not remove the hook unless the turtle is lightly hooked and it can be removed without further injury. If you are not sure, just cut the line.
7. Turtles with serious cuts, swallowed hooks or deeply imbedded hooks need medical attention.
8. Keep the turtle in the shade and wet.
9. Call for help immediately.

Report Sea Turtle Emergencies:

**Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission
Law Enforcement
1-888-404-FWCC**

**Volusia/Flagler Turtle Patrol
386-763-0977**

**Volusia County Sheriff
386-248-1777, press 0**

**Flagler County Sheriff
386-437-4116, press 0**



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