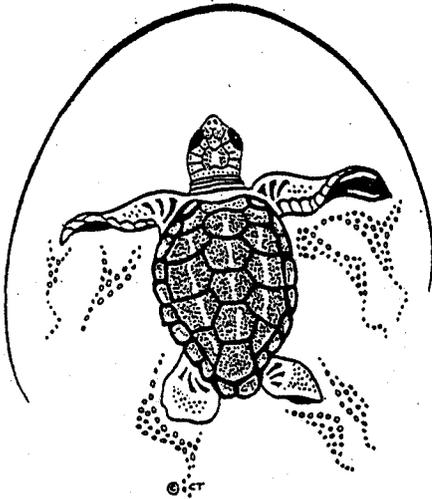


LOGGERHEADLINES

Sea Turtle News from South Carolina

June and July, 2000



Greetings!

As you will see in this issue of Loggerheadlines, it has been a very busy and eventful season so far.

Strandings

There were 49 dead turtles recorded in June compared to 29 last year. These included 45 loggerheads, three Kemp's ridleys and one unidentified. Seven were adult loggerheads. Two thirds of the strandings occurred in the latter half of the month and over 1/4 of the strandings came ashore on the Isle of Palms. The influx of strandings started within a week of when the requirement of the large leatherback TEDs expired. Six carcasses came ashore on South Island, part of the Yawkey Wildlife Center. There were also other strandings on islands in Cape Romain NWR and the Santee Coastal Reserve. One boat was caught in this area with the TEDs sewn partially closed, which may account for this cluster of strandings.

There were 28 dead turtles recorded for July, which is similar to the number for the past several years. There were 20 loggerheads, two greens, 4 Kemp's ridleys and two unidentified. Four of these were adult loggerheads. Again, most of these were in northern Charleston County. There were also eight reported from the northern coast, Grand Strand.

If the rest of the season is more typical to past years, we should end up slightly above the 1999 total.

Necropsy Summary

In June of this year, post mortem exams were conducted on ten sea turtles. Of these ten, nine were loggerheads and one was a Kemp's ridley. There were eight females and two males. Two were gravid females (with shelled eggs). Three of the turtles died from long-term chronic illnesses, but the other seven were in good body condition at the time of their deaths.

In July, post mortem exams were conducted on four turtles. There was one loggerhead, two Kemp's ridleys and one green sea turtle. The loggerhead was a gravid female and the other three were immature. Three had died from acute causes and one carcass was too damaged to make a determination.

Of the 14 carcasses, two had ingested plastic and two had ingested fishing line, although no hooks were found.

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Nesting News

Here are the nesting totals as sent in by each of the nest protection projects. In a "typical" season, the amount of nesting through July represents 93.2% of the total season. So it appears that there will be no major changes when we update this at the end of the season.

Nesting Activity Update

Through July 31, 2000

Waites Island	7
Myrtle Beach State Park	4
Huntington Beach State Park	14
S.C.U.T.E.	75
South Island	116
Cape Island	615
Lighthouse Island	221
Deweese Island	1
Sullivans Island/Isle of Palms	36
Folly Beach	51
Kiawah Island	205
Seabrook Island	14
Botany Bay Island/Plantation	179
Edingsville Beach	33
Edisto Beach State Park	54
Edisto Beach	50
Harbor Island	52
Hunting Island	32
Fripp Island	37
Pritchards Island	106
St. Phillips Island	14
Hilton Head Island	129
TOTAL	2,045

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Regional News

North Carolina

Candice Williams, North Carolina Assistant Sea Turtle Coordinator, sends this update on nesting and stranding activities. This year, a total of 702 nests (681 loggerhead nests, 17 green turtle nests and 4 leatherback nests) have been reported through the end of July. This represents a 30% decrease from the record setting year they had in 1999.

North Carolina's stranding total from 1 January through 6 August stands at 544, a 48% increase over last year's total of 367 for this same time period. This is cause for great concern given that 1999's 605 strandings represent the highest annual total ever reported in North Carolina.

