



Volunteers work to protect sea turtles, educate public on how to help

MARIA SONNENBERG Aug 31, 2021 Updated Aug 31, 2021



Peter Bandre helped create the Sea Turtle Preservation Society.

A disturbing sight awaited Peter Bandre during a morning beach visit at Indialantic in 1982. Dead sea turtle hatchlings were scattered across the parking lot, squashed by cars.

The babies had been trying to make their way to the ocean after hatching that evening, but mistook the lights from the boardwalk parking lot for the moon that was to guide them into the sea.

Bandre vowed to help the hapless reptiles. His passion for the job led to the creation of the Sea Turtle Preservation Society, or STPS, the all-volunteer group that for more than three decades has protected sea turtles in Brevard.

“Our primary goal is to educate people on how they can help sea turtles,” said Susan Skinner, chair of the board of directors.

Brevard’s 72 miles of shoreline provide a critical nesting environment for loggerheads, green sea turtles and leatherbacks, three of the world’s seven species. Florida serves as nest site for 90 percent of sea turtle eggs laid in the United States, and the Space Coast’s long stretches of beaches and the Indian River’s foraging opportunities attract these “lawnmowers of the ocean” by the thousands. The county ranks among the top nesting sites.

“Only Palm Beach County has more,” Skinner said.

Sea turtles return to their “hometown” when they are ready to lay eggs, and the cycle repeats itself year after year.

STPS’s 450 volunteers help sea turtles survive through a multi-pronged approach that includes public education on the threats facing these reptiles, menaces such as boat propellers, lights and ocean-going trash. Although connecting with the public during COVID was challenging, STPS volunteers took it in stride using Zoom and social media to reach approximately 3,000 individuals at schools, youth groups and other community organizations. The Turtle House in Indialantic and the Turtle Nest kiosk at Port Canaveral also provided educational opportunities.

The group also orchestrates the Sea Turtle Transport Program, the first in Florida. Trained volunteers deliver injured sea turtles to rehabilitation facilities throughout the state, but primarily to Brevard Zoo’s Sea Turtle Healing Center, which STPS helps fund from proceeds from events such as the upcoming Turtle Krawl 5K. In 2016, for example, STPS delivered 1,500 washback post-hatchlings to the Healing Center after Hurricane Matthew and a subsequent strong weather system pushed them back onto the beaches.

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Several times a week during June and July, STPS hosts educational night walks that allow the public to view a loggerhead nesting on the beach. The popular programs sell out quickly.

Like many volunteers, Skinner was hooked on turtles after attending one of the walks.

“I wanted to do something for them,” she said.

STPS welcomes volunteers and donations. Go to seaturtlespacecoast.org, where details on the Turtle Krawl 5K are also available. The Turtle House is at 111 S. Miramar Ave. in Indialantic.