

# How to observe sea turtles in Central Florida this summer



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A UCF researcher works to measure a sea turtle during nesting at the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge on Saturday, Aug. 4, 2018. (Marine Turtle Research Group / Orlando Sentinel)

It's sea turtle nesting season in Central Florida and some conservation groups are offering people the rare chance to see these ancient reptiles up close.

Parts of the Sunshine State's east coast are a haven for these egg-laying animals. Each year, thousands of loggerheads, leatherbacks and green turtles travel to Florida's sandy beaches to make their nests.

Sea turtles can be observed through October in areas up and down the Atlantic coast, but June and July tend to be the most active season for watching sea turtles nest.

For those taking a night-time beach walk on their own, keep in mind that flashlights are prohibited, stay quiet and never touch a nesting sea turtle or her hatchlings. Beach chairs, umbrellas, sandcastles and holes dug in the sand can also affect a turtle's ability to return to the water safely.



Sea turtle nesting in Florida: Loggerheads, leatherbacks off to strong start

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The best way to experience sea-turtles up close is by joining a guided walk with one of Florida's conservation or **research groups**. Although COVID-19 has caused some organizations to delay or cancel their summertime turtle walks, several groups are hosting walks with modifications for safety.

Here's how to observe and learn about sea turtles in Florida this summer.



The green turtle's name derives not from the color of its shell, which is olive-brown with dark streaks and spots, but from the greenish color of its body fat. On average, these sea turtles weigh 300 pounds and have a shell length of 3.3 feet. (FWC Fish and Wildlife Research Institute)

### **In-person walks**

- **Loggerhead Marinelifelife Center** is hosting guided turtle walks on Juno Beach during evenings in June and July. Face coverings will be required of all participants, who are limited to those ages 10 and older. Walks are also available in American Sign Language on select nights. Advanced reservations are required. Tickets are \$22 per person or \$20 per person for LMC members. More information: [marinelife.org](http://marinelife.org)
- **Florida Oceanographic Society** will hold sea turtle walks near Stuart Beach on Monday and Thursday nights through Aug. 6. The group has a limited capacity for each walk (12 participants) amid the COVID-19 pandemic,

and all guests will be required to wear a face mask. Be sure to reserve soon, as each date is booked until July 27. Tickets are \$25 per person. More information: [floridaocean.org](http://floridaocean.org)

- **Stella Maris Environmental Research** is helping people experience sea turtles up close with nighttime turtle walks inside the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge, where one-quarter of all loggerhead nests occur. The group's website shows live availability for turtle walks, which cost \$19 per person. Children ages 7 and older are welcome to attend the walks, which are scheduled through the end of July. More information: [stellamarisenvironmentalresearch.org](http://stellamarisenvironmentalresearch.org)
- **Sebastian Inlet State Park** is welcoming in visitors curious about sea turtles for ranger-guided watches, which take place Tuesday through Friday nights during July. Space is limited to eight people per night, and masks are required. Children ages 7 and older are welcome to participate, and advanced reservations are required. Tickets are a \$10 donation per person. More information: [fsispturtlewalk.org](http://fsispturtlewalk.org)
- **Coastal Connections**, which is based in Vero Beach, will host "Turtle Digs" this summer with some safety modifications due to COVID-19. The digs will be announced three days prior to the event, which will coincide with a nest hatching. Reservations will be required and crowds limited to 40-50 people. Mask wearing and social distancing will be strongly encouraged. Virtual digs will be held this year on Facebook and Instagram live for those unable to attend the in-person event. Stay tuned on the organization's Facebook page for more details: [facebook.com/CoastalConnectionsInc](https://facebook.com/CoastalConnectionsInc)
- **Hobe Sound Nature Center** is hosting sea turtle walks during Thursdays and Fridays in June and July. Face coverings are strongly encouraged. Tickets are \$5 each. The walks are fully booked for 2020, but waitlists are available for specific dates. More information: [hobesoundnaturecenter.com](http://hobesoundnaturecenter.com)

## Virtual events and education

- **Sea Turtle Conservancy** is hosting virtual sea turtle walks in lieu of in-person events this summer. Join the organization's senior research biologist and community stewardship coordinator online weekly to learn about the three main sea turtle nesting species, threats to their survival and how you can help. Registration for the online webinar is required. Find a schedule and more information: [conserveturtles.org](http://conserveturtles.org)
- **Sea Turtle Preservation Society** offers online tips and resources for beachgoers in the event they see a nesting sea turtle. This comes at a time when their usual night walks are temporarily on hold. More information: [seaturtlespacecoast.org](http://seaturtlespacecoast.org)
- **UCF Marine Turtle Research Group** shares conservation tips, turtle facts and nest count numbers on its Facebook page. The last count on June 23 provided a season total of 6,654 loggerhead nests, 1,307 green turtle nests and 40 leatherback nests in the Brevard County portion of Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge. More information: [facebook.com/ucfmtrg](https://facebook.com/ucfmtrg)

*Are there other sea turtle events or resources that should be included in this list? Find me on Twitter [@PConnPie](https://twitter.com/PConnPie), Instagram [@PConnPie](https://www.instagram.com/PConnPie) or send me an email: [pconnolly@orlandosentinel.com](mailto:pconnolly@orlandosentinel.com).*