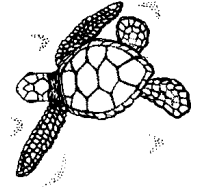


Turtle Tracker



Volume 10 – Issue 2

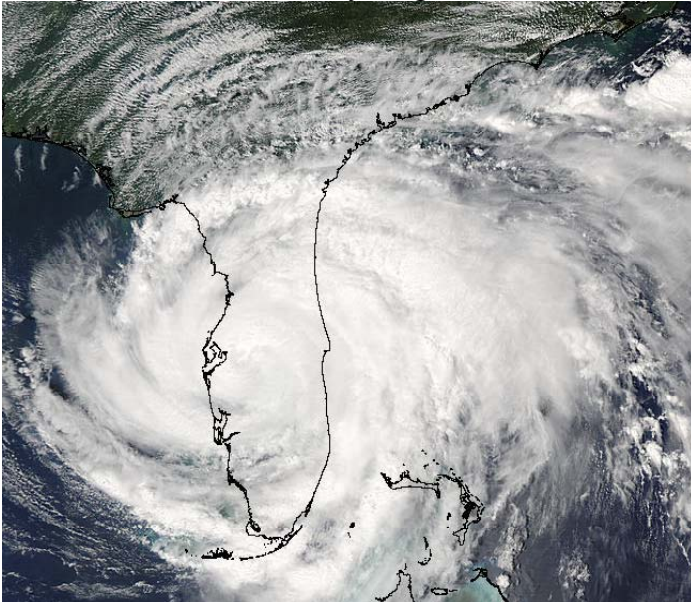
Final Issue

Summer/Fall 2004

Sea Turtles & Hurricanes

The 2004 sea turtle nesting season got off to a slow start and never really picked up. We expected to see the giant leatherbacks nesting as early as March, but they never came. The first loggerhead nest in Volusia County north of the inlet wasn't laid until May 12th and only 12 more nests were laid by the end of May. Flagler County's first nest was laid on May 15th,

This slow start was seen throughout the state. Even in Melbourne and Juno, where thousands of turtles usually nest each year. By mid August nesting was down approximately 50% from last year and only 1/3 of the nests had hatched. Then came Bonnie, Charley, Frances, Ivan and Jeanne. The 2004 hurricane season was upon us, and unlike anything we had seen before.



Hurricane Frances over Florida

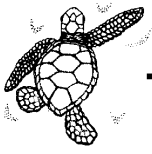
Tropical storm Bonnie made land fall on the west coast of Florida and brought heavy rains from the west coast through central Florida. A few days later Hurricane Charley hit hard on the west coast, then came across the state with strong winds and heavy rain. The only good thing about Charley was he took the water with him as he moved off the east coast, rather than causing a storm surge. At this point, almost all of the turtle nests had been over washed by high tides to some degree.

Sea turtle nests can endure several high tide over washes, so long as the tide recedes quickly. Nests laid in coarse sand, such as the red coquina found in north Ormond Beach and Flagler County tend to drain better than the hard packed white sands of Daytona Beach. Nest success varies depending on sand composition and location on the beach. Nests laid higher may have a better chance of survival because they are not affected by as many high tides.

After Charley, most of our nests were still on the beach and we believed the majority to be viable. Then came Hurricane Frances. Even though this storm made landfall to our south, we experienced winds around 90 miles an hour, extreme high tides and tons of rain as she moved slowly northwest. When it was finally over we only had a couple dozen nests left on the beach. Hurricane Ivan came and went not once, but twice and brought more rain. Two weeks later Hurricane Jeanne arrived in Florida making landfall very close to where Frances had. Even though we did not get the very strong winds, we got yet more rain and worst of all, severe beach erosion.

It brought tears to my eyes to see the devastation to our dunes and beaches. All of our remaining nests were swept out to sea. Even those laid high up on strong dunes that I was sure would have survived, were gone. However, Flagler County did not get hit as hard as Volusia and we still had a few nests left. We were delightfully surprised to have a new green turtle nest laid on September 30th in north Flagler County.

Sea turtle nesting naturally fluctuates from year to year as nesting females lay every other year or two. This nesting season was the lowest recorded since the mid 1980's. This should have been a good year for loggerheads and green turtles, but wasn't. There are many theories as to why this happened. I remember the old timers always saying the sea turtles could tell when it was going to be a bad hurricane season, and how the turtles acted was a good indication of things to come. Perhaps, the turtles knew it was going to be catastrophic hurricane season for Florida and went elsewhere to nest. Only the turtles know for sure and they aren't talking. Mother Nature will balance things out in her own time.



