



The Tortoise's Burrow

At Hugh Taylor Birch State Park

Hugh Taylor Birch
State Park

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MOTHERS OF THE SEA



It is the season for Eggs, thousands of eggs, that is, deposited along one of the highest concentrations of sea turtle nests in the world - That's right, Florida is a special body of land for sea turtles which attracts one of the highest number of nesting mothers per year. These marvelous creatures have returned to our shared coastline for over 150 million years.

Mother sea turtles mature only after 20 years or so, and nest

every two to three years. They are the product of years of intense, liberated travel in the oceans full of predation and other man-made obstacles. These elegant beauties are perhaps only 1 out of 1,000 that actually survive into adulthood, let alone achieve mating and the success of nest building.

Three species of sea turtles inhabit Florida's waters during some part of the season. Up to 50,000 pregnant mothers make it onto our Florida beaches. The most common is the Loggerhead (over 95% of all nests). Greens & the giant sized Leatherbacks make up a smaller percentage of nests.

Because of their Threatened status, many sea turtle observation and scouting programs exist both in Southeast and Southwest Florida to educate and protect our yearly matrons. Broward County trains sea turtle nest scouting volunteers in early April for the hatching season which begins in June and runs through October. By May, Lloyd Beach State Park and the Discovery Science Museum are offering Sea Turtle Walks, that allow small groups to venture out onto the beaches to hopefully watch a mother turtle lay eggs. Nesting begins in March and

runs through September. One mother sea turtle can lay several nests during one season. She will only nest every two or three years. Amazingly, she can be fertilized by up to seven males and carry his semen in her for many years, determining on her own when to fertilize her eggs. The hard process of nesting takes hours, having to heave her massive weight out of the water and onto the dunes. Mothers use their back flippers to dig a hole 2—3 feet deep. She

have been greatly reduced. All seven species of sea turtles are in danger of extinction. Demand for sea turtle meat, eggs, and other by-products, as well as a loss of habitat, commercial fishing, and pollution have contributed to their decline.

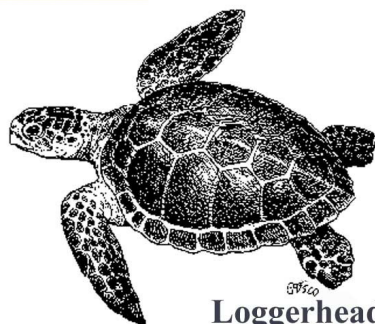
The main danger for hatchlings is from artificial lighting. When the babies emerge, they instinctively move toward the brightest direction. Normally, this would be the

open night sky reflected by the ocean (not the Full Moon, as often passed around). On a developed beach, artificial lights attract the hatchlings, causing them to crawl in the wrong directions. The results are disorientation, exhaustion, predation and death. Fortunately, sea turtle walks and scouting programs have successfully contributed to the success of sea turtle numbers increasing.

If You See A Turtle

Nesting turtle mothers are very shy and will often flee back into the water if disturbed, sometimes dropping her eggs in the water. If you see her already nesting, stay to her backside. Never shine lights or take flash photographs. This is one of the most invasive things you can do, despite wanting a photograph. If you MUST use a light, filter your light with RED screens. This distracts both Mothers and Hatchlings much less. SHOULD YOU WITNESS POACHING, INJURED OR STRANDED TURTLES OR MISORIENTED HATCHLINGS, call the FWC at 1-888-404-FWCC or the Florida Marine Patrol at 1-800-DIAL-FMP or the local police.

THREATENED



Loggerhead

then and deposits one hundred or more rubbery eggs and covers them. Once she leaves the nest, she never returns.

Within 60 days a miracle happens. A bubbling begins to occur in the sand at the nest site and suddenly dozens of baby sea turtles emerge frantically onto the surface. They usually hatch at night after the sands have cooled and move offshore where they will live for several years in seaweed beds drifting along the Gulf Stream. As the turtles grow older they move into coastal waters.

Sea turtles have roamed our oceans by the millions. In the last 100 years, however, their numbers

Turtle Trivia!

- Florida beaches are home to 80% of Loggerhead turtles in the U.S.
- Turtles can migrate thousands of miles, but usually return to lay their eggs on the same beach where they hatched.

- Sea turtles have existed for over one hundred million years.
- It can take 15 - 50 years before a sea turtle is capable of reproducing.
- Scientists estimate that only 1 in 1000 to 10,000 babies will survive to adulthood.
- Sea turtles live their entire life in the ocean. The only time they
- comes ashore is when the female lays her eggs.
- Sea turtles are reptiles. They breathe air, and can hold their breath for long periods of time.

Monthly Highlights

Wet Season Breaks! After at least four LONG months of intense DRY Season, the first rains of the coming WET Season have given Birch Park and South Florida a sigh of relief. Many of our wooded areas are browned, but the rains surely brings a sigh of relief.

Broward County Turtle Walks:

Both Lloyd Beach State Park and the Ft. Lauderdale Discovery Science Museum offer night time turtle walks beginning in June. Call today to reserve your space as these are highly attended meets. Nova University offers training for those interested in becoming scouts for turtle hatchlings, assisting disoriented baby sea turtles make it to the Ocean.

Ask about our tours!

Please see notices at the Ranger Station for Friday walks and/or Full Moon tours (usually a day or so before the Full Moon). Leave your information at the Ranger Station. Slots fill fast times vary!

Enviro Tip of the Month! Helping little turtles.

Shut off or shield lights that are visible from the beach. Close drapes or blinds after dark. Remove beach litter. Quietly observe a nesting turtle from a distance. Keep pets on a leash. Leave sea turtle identification markers. To report dead or injured sea turtles, or, if you have accidentally hooked a sea turtle that is small enough to rescue, contact: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission 1-888-404-FWCC, or call Turtle Time, Inc. 239-481-5566 immediately.

Our CSO—Citizens Support Organization—assists the park with many additional projects and endeavors. They need support. Please inquire about how you can participate today.