

LOGGERHEADLINES

Sea Turtle News from South Carolina

January - May, 2005



Greetings!

As we begin a new sea turtle season, there is much news to report and “romance is in the air”, at least for these two loggerheads.

Strandings

Strandings this spring are much lower than in previous years. There were no strandings reported during January through March, and April strandings were the lowest since 1993. The lower number in May was due in part to the lower number of debilitated turtles. There were 21 loggerheads, two greens, two Kemp’s ridleys and one leatherback for a total of 26 so far this year.

Necropsy Summary

Several carcasses have been collected and are in freezers awaiting necropsy. None have been performed at this time.

Rehabilitation at the SC Aquarium

This year is proving to be a busy one for the South Carolina Aquarium Sea Turtle Rescue Program. We over-wintered 4 turtles: 3 sub-adult loggerheads and 1 yearling green sea turtle. Two of the loggerheads, Channel and Hamlin, were released in May on Folly Beach. We are still holding Litchfield, a 40 kg sub-adult, waiting for a deep lesion in the carapace to heal. The green yearling is doing great now and will be kept until he grows to the size of resident green turtles.

Enough pools have recently been installed with filtration for holding up to ten turtles. We have expanded the medical lab, purchased medical equipment necessary to treat turtles on site and will be improving life support systems.



Two of Hamlin’s rescuers were on hand to see him off at Folly Beach in May.

Photo by Barbara Bergwerf

Regional Update

Federal activities

On April 21, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service published an announcement in the *Federal Register* concerning their initiation of a 5-year status review of the green, hawksbill, Kemp’s ridley, leatherback, loggerhead and olive ridley sea turtles. New data are available since the last reviews were completed five to ten years ago. The Services are soliciting information and comments pertaining to these species from any interested party by July 20, 2005.

Comments can be sent by fax to (301) 427-2522; by email at Seaturtle.Statusreview@noaa.gov or mailed to **Barbara Schroeder**, National Sea Turtle Coordinator, Marine Mammal and Marine Turtle Conservation Division, NMFS Office of Protected Resources, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD, 20910.

North Carolina

Matthew Godfrey, State Coordinator for the North Carolina Wildlife Commission, reports the 2005 nesting season started off slowly due to cooler than average water temperatures, by now nearly all nesting beaches had at least one loggerhead nest. There have also been two leatherback nests so far this year, one of which was laid by a female in the late afternoon on Pine Knoll Shores, a developed beach near Beaufort, North Carolina. Currently there have been 108 reported strandings and the majority have been loggerheads. The Topsail Sea Turtle Hospital recently released more than a dozen rehabilitated sea turtles. Four of these turtles were outfitted with satellite tags and their daily movements can be viewed on the Internet here:

http://www.seaturtle.org/tracking/index.shtml?project_id=80

Georgia

Mark Dodd with Georgia DNR reports that despite a rather slow start, a total of 100 loggerhead nests were laid on Georgia beaches in May. When they compare the 2005 May total with past nesting, they are ahead of last year (57 nests), but behind the previous 4-year average for May (188 nests). He predicts they will have between 600-700 nests in Georgia during 2005, below the 16-year average of approximately 1,000 nests, but above the dismal showing of 368 nests in 2004.

Georgia also reports a leatherback false crawl on St. Catherine's Island. Caretta Research Project personnel intercepted a nesting leatherback on Wassaw Island, and according to their records, she had nested there previously in 2001.

Florida

Allen Foley, State Stranding Coordinator, reports that the total number of dead strandings has been below average but the number of live strandings has been above average. They have been spending a lot of

their time transporting live turtles to rehabilitation facilities and fresh dead turtles to the University of Florida for necropsy. Actual stranding numbers were not available at this time, but he thinks they are running about 15% below the previous 10-year average.

Blair Witherington with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission says that it is too early to make a complete assessment of nesting. The numbers from the Archie Carr NWR are average but not stellar, where they are getting 100-150 nests per night. On the other hand, the leatherbacks are nesting "like gangbusters".

South Carolina

As with our sister states to the north and south, our nesting season got off to a slow start, as the numbers in the table show. As of this writing, things were picking up in June. We have included the two previous years for the May comparisons.

