

Share the Beach E-Newsletter

Loggerhead Sea Turtle
(*Caretta caretta*)
Photo: Julia Goodman



Sea Turtle Season Wrap Up

Each sea turtle season May 1 – October 31 (Halloween Day) volunteers patrol the beaches in search of sea turtle nests. Days upon hours are dedicated to ensure that the proper information is documented and sent to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and St. Johns County. The collected information allows the State and County to make proper management decisions for the future of sea turtles. Their future depends on the very thing that has put them in the predicament they are in – humans. The information they collect theoretically reflects the amount of sea turtles that nest on our beaches and becomes a piece of the bigger puzzle. Sea turtle volunteers document the date, species, location of nest (i.e. base of dune, in dune, driving lane, etc.), gps coordinates, obstacles encountered and type of shoreline (i.e. dune, sea wall, escarpment). Throughout the season they continue to keep an eye on the nest and document any changes or damage done to the nest by storms, animals, or humans. This sea turtle season proved to be a challenging year as we were hit with many storms that brought high tides thus inundating many of the nests with sea water repeatedly. Sea turtle eggs need air exchange from

the outside environment in order to reach their full development potential. The white sand on the southern beaches develops into a cement-like material even after occasional inundation and can prevent fully developed hatchlings from reaching the surface. Other areas of our beaches experienced an accumulation of sand or the complete washing out of nests. During Tropical Storm Fay, 36 nests were completely washed out. When a nest is washed out not much can be done as they have been exposed to the natural elements and likely will not develop. When the sand accumulates sea turtle volunteers worry that the hatchlings cannot dig themselves out. However, the last green nest of the season proved that 3 feet of excess sand was nothing, as the Primary Permit Holder for the Vilano beaches discovered upon her final evaluation of the nest at 77 days of incubation on November 10. Some of the hatchlings had dug through at least 5 feet of sand to make their way to the ocean. The others she had discovered during the evaluation were brought to the Marine Science Center in Volusia

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St. Johns County Beach Services is looking for some dedicated volunteers. If you are interested in one of the following programs please contact us:

*Sea Turtle Patrol (if available)
Injured Bird Pick Up/Transport
Sea Turtle Festival Committee
Sea Turtle Washback Program
Adopt-A-Beach Program
Light Office Duties*

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Cross section of sea turtle nest almost completely washed out as a result of storm events.

Sea Beans – Global Drifters



Pictured clockwise from the right:
Sea heart (*Entada gigas*), sea coconut
or golf ball (*Manicaria saccifera*)
and red hamburger bean
(*Mucuna urens*)



Sea heart (*Entada gigas*)
bring good luck

When storms begin to stir up the ocean waters and the sargassum begins to build on the beaches (often referred to as the wrack line) many mysterious sea drifters begin to appear. Small sea turtles, the occasional sea horse, star fish, shells trash, and sea beans all become part of the wrack line. Sea beans don't actually come from the sea itself but from vines and fruit trees that grow along tropical rain forest and shores of the Caribbean, South & Central America, and the southern most part of the keys. They are the seeds of tropical plants that often get deposited into fresh water streams from other countries and end up in the constant flow of the Gulf Stream. Some sea beans have reached as far as the United Kingdom, Norway, Iceland, and Greenland. To the occasional walker one might overlook the treasures in the wrack line, but to the experienced beachcomber sea beans become a treasure find. They can appear at any time of the year. However, the fall season usually produces Nor-easters and Hurricanes stirring up the waters and transporting more sea beans to our beaches. Coming in many different shapes and

sizes they can be identified by their distinct characteristics. The most common on our beaches here in St. Johns County are the sea heart (*Entada gigas*), sea coconut or golf ball (*Manicaria saccifera*) and red or brown hamburger bean (*Mucuna urens* and *Mucuna sloanei*). However, many other sea beans do wash up on shore and some come from our own back yard like railroad vine, mangrove, and sea oats. Originating from the monkey ladder vine of Costa Rica, sea hearts are gently shaped like a heart. They were known to bring good luck because they had made a long and challenging journey. They were also known to have inspired Columbus to travel the seas for the land in which they came from. The common sea coconut distinctly resemble the shape of a golf ball, hence their secondary name. Red and brown hamburger beans are named for their obvious resemblance of a hamburger. They come from vines along the Amazon River and are often referred to as horse eyes. Some sea beans have medicinal uses and hold mysterious folklore stories. Next time you on the beach be sure to take a second look as you might find one for your collection.

More Sea Bean Information

- 🐛 Visit www.seabean.com to get more information about the annual sea bean symposium and to identify your treasures
- 🐛 Pick up trash while searching for sea beans. This bending over and picking up trash might open your eyes to a new world in the wrack of seaweed
- 🐛 Bring along a beachcombing guide so you can identify any other drifters.

Brown hamburger bean (*Mucuna sloanei*) often referred to as a true sea bean.



Photo Credit: www.seabean.com

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County because the water temperature was too cold for their journey. They will be transported to the sargassum layer via boat. Here they will spend quality time foraging and developing into larger sea turtles.

This year on St. Johns County beaches our returning loggerhead nesting females deposited 301 nests. While our returning green female sea turtles only deposited 11 nests, giving our County a grand total of 312 nests. This is above our yearly average of 265. No leatherbacks were recorded as entering the beaches. Green and Leatherback sea turtles tend to nest in a biannual pattern, so next year County beaches should see an increase in green and leatherback nesting. From the Duval/St. Johns County line to the St. Augustine Inlet at the Vilano jetties a total of 215 loggerheads and 9 greens were deposited. From the St. Augustine Inlet at Anastasia State Park to the Matanzas Inlet 51 loggerhead and 1 green were deposited. Summer Haven beaches produced a total of 26 loggerheads and 1 green. The earliest loggerhead nest was discovered on May 10th and the earliest green nest on May 27th. The last nest of the season was deposited on September 12th by a loggerhead and the last green nest discovered was on August 30th. It cannot yet be determined how many hatchlings actually made it to the ocean until our dedicated volunteers have completed the 2008 data forms. One thing is for sure, deposited nest were lost due to storm events and extreme high tides. A final evaluation will be mentioned in the December newsletter.

Thank you to all who have dedicated your summers to ensuring the future survival of our sea turtles.



Loggerhead hatchlings making their way towards the ocean.



Hatched sea turtle eggs are always a good sign.