

Sea turtles start nesting season with 'unheard-of' numbers on one NC island, town says

June 4 2019, by Charles Duncan



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Each day from May through August, volunteers walk and survey the 26 miles of coastline on North Carolina's Topsail Island looking for the tell-tale tracks of sea turtles coming onto the beach.

The Topsail Town of Surf City said there volunteers have already found 21 turtle nests on the island. "This is 'un-heard of' before June 1. Turtles are nesting in the hauled in sand, which is important to the ecology of future turtle nesting," the town said on Facebook.

To learn more, town officials visited the Karen Beasley Sea Turtle Rescue and Rehabilitation Center in Surf City, which organizes the volunteer sea turtle nest monitoring program and runs a hospital to care for sick and injured turtles.

North Carolina's Bald Head Island is also having a record year for sea turtle nests, WECT reports. The island east of Wilmington reported 22 loggerhead turtle nests already this year, according to the Bald Head Island Conservancy, the TV station reports.

What kind of sea turtles nest in North Carolina?

Most nesting sea turtles in North Carolina are loggerheads, according to the North Carolina Sea Turtle Project, part of the state Wildlife Resources Commission.

The state also sees "a few green turtles and leatherbacks nesting each year. There have only been two ever recorded Kemp's ridley nests in NC," according to the commission.

When do sea turtles lay eggs in North Carolina?

According to the Karen Beasley Center: "In North Carolina the nesting season is mid-May through August. The Loggerhead Sea Turtle comes ashore to nest 3 to 5 times during a nesting year. She deposits an average of 120 eggs per nest.—How long does it take for turtle eggs to hatch? And what happens next?"

Sea turtle eggs incubate for about 60 days in the sand before they hatch, according to the National Parks Service. One interesting fact about sea turtles is that the temperature of the sand helps determine the turtle hatchlings' gender, the parks service says: "warmer sand will develop mostly females, cooler sand produces mostly males."

"Once the eggs hatch, the hatchlings use a combination of cues to find the ocean when they emerge from the egg cavity including slope of the beach and the reflection of the moon or starlight off the water," according to the parks service. That's why it's important to keep lights off the beach at night, which the hatchlings can confuse with the moon and go the wrong way, according to the North Carolina Sea Turtle Project.

"Weighing in at about 2 ounces, their first challenge on our beach is escaping the deadly grasp of the ghost crabs. Once in the water they must hide from both bird and fish predators, and the swim to sea weed rafts and the Sargasso Sea begins," according to the Karen Beasley Center.

Where can you see sea turtles in North Carolina?

If you're lucky, you can see a sea turtle swimming in its natural environment, the ocean. But there are easier ways than sitting on a pier waiting for the slim chance of catching a glimpse of a loggerhead.

The Karen Beasley Center in Surf City gives public tours of its sea turtle rehabilitation hospital.

The Bald Head Island Conservancy hosts beach walks and beach patrol ride-alongs. They also let people join for sea turtle nest excavations once the eggs start to hatch. "Nest Excavations occur three days after a nest boils and are free and open to the public. Excavations provide a unique

opportunity for attendees to witness hatchlings, that didn't make it out of the [nest](#) during the boil, crawl to the ocean with the help of the Sea Turtle Interns and Conservancy Staff."

The three North Carolina Aquariums also have sea turtle exhibits. According to the Visit NC site, "Sea turtles are highly visible at all three North Carolina Aquariums, which are also involved in rescue, rehabilitation and release."

"The Aquarium on Roanoke Island, located on the Outer Banks, features a Sea Turtle Rescue exhibit. Visitors to the Aquarium at Pine Knoll Shores on the Crystal Coast can follow the journey of loggerhead sea [turtles](#) and even speak with one in the Loggerhead Odyssey exhibit. In the Wilmington area, The Aquarium at Fort Fisher features turtle exhibits and Turtle Talks at the adjacent Fort Fisher State Recreational Area," Visit NC says.

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