Turtle Egg Poachers

Flagler Beach resident Jack Plimpton was out for his routine morning beach walk with his dog when he noticed two men behaving strangely. When he got closer he realized one of the men was digging up a marked sea turtle nest while the other was attempting to draw attention away. A third man was on the walkover as lookout. Jack knew these were not the “turtle patrol” and immediately called police from his cell phone.

When Flagler Beach Police Officer Robert Burns arrived on the scene he saw a man throw a bag under the walkover. Burns asked what was in the bag and the man said “turtle eggs,” he then asked what they intended to do with them and the man said “eat them.” This bag contained 21 loggerhead sea turtle eggs and a second bag was discovered with 44 more eggs.

Turtle Patrol volunteers were notified. Lori Ottlein, and Dan and Ramona Rutkowski arrived to determine the extent of the damage to the nest. There were still undisturbed eggs in the nest and they were recovered with sand. The 65 poached eggs were reburied in a new nest cavity next to the original nest and marked as FB14B. The nest known as FB14 was due to hatch in approximately two weeks. All we could do was wait and hope some had been saved.

The original nest FB14 hatched on August 2nd and was evaluated three days later. There were 23 eggshells, 1 dead and 10 unhatched eggs. On August 5th, hatchling tracks were spotted coming from FB14B and five days later the nest evaluation showed 19 hatched eggs, 1 pipped dead and 40 unhatched eggs. Considering what these eggs went through at such a critical point of embryonic development, the nest success was good.

If you see suspicious activity near a sea turtle nest please contact the police immediately. Thanks!

Important Newsletter Notice

In order to provide better sea turtle conservation information to you, and save money and trees, we are discontinuing the circulation of our Turtle Tracker Newsletter. Future sea turtle news will be available on our website and will be updated regularly. If you have a current subscription you may request a refund or we will consider it a donation to sea turtle protection.

Thank you for your continued support!

Beach Armadillos

Over the years we have rescued hundreds of sick and injured shore birds as well as other creatures. One of the funniest and most out of place animals I have seen on the beach is the armadillo. Unfortunately, all of the ones I encountered were dead. It seems they somehow end up in the river and get washed out to sea, where they drown and wash ashore.

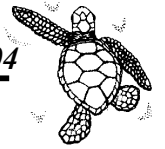
Last July, while on turtle patrol, I passed a “dead” armadillo on the beach with its snout buried in the sand, I felt bad since they are such cute harmless animals. On my way back a woman frantically flagged me down saying the poor creature was alive. I assured her this was not the case and explained how they wash in dead regularly. She was adamant, so I poked it with a stick and sure enough he was still barely alive. Once we got the sand out of his mouth and nose and the salt water out of his lungs, he spent the day resting and later released in Flagler County.

Armadillos are one of the oddest mammals in America. Except for their soft little ears, their bodies are covered by bony plates that look like armor. Armadillos are most active at night using their long sharp claws to dig for insects they catch with their sticky tongues.

They migrated here from South America in the 1800’s, but unlike their southern cousins our Nine-banded Armadillo cannot curl up into a ball for protection, so it must dig holes for shelter and protection. In the Spring, litters of four identical young are born and are always of the same sex. Their skin is soft and leathery and their bony plates do not harden until they are fully grown. In case you’re hungry, armadillo flesh makes good eating and is said to taste like pork. Adults measure 30 inches in length and weigh up to 15 pounds.



Lucky the Armadillo



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 for 2005 season:

- * official adoption certificate
- * sea turtle tee shirt (specify size and style)
- * sea turtle educational packet
- * nest watching guidelines (**hands on adoptions**)
- * nest success evaluation report
- * 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.

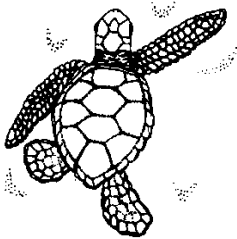
Yes, I would like to help sea turtles!

Name _____
 Address _____
 City/State _____
 Zip _____
 Telephone _____

Annual membership _____ \$15.00
 T-shirt total (add \$3 shipping) _____
 Other donation (greatly appreciated) _____
 Total enclosed _____
 Allow 2-3 weeks for shipping

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
 email: VFturtlepatrol@aol.com
 website: turtlepatrol.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* Adult Sizes M, L, XL \$15.00



Children's Shirts \$10.00
 Sizes XS, S, M, L Adult sizes S, M, L
 Design from handmade quilt by the Hand Quilting Class of Flagler County Adult Education
White, Yellow or Green, front print only