

'Incredibly rare' white baby sea turtle pops out of the sand on South Carolina beach

October 20 2020, by Mark Price, The Charlotte Observer

An "extremely rare" white baby sea turtle was found Sunday on a beach 25 miles south of Charleston, South Carolina, according to Kiawah Island town officials.

"You can imagine the excited 'oohs' and the 'aahs' from the guests, including some College of Charleston students, when the ([beach](#)) patroller found a lone, leucistic [hatchling](#) in the nest," town officials wrote on Facebook. "It was a first for everyone."

Leucism is a condition that decreases color pigmentation, experts say, often making an animal appear white or spotted.

"Leucism is different from albinism, as albino animals have a complete loss of pigment, leaving them completely white with red or pink eyes," town officials posted.

Loggerhead turtles are typically "reddish brown," the Savannah River Ecology Laboratory reports.

Sea turtles with leucism are rare—largely because odds of survival in the ocean are slim, according to the Olive Ridley Project.

"Leucism is an abnormal genetic defect, and not a useful one," the project reports. "Camouflage is important to all animals, particularly very small sea turtle hatchlings that are predated on by almost everything. So, to be born white makes you stand out and very visible to

predators."

Kiawah Island researchers said they chose to let nature take its course, and the newborn white turtle "crawled to the ocean and swam away in the surf" to meet its uncertain fate.

Sea [turtles](#) nest on Kiawah Island "from May 1 through Oct. 31," and a recent survey found at least 380 nests, according to an Aug. 24 Facebook post. Most of the eggs, around 80%, hatched by mid-September, officials reported.

The rare white hatchling came from a nest on Beachwalker Park, the island's "only public beach access," Charleston County Parks says.

Loggerhead hatchlings are 2 inches in length, but grow to 3.5 feet and 375 pounds as adults, the Sea Turtle Conservancy reports.

Their eggs hatch below the surface on beaches and the hatchlings dig themselves out, and then dash for the ocean, experts say.

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