

The Turtle Times

A Seasonal Publication from the Edisto Beach Loggerhead Sea Turtle Project

Summer 2026

edistobeachseaturtles.com

Edisto Beach Sea Turtles Find Their Way Back



Noni Sallenger

Loggerhead Sea Turtle laying her nest on Edisto Beach

Welcome to sea turtle season at Edisto Beach, which runs from May 1 through October 31!

These massive marine reptiles, known for their large heads and powerful jaws, migrate hundreds of miles to reach the South Carolina coast. For mother turtles, this is a homecoming: they often return to the very same beach where they were born decades earlier to lay their own eggs. From May through September, nesting females crawl ashore under the cover of darkness. They use their flippers to scoop out deep sandy chambers, depositing about 100 to 120 golf-ball-sized eggs before heading back to the Atlantic. By midsummer, the beach is dotted with protected nests, all waiting for the “boil”—the moment when dozens of tiny hatchlings emerge and scurry toward the ocean.

This year, the first nest on Town Beach was laid on May 8, and the first nests on State Park Beach were laid on May 6.

Last summer, Edisto Beach’s 3.5-mile stretch had 126 loggerhead nests and 2 green turtle nests. State Park Beach, which spans 1.4 miles, had 145 loggerhead nests and 1 green turtle nest last summer.

The Junior Turtle Patrol Returns

For the second summer season the Edisto Beach Loggerhead Turtle Project will be enlisting the help of the Junior Turtle Patrol to support its mission. Visitors and residents are encouraged to join in our efforts to make Edisto Beach the best destination to continue to host the beloved Loggerhead Sea Turtle for future generations. The Edisto Beach Loggerhead Turtle Project invites guests and residents to become members of Junior Turtle Patrol. Simply commit to follow the guidelines of our pledge found on page three. If you would like a “thank you” sticker, complete your signed pledge and visit a designated location. Visit edistobeachseaturtles.com to choose a location to receive your gift.

Fun Facts for Young Marine Biologists

Heavyweights: An adult loggerhead can weigh as much as a piano—up to 350 pounds!

Built-in compass: Turtles use Earth’s magnetic field to find their way across the ocean.

Temperature tells all: The temperature of the sand helps determine whether hatchlings are males or females. Warmer sand usually means more females, and cooler sand usually means more males.

Fast scramblers: Even though they look slow, hatchlings can move surprisingly fast to reach the water and escape predators such as hungry crabs or birds.

Follow the moon: Hatchlings rely on moonlight reflecting off the water and the white of the ocean surf to help guide them to the sea.

Survival: Only 1 in 1,000 hatchlings reach adulthood.

Nesting: Female turtles may nest every 2 to 3 years and can lay between 1 and 7 nests in a single season.



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edistobeachseaturtles.com

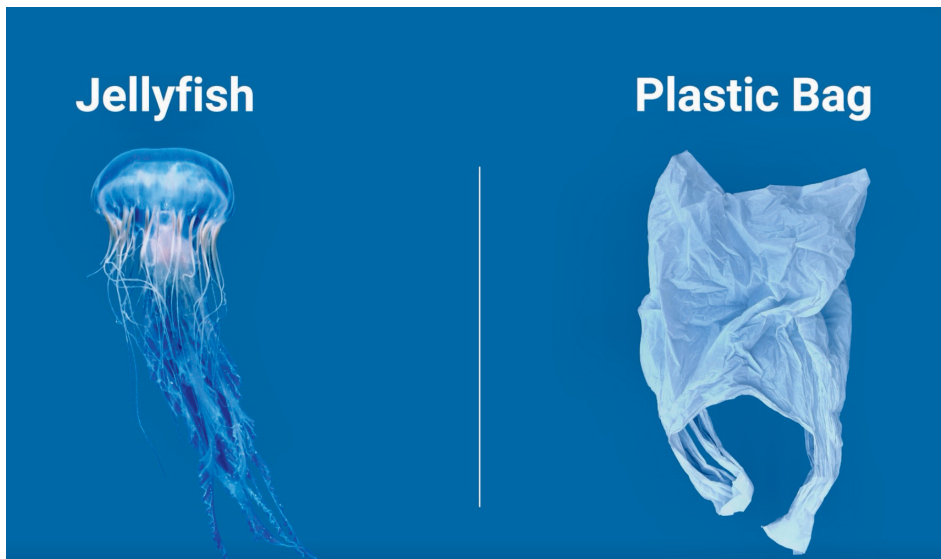


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Edisto Beach Loggerhead Turtle Project
P.O. Box 204
Edisto Beach, SC 29438-0204

Food or Trash?