Georgia

Happier news comes in from Georgia. Mark Dodd, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, reports they are having an average nesting year and will probably end up with about 1000 nests statewide, which is their 10 year average. The big news from Georgia is that strandings are half of what they were last year. At this time last year there were 245 strandings compared to 123 so far this year. They are doing a survey to determine if the use of the leatherback TED configuration is responsible for this change or if there is some other change in commercial fishing activity.

Florida

Sandy MacPherson, National Sea Turtle Coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provides some interesting news from Florida. The Volusia County Code Enforcement Board met on July 5th and 19th to consider 12 and 14 lighting ordinance violation cases, respectively. Most were brought into compliance before the scheduled meetings. But one motel in Ormond Beach had done nothing to correct its non-compliant lights, had made no effort to work with the County, and did not even show up for any of the Code Board meetings when they were on the agenda. Their fine was to start a \$250/day with the effective date beginning on June 12th. Speaking of which...

Beachfront Lighting – Problems and Solutions

Hilton Head Island

Despite great newspaper coverage and Town law enforcement support of the lighting ordinance, we are still having great problems with hatchling disorientation. We have been able to roughly quantify tracks from 26 out of 34 nests with hatchling activity. The total number of estimated tracks was 1,213. Of these, approximately 540 or 47% were oriented to the ocean and 643 or 53% were

oriented to the dunes. Very depressing! – *Kim Washok*

Harbor Island

One of the local shrimpers, who works St. Helena Sound and the Atlantic off of Hunting and Fripp Islands, has been very helpful to us in controlling lights on the beach at Harbor. Steve Kerchner, Captain of the *Poor Boy*, calls me if he sees houses lighted up on the beachfront, when he begins his run to the shrimping grounds early in the morning. Using his information, we have been able to pinpoint sources of lighting problems and keep most of beachside lights under good control. Steve says that the shrimpers get blamed for contributing to turtle strandings, but he is interested in preserving the species and wants to help however he can. – *Ivan Kinne*

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The "Lights Out" signs are on the way. The South Carolina Coastal Conservation League has agreed to act as a liaison between the FWS and the South Carolina Electric and Gas Company. The signs will say "Beachfront Lights Out" and "Let's Help the Sea Turtles". The FWS will provide the posts, nuts and bolts. The signs will go up on the causeways to the islands as well as on main streets of the beach communities. We will have 65 signs created this year and move forward from here. It's a start. Kudos to SCE&G! – *Paula Sisson*

There is a new source of information on the web regarding lighting and sea turtles. You can get to it directly at:

<http://www.state.fl.us/fwc/psm/turtles/lighting/>

-- *Kristen Nelson, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Tequesta Field Lab*

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New Research

Marine Resources Division In-water Study

The Marine Resources Division's new, in-water study of sea turtles has been underway this summer. The project objective is to develop a methodology to establish a scientifically valid index of abundance for the northern population of the loggerhead turtle along the south Atlantic coast.

Research vessels and contract shrimp trawlers, using bottom trawls from Winyah Bay to St. Augustine, FL., have been catching sea turtles and gathering biological data on species, genetics, sex and a general health assessment.

So far the R/V "Lady Lisa", R/V "Georgia Bulldog" and several contract shrimp trawlers have caught, processed, tagged and released alive 212 *Caretta caretta*, 25 *Lepidochelys kempi*, and 3 *Chelonia mydas*. Tow time has been reduced to an actual bottom time of 30 minutes to minimize stress on the turtles.

Only 4 *Caretta carrettas* had tags. It is interesting to note there were no recaptures of turtles the study project tagged, even on the two observer boats fishing the same waters day after day.

Morphometrics of Nesting Loggerhead Turtles

South Carolina's nesting loggerheads comprise about 56% of the northern sub-population nesting effort, more than the other states combined. There is a need to augment the genetic evidence with natural history data that could further delineate the northern sub-population. There is also a need to expand the size of TED openings so that the largest and most productive turtles can escape. This decision should be based on scientific data, rather than as a political compromise.

From 20-28 June 2000, teams of biologists and volunteers worked each night on Cape Island, Cape Romain NWF, to measure and tag

female loggerheads. This project involved 7 staff and 23 volunteers for a total of 54 man-nights of work. Data on eighty-nine turtles were taken. All but one of the turtles had a body depth larger than the current 12-inch TED opening and six had a body depth larger than the proposed 16-inch opening size.

