

Dear Sea Turtle Friends and Supporters,

What's the best way to welcome Spring? By reading the annual BSTP newsletter, of course!

2010 Recap

The big news of the season was the number of nests. At a combined total of 62, this was the highest year on record for nests in Atlantic, Neptune and Jax Beaches. There were 60 loggerheads plus one green and one leatherback. It's been quite a few years since each local nesting species sent a representative, and we're very appreciative.

Three nests were lost to tides but of the remaining ones that were able to be evaluated we counted 5,974 eggs. Of those, 5,270 had successfully emerged. We recorded 30 non-nesting emergences (false crawls), which was right in line with the average of 50%.

Sadly, some of our carefully tended nests were subjected to animal predation (mostly dogs), and hatchling disorientation from ambient lights. Human disturbances such as footprints and trash inside the nest perimeter were also found, including evidence of a romantic interlude, to put it nicely.

Statewide Report

Statewide, Florida's turtles experienced another massive cold-stun event in January which put another large hit on the turtle population. FWC biologists have posted the following nest numbers for 2010:

- Loggerheads – 73,702 (5.92% decrease from 1989)
- Greens – 13,225
- Leatherbacks – 1,334

In March of last year the Obama administration recommended raising the classification of loggerheads from "threatened" to "endangered". On March 16, 2011, the National Marine Fisheries Service announced a 6-month extension of the deadline for a final decision, so there will be no action on this matter until September.

Of course, the event with the biggest environmental impact was the Deepwater Horizon oil well explosion in the Gulf. We reported in our March 2010 newsletter that the State of FL was considering revoking the ban against drilling in near-shore waters. We recounted our participation in the Hands Across The Sand movement in February 2010 when concerned citizens lined up along the coastline to represent their support of the ban. Little did we know then what was about to occur on April 20. A second "Hands" gathering was held in June, with the third event scheduled for this coming June 25. BSTP will not be able to organize a gathering this time but if you are interested in participating or organizing a group we'll have links on the website and Facebook page. While the initial explosion, oil spill

and clean up efforts all caused alarming deaths to numerous marine species, the lasting effects may not be known for decades, if ever. The Sea Turtle Conservancy is endeavoring to put a constitutional amendment on the 2012 ballot that will allow voters to decide whether to ban drilling in near-shore Florida waters.



Oil-covered sea turtle. Submitted by Wallace J. Nichols

Several BSTP volunteers devoted extra time to haz-mat training in case we were needed as first-responders on the Atlantic coast.

2011 Preview

While we hope that each nesting season will be more prolific than previous ones, the reality is that overall loggerhead nesting is on the decline and they are the most common nesters in northeast Florida. While there are surely many factors causing the decline, we expect the upcoming beach renourishment project to play a major role in limiting the numbers of nests deposited on our beaches. Historical data backs up that assessment: the last renourishment project was done in 2005, and that year we had only 15 nests (the lowest year since of the past 16 seasons).

Because of this project we are required to conduct our morning patrols beginning April 1, rather than the usual start date of May 1. We'll also have to relocate all nests deposited in the future construction zones, so that means our volunteers can expect to be very busy. Consequently, most of the nests will be clustered in areas where construction has already been completed or will not be conducted. It will therefore be even more imperative that homes and businesses in those areas take steps to limit the nests' exposure to artificial lights.

Calendar of Events

We will not be able to participate in some of our favorite events this year, such as the Beaches Parade, but are very pleased to continue our partnership with First Street Gallery and Keep

Jacksonville Beautiful. We're also happy to participate for the first time as exhibitors in the Never Quit Never Festival. All female finishers of the 5K will receive a sterling silver sea turtle pendant valued at \$250 and will be presented by a Naval Officer in dress uniform. Let's go, ladies! Green sea turtle pendants will also be available for purchase from Underwood Jewelers, and 10% of the proceeds will be donated to BSTP!

- **Season kick-off/volunteer orientation meeting – Monday April 11, 6:30 p.m., Beaches Library**
- **Never Quit Never Beach Fest/5k – May 20-21**
- **Annual Sea Turtle Art Show and BSTP benefit – May 25 through June 27, First Street Gallery. Opening reception May 27.**
- **First beach clean up – July 5, 7-9 a.m.**
- **Second beach clean up – September 17, 7-9 a.m.**

As of press time we're also working on a very special new event for the entire family that we hope to announce soon. Watch our website and Facebook page for details for this and other new events.

If you have not yet gotten a BSTP supporter t-shirt, or would like additional shirts, the donation amount has been reduced to \$10.00 to clear the inventory. We currently have sizes in Youth Small and Youth Medium, and all adult sizes (small through 2XL). Shirts will be available at the April 11 meeting. If ordering by mail, please add \$3.00 per shirt for postage. There's a handy form on the website which includes the amount for postage.

Our pilot program to implement an online donation method was deemed successful and will be continued. We do have to pay fees for this convenience to our donors but have chosen not to adjust donation levels at this time. In fact, BSTP's membership structure has not changed since it was first implemented many years ago. We want to provide levels that are accessible to everyone and are hopeful that those who can afford to give a little more will do so. BSTP receives no government funding and has no paid positions. All work is conducted by volunteers and you're invited to join our squad. Thank you for your continued support. Without it we would not be able to accomplish all that we do.

Sincerely,

BSTP Directors

Reference Links:

conserveturtles.org
 nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/
 myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/managed/sea-turtles/
 neverquitnever.org
 firststreetgalleryart.com

Glossary

Endangered: Defined under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) as "any species which is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range."

Threatened: Defined under the ESA as "any species which is likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range."

(National Marine Fisheries)

Why Care About Sea Turtles?

Much can be learned about the condition of the planet's environment by looking at sea turtles. They have existed for over 100 million years, and they travel throughout the world's oceans. Suddenly, however, they are struggling to survive -- largely because of things people are doing to the planet's oceans and beaches. But what does this mean for the human species?

It is possible that a world in which sea turtles can not survive may soon become a world in which humans struggle to survive. If, however, we learn from our mistakes and begin changing our behavior, there is still time to save sea turtles from extinction. In the process, we will be saving one of the earth's most mysterious and time-honored creatures. We might just be saving ourselves too.

Sea turtles are part of two ecosystems, the beach/dune system and the marine system. If sea turtles went extinct, both the marine and beach/dune ecosystems would be negatively affected. And since humans utilize the marine ecosystem as a natural resource for food and since humans utilize the beach/dune system for a wide variety of activities, a negative impact to these ecosystems would negatively affect humans.

(Sea Turtle Conservancy)

Extinction is forever



Beaches Sea Turtle Patrol