Did you know that a loggerhead sea turtle's favorite food is jellyfish? Unfortunately when they see plastic bags or any kind of trash floating in their home, they can mistake it for a jellyfish. That's why it is so important not to leave trash on the beach where it can be blown or washed into the ocean and become dangerous for sea turtles as well as other marine creatures. Trash on our beach may also attract unwanted predators such as raccoons that will disturb turtle nests. And trash on our beach is ugly! Please help us keep Edisto beautiful.



Kristi Summers

Left behind beach gear creates an obstacle for a turtle seeking her nesting spot. Hatchlings can get trapped and not be able to get to the ocean.

Flat Matters

Digging holes and building sandcastles is classic beach fun! However, if left behind at night, they create deadly obstacles for wildlife and hazards for people. Please follow these simple rules before you leave the beach each evening:

- **Fill holes:** Leftover holes trap nesting mother turtles and tiny hatchlings and are also a hazard for people walking at night.
- **Flatten castles:** Tall sand structures disorient baby turtles trying to find the sea and can also confuse mother turtles trying to lay her eggs.
- **Pack gear:** Take all chairs, tents, and bags with you.
- By leaving the beach completely flat and clean, you save turtle lives and protect fellow visitors.



LindaScroggy

Holes are dangerous for the turtles and people of Edisto Beach



Becky Lynch

Lights from inside a house can be bright and confusing. Be sure to close curtains and pull down the shades at night.

Light Matters

When staying in a beach front house it is important to take extra care to make sure you will not disturb the sea turtles. Sea turtle hatchlings naturally move towards the brightest lights. If the lights on land are brighter than the moonlight, they can go in the wrong direction.

- * Turn off all outside lights.
- * Lights that cannot be turned off should have a red filter cover.
- * Use curtains or shades to make sure that all windows that face the beach are covered and light is not escaping.
- * Make sure all outside trash cans have tight lids.
- * Avoid flash photography.
- * When out on the beach use a red sticker filter on phones or flashlights.
- * Use an app on your phone such as "Night Vision" by Vixen to make your screen a red light. Even if you have a red light filter on your flashlight or phone, do not approach a sea turtle or hatchlings.

JUNIOR TURTLE PATROL PLEDGE

BE FLAT

- KNOCK DOWN CASTLES BEFORE DARK
- FILL IN ALL HOLES

BE CLEAN

- PICK UP ALL TRASH
- PUT AWAY ALL BEACH GEAR

BE UNSEEN

- TURN OFF LIGHTS ON THE BEACH
- USE A RED FILTER ON FLASHLIGHTS AND PHONES
- MAINTAIN A RESPECTFUL DISTANCE FROM TURTLES OR HATCHLINGS

ENCOURAGE OTHERS

- MAKE SURE YOUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY KNOW AND FOLLOW ALL BEACH GUIDELINES

I _____ pledge to follow the Junior Turtle Patrol Pledge while visiting Edisto Beach from _____ to _____ 2026.



Noni Sallenger

Hatchlings are very small and need to get to the ocean quickly. Even small holes or left behind toys can be hazardous.

Frequently Asked Questions

How long does it take for the turtles to hatch?

It usually takes 45 to 60 days, depending on the weather.

How do turtle patrol volunteers know when there is a nest?

Volunteers walk the beach every morning at sunrise looking for tracks. They follow the tracks to the spot where the mother turtle laid her eggs.

Why are there orange signs on poles on the beach with pink tape?

The Edisto Beach Loggerhead Turtle Project marks each nest with stakes and tape. These markers help volunteers monitor the eggs and ensure that beachgoers do not accidentally step on a nest.

How can I protect the turtles?

The most important rule is "Lights Out!" Bright lights can confuse nesting mothers and lead hatchlings away from the ocean. If you are staying on the beachfront, turn off exterior lights and close your blinds after dark. You can also help by filling in holes, knocking down large sandcastles before nightfall, and putting all trash in the garbage can.

What should I do if I see a nesting turtle?

Keep your distance and stay very quiet. Do not use flashlights or take flash photography, as this can scare the mother back into the water before she finishes laying her eggs.