Thru 5/31	2003	2004	2005
Myrtle Beach S. P.	1	0	0
Huntington Beach S. P.	1	0	0
S.C.U.T.E.	6	5	2
South Island	9	3	6
Cape Island	132	38	41
Lighthouse Island	37	15	15
Deweese Island	5	1	1
Sullivans/Isle of Palms	7	0	1
Folly Beach	6	3	3
Kiawah Island	50	10	15
Seabrook Island	11	0	3
Botany Bay Isl & Plan	47	17	19
Edingsville Beach	17	3	4
Edisto Beach S. P.	22	5	6
Edisto Beach	12	2	7
Harbor Island	12	5	4
Hunting Island	16	6	6
Fripp Island	9	0	2
Pritchards Island	17	6	5
Hilton Head Island	36	10	12
TOTAL	453	129	152

Research

Satellite Tracking - Update

Of the five nesting loggerheads we instrumented with satellite transmitters in July 2003, one is still transmitting data with over 1,000 locations for over 700 days. Lofton's Lass migrated to an area just north of Cape Hatteras after nesting and then returned to warmer waters off the North Carolina coast for the winter. The next season she utilized an area off the coast of New Jersey. She is now making her second trip back to this same area. We do not know why she used North Carolina the first year and then New Jersey last year and again this year. You can view this turtle's migrations at www.dnr.state.sc.us/seaturtle/

Leatherback Aerial Surveys

Once again we flew parallel lines along the entire coastal zone at 1.5 and 3.0 nautical miles from shore. Leatherback numbers were low again this year. Cannonball jellyfish were also rare or absent. For those who have not spotted our plane yet, here it is. It is a Vulcan P68 Observer 2, which was made in Italy.



Photo by Barbara Bergwerf

Notes from the Field

Hilton Head Island

While on patrol May 26th, **Amy Lutmerding** and **Jayne Davidson** noticed tracks that led over the dune in North Forest Beach. Upon following them, they came upon a large female loggerhead that had spent a long night

bumping into houses and crawling through yards. Amy and Jayme called in help from the Fire and Sheriff's Departments and Shore Beach Service. This photo shows Beaufort County's finest hard at work getting the wayward mom loaded into a trailer so that she could be taken back to the sea. – **Kim Jones**



Photo by Becky Douglas, Shore Beach Service

Hunting Island and Folly Beach Nourishment

Emergency funding was made available for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to renourish these beaches this spring. The Hunting Island project protects the road that connects the south end of the island and replaces sand lost during last year's hurricanes. The Corps was able to complete the project before loggerhead nesting started.

The Folly Beach project is much larger and is being done during the nesting season. Renourishment during the nesting season is usually avoided, but the monies had to be spent by a certain date or be lost. Also the beach was in such bad condition, not that much usable nesting habitat was available. The contractor has hired staff that monitors the active project areas all night long to warn workers if turtles come ashore and to monitor the behavior of turtles relative to the construction. A College of Charleston student, **Jenny Gossett**, is also monitoring the effect of the renourishment project for her Master's thesis.

Beach Vitex Update

We have a new and simple web address for you to check the updates for Task Force activities. Please go to:
<http://www.beachvitex.org/>

Parade Magazine had a cover story on invasive species in the May 22, 2005 Sunday newspaper. The article will be available in the Parade's online archive starting May 30. You can go to:
http://archive.parade.com/2005/0522/0522_in dex.html to view the article. There are related links like: www.invasivespecies.gov where beach vitex is featured as the invasive species of the month!

The May 15 edition of the Charleston Post and Courier included an article about Task Force member **Bev Ballow** entitled "**Unsung Hero**". Bev is also a sea turtle volunteer at the Isle of Palms and keeps us well informed about her area of the coast. The article is a fitting tribute to her efforts.

SC Wildlife Magazine features an article about Beach Vitex in its May/June publication. – **Betsy Brabson**

Notes on Folks

A new hatchling has arrived. Kim Jones reports that **Mia Ramos** was born on April 11th to **Melanie Hanes-Ramos** who has been with the Hilton Head Island project for five years. Congratulations!

Carolina's Story: Sea Turtles Get Sick Too!

Is a photographic journal of Carolina, a critically ill loggerhead sea turtle, as she is rescued by SC DNR workers, nursed back to health, and released from the Sea Turtle Hospital of the South Carolina Aquarium. The author is **Donna Rathmell German** and the photographer is **Barbara Bergwerf**, a member of the Island Turtle Team on the Isle of Palms. Both are donating a portion of their royalties to the Sea Turtle Hospital at the Aquarium.

They will be having book signings across the state this summer and will have the Aquarium's "Turtle Cart" for educational opportunities.

Carolina's Story: Sea Turtles Get Sick Too!

Ages 4-8, 32 Page, 10" x 8.5", Hardcover w/ Jacket, ISBN: 0-9764943-0-2, \$15.95
Info@SylvanDellPublishing.com

26th Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation

Next year's symposium will be held on the island of Crete in Greece. **Dimitris Margaritoulis** of ARCHELON, the Sea Turtle Protection Society of Greece, is the symposium President.

Please note our new web site address:

<http://www.dnr.state.sc.us/seaturtle/>

Please note our new email address for the sea turtle desk: coastbio@dnr.sc.gov

Sally Murphy, *State Coordinator*
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Cover Photo of mating loggerheads by **Melissa Bimbi, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**