Thanks again to all the volunteers and staff who made this possible.

Notes from the Field

Danna Baxley, the summer intern at the Yawkey Wildlife Center in Georgetown, reports on a green turtle that nested on South Island. She was lucky enough to catch her around 5:20 am just starting to wallow out her body pit. Danna bellied up behind her and watched her lay. She did not dig her egg chamber deep enough, so eggs were overflowing onto the beach. As soon as she saw spacer eggs being laid by the turtle, she peeked around to look at her head and realized, "Yes, it's a green"!! Danna relocated the 110 eggs and wished the hatchlings luck. -- *Danna Baxley*

In June of 2000, the Isle of Palms City Council ratified Ordinance 2000-3, creating a Preservation Overlay Zone. In effect this legislation prevents building on the vacant front beach lots from 21st Avenue to 41st Avenue. This 20-block stretch is the very best turtle-nesting habitat left on the Isle of Palms. The dunes are still naturally high, the houses are set several hundred feet back from the beach. During this season, about 2/3 of our nesting loggerheads have chosen this area to come ashore. Mary Pringle spoke on behalf of the Island Turtle Team at the public hearing on May 23rd, stressing the need to "safeguard the critical habitat of sea turtles" and "maintain the existing health of the natural systems that support life on the beach." With development and lights encroaching on so many sections of this island, those of us who work for the turtle nest protection program are very relieved that this last stretch of dark dunes will remain protected for future years. -- *Mary Pringle*.

At the end of June, the Hilton Head Island Project Turtle Watch had a TV crew from Turner South Broadcasting come to the island.

They filmed the turtle staff on the beach for an upcoming episode of "Liars and Legends of the South", a new series on TSB to air this fall. They considered the loggerhead a "legend", not a "liar." -- *Kim Washok*

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Outreach and Education

Kim Washok from Hilton Head Island's Project Turtle Watch says they have a high school intern, Michael Wysocki, who volunteers once a week to gain experience and knowledge about marine biology. He's been a great help.

Resources

We are repeating these resources from the last issue in case some folks missed them.

- Eckert, K.L., K.A. Bjorndal, F.A. Abreu-Grobois, & M. Donnelly (editors). 1999. *Research and Management Techniques for the Conservation of Sea Turtles*. IUCN/SSC Marine Turtle Specialist Group Publication No. 4. 235 pages.
--With 42 chapters by authors from around the world, the manual provides information and guidance for field researchers and conservationists on standardized methodology to allow for comparison of data within regions and across ocean basins.
--Cost \$25; Order from IUCN-Marine Turtle Specialist Group, 1725 DeSales Street, Washington, DC 20036.
- Lutz, P.L. & J.A. Musick (editors). 1997. *The Biology of Sea Turtles*. CRC Press, Boca Raton, Florida. 432 pages.
--With 15 chapters written by 22 authors, this book synthesizes the results of advances in sea turtle biology. It focuses on how these endangered marine reptiles operate in, adapt to, and are dependent upon particular features of the marine environment. Covers pressing conservation and environmental issues, includes new research techniques and findings, and contains over 1600 references from the literature.

--Order from CRC Press, INC., 2000 Corporate Blvd., NW, Boca Raton, FL 33431.

- Godley, B.J. and A.C. Broderick (editors).

Marine Turtle Newsletter

--This newsletter is published quarterly and received by more than 2000 persons in over 100 countries. It contains articles, meeting reports, announcements, news and legal briefs, and recent publications on all aspects of sea turtle biology, research, and conservation.

--The newsletter can be downloaded electronically for free from the website <www.seaturtle.org/mtn/>. It can be viewed with Adobe Acrobat Reader (which is also available free through the same site).

- CTURTLE Listserve

--This electronic listserv is a discussion forum on sea turtles. It carries information and discussions on a variety of research, conservation and management topics from around the world.

--This listserv is available free-of-charge to all interested persons. An e-mail address is required to subscribe. Any message sent to the listserv is automatically distributed to all persons subscribing to the list. To subscribe send the message "subscribe CTURTLE [your name]" in the body of the message to <listserv@lists.ufl.edu>. No subject heading is required.

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