

# Not-So-Hidden-Treasure

By Joquita Burka



*Just a sea of white. Smooth and undisturbed. Salt, sand and more sand. Unless you look. Really look. Then what you see is a whole world of life above and below that seemingly featureless landscape that we call the beach.*

Start at the surf line and think “micro” in this macro landscape. Look closely at the beach just as the water recedes. Every time a wave rolls out, the sand is momentarily covered by small rainbow-colored shells. These shells, no larger than an inch across, seem to appear and disappear as if by magic. What are they? In fact, they are the quick survivalists known to locals as “periwinkles.” These creatures (actually coquina clams) surf the waves up and down the beach, doing a quick disappearing act under the sand as the waves recede.

Look again. Did something catch the light on the beach or did you just imagine it? Must have been one of those charming little ghost crabs. They are very fast and fascinating to watch as they scurry across the sand to avoid becoming lunch for the local bird population. Cute as they are, resist the urge to carry them home. They are certainly happier where they are.

Notice an indentation in the beach, anywhere from 16-20 inches wide with smaller marks along each side? You may actually be lucky enough to have discovered the trail of a loggerhead turtle, which is on the U.S. list of threatened species. South Carolina is fortunate enough to serve as one of the nesting grounds for these marvelous creatures. From mid-May until mid-August, adult females pull themselves on shore at night to build a nest along the dune line. These amazing sea turtles can weigh 200-350 pounds and may produce a nest filled with an average of 120 eggs. After approximately 60 days, these hatchlings will make

their way to sea. Many Lowcountry communities make great efforts to protect these nests.

And there are the birds. Sandpipers, gulls, egrets, pelicans, osprey, oystercatchers, herons, willets, kingfishers, ibis and others. You’ll need to be very still and sit quietly near the beach or marsh to enjoy the full beauty of these wonders. A good bird guide and binoculars will help. (HINT: Many of the state parks offer guided birding excursions during the summer months. Get details at [SouthCarolinaParks.com](http://SouthCarolinaParks.com).)

Sitting quietly and observing has its benefits. However, it’s hard to beat a stroll along the surf on one of our state’s fantastic beaches. Slip off your shoes and enjoy the more traditional beach finds—sea shells, driftwood, sand dollars, and, our family’s own personal “holy grail,” fossil sharks’ teeth. Precisely because sharks’ teeth are difficult, but not impossible to find, they make for a fun search. These small, shiny, black/gray/brown objects are strewn up and down our coast making you wonder why sharks aren’t known for their ferocious gumming of others—not the terrors of “Jaws” fame. However, a little research will show you that sharks’ teeth are constantly being replaced, meaning a shark may go through thousands of teeth in his hungry lifetime.

And of course, the beach offers its daily surprises. Every day the tide replenishes the shore with more treasures. And that can mean only one thing. You must return again and again to discover all that’s wonderful in that sea of white.

