

You Can Help Protect Sea Turtles and their Hatchlings

Sea Turtles depend on beach habitat for their reproduction. Nesting females return to the same beach from where they were hatched to lay their eggs. This becomes a problem when new development changes their nesting habitat beyond recognition and artificial lighting is brighter than the moon causing hatchlings to head to land and not the sea.

Do: Make sure all exterior light fixtures visible from the beach meet sea turtle code.

- Keep it amber or red
- Keep it shielded
- Keep it downward directed

Do: Close window blinds/curtains from sunset to sunrise.

Do: Report any direct and non-direct reflective artificial lighting seen along the beach during sea turtle nesting season.

Don't: Use flashlights, cell phone lights, flash bulbs, or video camera lights on the beach. *If a light is necessary use an approved red light.

Do: Fill in any holes and knockdown sandcastles that may entrap adults or hatchlings on their way to the water.

Do: Keep pets off the beach. Pets can dig up nests, eat hatchlings, and frighten away nesting females.

Do: Place trash in proper receptacles which prevents garbage from being consumed by wildlife and helps to reduce the number of predators being attracted to our beaches.

Don't: Leave beach furniture or personal belongings on the beach overnight which may obstruct the turtles' path, entangle, disorient, or even kill them.

REMEMBER!

Marine Turtles are Protected by Law:

- *Federal Endangered Species Act*
- *Florida Statute 379.2431 the Marine Turtle Protection Act*
- *Charlotte County Sea Turtle Protection Ordinance No. 98-41*

To Report Violations, Dead, Disoriented, Or Injured Turtles:

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) at:

888-404-FWCC (3922)

*FWC or #FWC

Tip@My FWC.com (text)

<https://myfwc.com/contact/wildlife-alert/>

For More Information on Sea Turtles:

Mote Marine Laboratory
1600 Thompson Parkway
Sarasota, FL 34236

mote.org

Sea Turtle Conservancy
4581 NW 6th St Suite A
Gainesville, FL 32609

conserveturtles.org

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Farris Bryant Building 620 S Meridian St
Tallahassee, FL 32399

myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/wildlife/sea-turtle/

If you have any questions please contact:

Charlotte County

Parks and Natural Resources

1120 Centennial Blvd
Port Charlotte, FL 33953
941-613-3220

Sea Turtles



It's that time again! **May 1st through October 31st** is Sea Turtle nesting and hatching season. In hopes for a successful year, it is vital that we learn to share the beach.



We have a very important role in ensuring the success of these beautiful, threatened, or endangered creatures who depend on the beaches to produce their next generation.



CHARLOTTE COUNTY
Parks & Natural Resources

There are 7 species of sea turtles found around the world. In Charlotte County you are likely to see 3 of the 7 species, these are the Green, Loggerhead, and Kemp's Ridley. On our coast, the Loggerhead is the most common. This species can be recognized by their very large head from which they get their name.



Pictured above: An adult female loggerhead returning to the gulf after laying a nest. Notice the sand on top of her shell, this is a good sign that she completed the final step to nest laying: camouflage.

Sea Turtles are air breathing reptiles that spend most of their lives in marine waters. Like other turtles, they have a hard shell called a carapace that protects them from predators. Their carapace has a specific size and pattern that can be used to identify one sea turtle species from another. Sea turtles have powerful front flippers that enable them to swim hundreds of miles to feeding grounds and nesting sites. Unlike other turtles, sea turtles can not pull their limbs or head into their shell. This leaves them vulnerable to predation, especially when they are small. To assist with their safety, sea turtles have adapted to have a kind of camouflage called countershading to make them less visible to dangers in the water column.

Habitat: Sea turtles spend their whole lives (apart from nesting) in marine waters. They can be seen in different offshore and near-shore habitats depending on where their desired diet is located. Green sea turtles, for instance, are usually seen near-shore in and around sea grass beds. In contrast, the leatherback sea turtle is most likely to be observed offshore where jellyfish are plentiful.



Diet: Sea turtles eat a variety of different foods including seagrasses, fish, jellyfish, crustaceans, and sponges. Sea turtle species have specialized adaptations for the specific foods they eat. For instance, some species only eat harder foods like crustaceans and glass-like sponges; they are equipped with powerful beaks meant for crushing. Another species eats mostly sea grasses and has a serrated jaw so that it can tear the grasses while grazing.



Nesting and Hatching: A healthy sea turtle will only come to shore to nest. Female sea turtles usually nest during the night between **May 1st and October 31st**. Each nest contains between 50 and 200 golf ball sized eggs. After laying, the female returns to the water and never revisits her nest. The eggs will incubate in the warm sand for 45-60 days until hatching.

Hatchlings usually emerge from their nest during the cool of the night. The 2 inch babies rush to the brightest horizon which is naturally over the water. Once there, hatchlings swim offshore to live for the first crucial years of their lives in drifting seaweed along the edges of ocean currents. Eventually the young turtles take up residence in coastal waters where they will migrate between feeding grounds. Once mature they will travel back to the beach they hatched from to reproduce. **Only 1 in 1,000 hatchlings survive to maturity**, which for most species, is believed to be between 20 and 30 years of age.



Pictured above: Loggerhead hatchlings emerge from their nest. Screening added by sea turtle monitors to reduce predation.

Pictured to left: A mature loggerhead skull. Note its powerful beak, which is used to eat hard bodied crustaceans.