

Brevard beaches largest nesting area for sea turtles | News

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3-4 minutes

BREVARD COUNTY — There's nothing like strolling on the beach and seeing nature taking its course during sea turtle nesting season.

Through Oct. 31, thousands of sea turtles, such as the green sea turtle, loggerhead sea turtle and leatherback sea turtle, will return to Brevard County beaches to nest their eggs, and although each nest isn't marked, officials state there can be hundreds of nests within a few miles of shoreline.

While sea turtles primarily nest after midnight, onlookers may spot a sea turtle or two nesting during daylight hours such as after 6:30 p.m. or early morning. Spectators must, however, remain at least 50 feet away from the nesting sea turtle.

"There are between 8,000 and 20,000 loggerheads nesting in one season in this area in Brevard County, and that's one quarter of all the loggerhead turtles in the world," said Sheila Harnois, media contact for Sea Turtle Preservation Society. "With green (sea turtles), we have between 1,000 and 15,000 nests."

The gestation period for a sea turtle is 50 days, and each sea turtle can lay up to 100 eggs at a time. According to Mrs. Harnois, the temperature of the sand will determine the sex of each turtle.

At the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge, there can be between 400 and 1,000 nests per mile, she added.

"A lot of people say, 'Why don't you mark the nests?' but can you imagine if we had to mark 400 to 1,000 nests per mile?" Mrs. Harnois said. "I mean, the beach would be nothing but stakes with sea turtle nests."

Leatherback sea turtles will often nest along Brevard's beaches, but are fewer than the popular green or loggerhead sea turtle.

Beachgoers and property owners along the beach should keep in compliance with county and city lighting ordinances.

Lighting restrictions are currently in effect through Oct. 31, with no artificial light sources allowed to be visible from or to illuminate the beach at night.

Artificial lights can disorient sea turtles, especially for the hatchlings as they naturally gravitate toward a source of light, according to Mrs. Harnois.

“Some people think if they put a red cap on their flashlights, it’s legal, but that’s not true,” she added. “When the hatchlings come out, they all come out a few hours of each other and they go toward the brightest area, and that should be the surf line.”

For beachgoers who enjoy digging at the beach, officials ask that they cover up any holes before leaving, as holes can destroy nests and trap sea turtles and their hatchlings.

Brevard County is the largest nesting area in the United States for both loggerhead and green sea turtles, according to a press release.

For more information, call (321) 676-1701, email er@seaturtlespacecoast.org or visit www.seaturtlespacecoast.org.