

Dear Sea Turtle Friends and Supporters,

This is the time of year when we begin our preparations for the approaching season in anticipation of our fine flippered friends. We hope the number of visitations this year is greater than in 2007 but the statewide trending charts show an overall decline in loggerhead nesting (50% decline since 1998). However, the charts also show an increase in nesting activity for greens and leatherbacks. In fact, 2007 was the highest year for green and leatherback nests in Florida since the state began counting them. Sadly, that upward trend was not evident locally. In Atlantic, Neptune and Jacksonville Beaches the 2007 season shaped up like this:

- ◆ 27 nests (26 loggerheads, 1 leatherback-infertile)
- ◆ 2,670 eggs
- ◆ 2,246 live hatchlings
- ◆ 8 false crawls (2 greens)
- ◆ 3 predations
- ◆ 26 strandings

The stranding count was slightly higher than in the previous year. We documented 26 incidents in 2007, two more than in '06. Most occurred in June, July and August. Statewide there were nearly 1,500 documented strandings, the 4th highest year on record.

But not all is doom and gloom. Because of disorientation events in previous years one of our initiatives for 2007 was to form a special committee to monitor all artificial lighting which could impact the nests. The committee is comprised of a subset of volunteers who donate extra time to survey lights and distribute information packets to homes or businesses with lighting that could potentially distract the hatchlings. We are very pleased with the results of this new committee: 100% cooperation from those who received the info packets, and zero disorientation events. This was a huge undertaking and all those involved in making this initiative a success are to be congratulated.

Another positive sign in 2007 was a lower number of nest disturbances by humans. We documented one instance in which an individual had used their fingers to probe into the sand of one nest, but the cavity was not breached and no eggs were disturbed. However, dogs continue to be a real concern, especially in South Jax Beach. Two of the predation incidents were from dogs digging into the nest and destroying eggs. One man was seen allowing his dog to urinate on the marked nest area. While technically that's not a predation, it sure is nasty, especially for the BSTP volunteers who must dig by hand in that same sand to conduct the post-emergent nest inventory.

There are many theories of why loggerhead nesting is down and stranding incidents are up, but none have been scientifically proven. In fact, there are likely multiple and complex contributory factors ranging from long-line fishing to red tide to climate change, to loss of habitat from coastal development and armoring. The biologists just don't know, which is one reason our conservation efforts are so very critical in the fight against extinction.

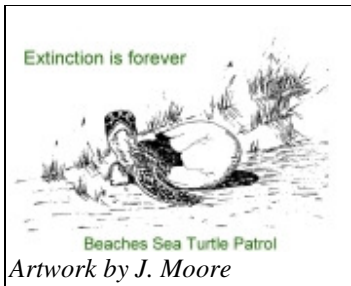
Though small, BSTP plays a unique and valuable role in the collection of data that is analyzed by the state biologists. Of the 196 beaches covering 1308 kilometers that contribute data annually to the statewide nesting program, there is a small subset of 33 beaches covering 396 km that have contributed specialized data consistently since 1989. BSTP belongs to this subset, which requires more detailed data collection and record-keeping. The specific data from this program, put simply, is used by the biologists to track trending arcs and identify areas of concern. So in addition to collecting the same data that all the other conservation groups do, BSTP must gather even more. Additionally, for the past several seasons we have participated in an ongoing voluntary DNA collection program to assist researchers from the University of Georgia studying loggerhead population structure in the southeastern U.S., which could help provide answers and solutions for the declining trend.

Another way in which BSTP plays an important role in sea turtle conservation is through education and community outreach. Our website (www.bstp.net) receives visitors from all over the world who make use of the extensive resources provided there. While on the beach doing our surveys and other data collection we typically field questions from curious beachgoers and residents. Our volunteers also participate in civic events such as Earth Day, Marshfest, charity fairs and school events. Knowledgeable speakers are available for lectures at schools and clubs. For the past several years we have participated in the annual Opening of the Beaches Parade, which occurs just in time to welcome in sea turtle nesting season.

Our renovated website has been online for a year now and has been met with very positive feedback. We have been adding new resources, links and other information we hope you will find useful. Soon we will begin using variations of our brand new logo with a fresh, updated look. But don't worry, our little hatchling mascot isn't going anywhere. The little fellow has been our mascot for many years and it



wouldn't be the same without him.



We invite you to join us at any of our public events. Here is what's on the horizon so far. Check the website calendar for additional details and updates throughout the season:

- ◆ Thursday, April 3, 6:30p: Pre-season meeting at the Beaches Library. New volunteer sign up.
- ◆ Sunday, April 27: Opening of the Beaches Parade in downtown Jax Beach.
- ◆ Saturday, July 5, 7-9a: Annual Fifth of July Beach Clean Up.
- ◆ July 31-September 29: "Loggerhead 2008", First Street Gallery art benefit. Opening reception Friday August 1. *(May be subject to change).*
- ◆ Saturday, September 20, 7-9a: International Coastal Clean Up Day.

Even though you may only notice us on the beach during the summer months, many of our volunteers donate their time year-round to work at those special events, attend meetings and training workshops, maintain the databases and take care of the administrative tasks required to keep the patrol running. We may be just a tiny organization but we have a tremendous amount of dedication and desire to help these magnificent, prehistoric creatures before they are gone forever. Your help is so vital to our mission, whether it's picking up trash from the beach, reducing your lighting to encourage nesting and prevent hatchling disorientation, whether it's donating money or just cheering for us at the parade, everything you do to help us also helps the turtles.

We thank you for your continuing support through donations, nest adoptions and memberships. We still have t-shirts, ornaments and other turtle gear available at most events and online via mail, for separate donations, to show your support for the turtles. BSTP is virtually dependent on your generosity — we receive no government funding and all work is conducted by unpaid volunteers. Please visit our website for more information about sea turtles, the patrol and our events. We look forward to seeing you at our meetings and exhibits, and, of course, on the beach.

Did you know....?

-Sea turtles have existed for over 100 million years
- Only 1 of 1,000 hatchlings will survive to adulthood.
-Scientific studies have proven that sea turtles show a feeding preference for brightly colored balloons over other items such as clear plastic.
-Most female turtles return faithfully to the same beach where they were born each time they are ready to nest.
-The largest leatherback ever recorded was almost 10 feet from the tip of its beak to the tip of its tail and weighed 2,019 pounds.
-Sea turtles are highly migratory and utilize the waters of more than one country in their lifetimes.
-Neptune and Jacksonville Beaches have ordinances to protect sea turtles from artificial lighting.
-Atlantic Beach has a city resolution advocating protection for turtles from artificial lighting.

Kudos to....

Kaitlan Radoycis, teen-age sea turtle supporter from Manhattan Beach, Calif., who made and sold grocery totes to encourage bag recycling. Kaitlan donated \$1.00 per bag sold to BSTP.

Turtle Island Natural Foods of Atlantic Beach for their "Save A Bag" campaign which encourages patrons to use recyclable bags in lieu of plastic bags.

Woof! We love dogs as much as anybody else, except when they dig up turtle eggs. Let's all work together to eliminate nest predation by loose dogs! Please keep them leashed and away from nest sites.



Atlantic Beach Animal Control: 247-5866
 Neptune Beach Animal Control: 270-2411
 Jax Beach Animal Control: 247-6167

Green nest predated by dog, 2006, S. Jax Beach Red circles denote destroyed eggs. (Photo by E. Fisher)