

Sea turtle nesting season winding down in Florida, some numbers are up and it's unexpected

October 28 2020



A loggerhead hatchling climbs out of a footprint along the beach. Permit: Florida MTP-186. Credit: G. Stahelin, UCF MTRG.

Florida's sea turtle nesting surveying comes to a close on Halloween and like everything else in 2020, the season was a bit weird.

The number of green sea turtle nests on central and southern Brevard County, Florida beaches monitored by University of Central biologists were way up during a year they should have been down based on nearly 40 years of historical data.

"Usually, [green turtles](#) alternate between high years and low years, but this year they defied expectations," says Chris Long, a [doctoral candidate](#) and research assistant with UCF's Marine Turtle Research Group.

"Green [turtles](#) had the fifth highest year on the Archie Carr Refuge that we've recorded since 1982. There is no evidence pointing to high nesting as a result of fewer people on the beaches or anything pandemic-related like that. It's difficult to know why nesting differed from expectation."

East-Central Florida's coastline (from Brevard to Indian River County) is among the most important nesting areas in the world for loggerhead sea turtles, and it also hosts about one-third of all green turtle nests in the state. The region is at the northern end of a "hotspot" for leatherbacks, which [nest](#) on the local beaches at a smaller scale as well. All sea turtles in the U.S. are protected under the Endangered Species Act.

UCF has run a sea turtle monitoring and research program on the beaches of the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge (ACNWR) in southern Brevard County for more than 35 years. UCF findings about sea turtle abundance and behavior are among the reasons the refuge was created in 1991. The UCF Marine Turtle Research Group focuses on long-term nesting [beach](#) and coastal juvenile sea turtle research in Brevard and Indian River counties locally. The group also studies the oceanic "lost years" tracking turtles in the Gulf of Mexico, North and South Atlantic, and Indian Oceans.

All [sea turtles](#) saw an increase in nests along the coastline this year compared to recent years. Here's a look at the numbers recorded by the UCF Marine Turtle Research Group's covering the 13 northernmost miles of the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge. Final counts won't be tallied until Oct. 31:



A loggerhead hatchling crawls toward the sunrise along Florida's coastline. Permit: Florida MTP-186. Credit: K. Johnsen, UCF MTRG

Green turtle nests:

- 2020: 8,110 (unexpectedly high for a "low year")
- 2019: 15,784 (record, "high year")

- 2018: 1,230 (typical "low year")

Loggerhead nests:

- 2020: 12,968
- 2019: 10,813
- 2018: 11,901

Leatherback nests:

- 2020: 40
 - 2019: 36
 - 2018: 17
- Note: there are no clear trends in local leatherback counts; the highest recorded total nests was 55 in 2016.

Provided by University of Central Florida

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