The Sea Turtles of Edisto

Although several varieties of sea turtles are seen in the waters around Edisto, the loggerhead and green turtles lay their nests here. The loggerhead nests are most common. However there are a few green turtle nests. Leatherback turtles have been seen at Edisto in the early spring as they are migrating either to the warmer waters to nest or they are just passing through. They may enjoy eating the jellyfish and especially love the dangerous blue Man o War species. They have very sharp scissor like teeth that can grab gelatinous prey including squid and small fish. Leatherbacks are the largest type of sea turtle and because of their leather like carapace they are able to dive down as far as 3000 feet! This Spring a leatherback named Malone, who wears a tracking device on her back visited Edisto. She is tracked by a group of researchers from Juno Beach, Florida.



Kristi Summers

The turtle in the top photo is a loggerhead sea turtle. The second photo is a green turtle. The loggerhead turtle is a bit larger and has a bigger head. What other differences do you see? Pictured below, leatherback turtles nest further south but are visible along the shore in the spring..



Ron Scroggy

What Do Sea Turtles Eat?

Our most common species, the loggerhead sea turtle gets its name from its large head. The beaks are strong and allow them to easily crush the food from its shell. Loggerheads are the most carnivorous (meat eating) sea turtle. They eat horseshoe crabs, blue crabs, and whelks. They also eat jellyfish, sea cucumbers, and anemones. The green sea turtle eats mostly sea grasses and algae. Their jaws have serrated edges that help them chew the grasses.



Noni Sallenger

The blue Man O War is a leatherback's favorite.



Kristi Summers

Edisto jellyfish are a tasty meal for a sea turtle.

For the Record

- ? What does the data tell us?
- ? Which year had the most nests?
- ? Which year had the fewest nests?
- ? Which day in May was the earliest?
- ? Which was the latest?
- ? Do you see any patterns relating to the first day and the number of nests?
- ? Did Hurricane Mathew in 2016 impact the nesting season in 2017?
- ? Does beach renourishment impact nesting numbers?

These are just a few of the issues that are studied from the data collected by the Edisto Beach Turtle Project. Of course there are also fun facts as well.

- How many nests were laid the last summer you visited Edisto Beach?
- How many nests were laid the year you were born?

Edisto Town Beach Nest 1999-2025

YEAR	1 ST NEST	TOTAL NESTS	YEAR	1 ST NEST	TOTAL NESTS
1999	5/17/99	101	2014	5/18/14	66
2000	5/13/00	46	2015	5/7/15	177
2001	5/17/01	67	2016	5/12/16	233
2002	5/7/02	94	2017	5/9/17	74
2003	5/10/03	63	2018	5/14/18	114
2004	5/20/04	11	2019	5/9/19	247
2005	5/20/05	88	2020	5/10/20	163
2006	5/21/06	50	2021	5/15/21	117
2007	5/19/07	67	2022	5/6/22	219
2008	5/12/08	49	2023	5/12/23	189
2009	5/22/09	81	2024	5/9/24	148
2010	5/20/10	83	2025	5/7/25	128
2011	5/15/11	42	2026	5/8/26	?
2012	5/8/12	173			
2013	5/22/13	175			

The Life of a Sea Turtle



Nita Swift

Female turtle makes her way to lay her nest—She will use her flippers to dig a hole the shape of an upside down lightbulb. She will lay between 100-120 eggs. She will then cover the hole with sand and make her way back to the ocean. Male turtles do not typically return to land.



Noni Sallenger

Someday to return—Around age twenty the turtles will mate and the female will return to lay her nests.



Kristi Summers



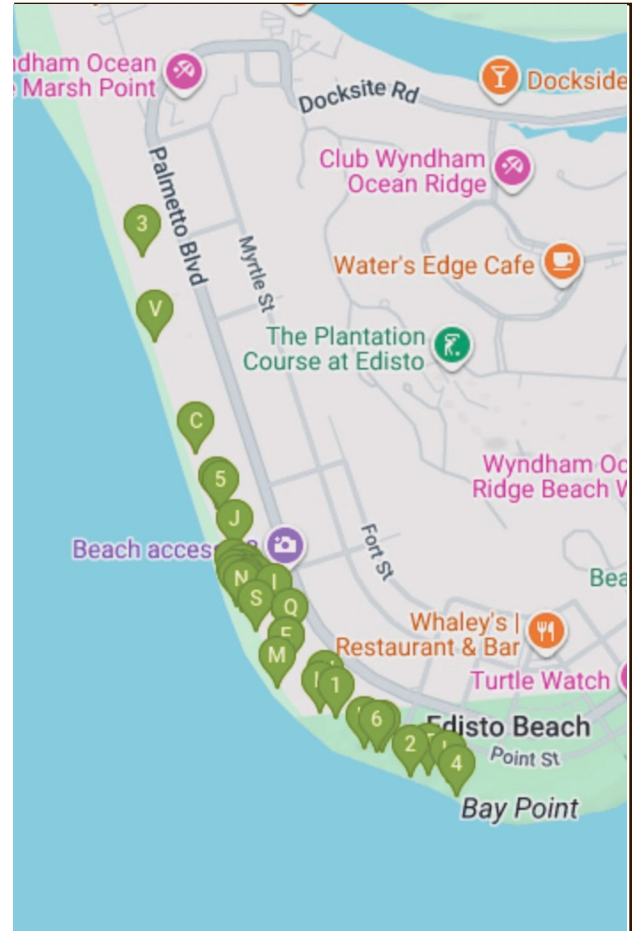
Kristi Summers



Noni Sallenger



Noni Sallenger



www.seaturtles.org

Incubation — The eggs will incubate in the sand from 45 to 90 days. The turtle volunteers remove one egg from the clutch that is sent to researchers for DNA testing. The nest is marked so that it can be kept safe. After 45 days volunteers put up a screen to reduce the risk of hatchlings going in the wrong direction.



Ron Scroggy

Emergence — The hatchlings will emerge together at night. They will quickly make their way to the ocean to begin their journey to deeper waters with food.

DNA testing shows the nests of ONE turtle who returned to the same area of Edisto Beach to lay over 30 nests between 2012 and 2024.

Below is her nesting data from 2012 -2024.

Date	Eggs	Hatchlings	Nest #
2012-05-10	0	0	5
2012-05-27	146	137	29
2012-06-10	156	92	62
2012-06-23	165	99	94
2012-07-06	157	146	121
2014-06-01	178	90	7
2014-06-14	172	117	15
2014-06-25	155	71	19
2014-07-07	146	113	29
2016-05-19	164	135	8
2016-06-01	142	76	39
2016-06-13	158	147	74
2016-06-25	122	0	110
2016-07-08	152	39	131
2017-05-09	142	91	1
2017-05-24	159	106	6
2017-06-06	150	108	22
2017-06-20	73	37	36
2020-05-15	157	115	4
2020-05-31	169	76	30
2020-06-14	0	0	69
2020-07-12	0	0	138
2022-05-15	137	64	8
2022-05-29	133	110	41
2022-06-12	178	118	90
2022-06-23	146	61	136
2022-07-05	139	15	178
2024-05-11	134	70	2
2024-05-27	145	67	25
2024-06-10	149	35	51
2024-06-22	140	2	87
2024-07-02	126	81	109

More About Sea Turtle DNA



Ron Scroggy

Just like us, sea turtles have DNA. DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid,) is the molecule that carries all the instructions for how living things grow, function, and inherit traits from their parents.

Scientists use DNA egg testing to learn more about the loggerhead sea turtle. Each season when a loggerhead lays her eggs, volunteers around the coast of South Carolina, North Carolina and Georgia take a single egg sample to send to researchers to extract the DNA of the mother turtle. The DNA is like a unique fingerprint that can be matched to other eggs to identify the same female.

This is very useful to help researchers in a lab to analyze each of the egg samples. Researchers use these samples to help answer several questions:

- How many female loggerheads are nesting in a given year?
- How many nests does each female lay, and how often?
- How far apart are her nests?
- How precisely do female offspring return to their hatching site?

Fun Facts:

- From tiny hatchlings to nesting adults, sea turtles travel thousands of miles back to where their lives began.
- A loggerhead egg is about the size of a golf ball and takes about 70 days to hatch.
- Females can be 30 years old before they start nesting.
- DNA testing (genetic tagging) is like a “family tree” for turtles, showing how they’re related.



Ron Scroggy

Cool Dudes & Hot Chicks!

For most sea turtles, sex is determined by temperature during incubation, not by sex chromosomes like in humans. This is called temperature-dependent sex determination (TSD).

Here’s the general pattern for species like loggerhead and green sea turtles:

- **Warmer** nest temperatures > mostly **female** hatchlings
- **Cooler** nest temperatures > mostly **male** hatchlings

There’s usually a “pivot temperature” around which the sex ratio is about 50/50. For many sea turtles, that’s roughly around 29°C (84°F), though it varies by species.

The critical period happens during the middle third of egg development. Even small temperature differences can strongly shift the sex ratio.

This matters because climate change is warming nesting beaches. In some populations, researchers are finding extremely female-biased hatchling ratios, which could affect long-term reproduction. For example, studies on green sea turtles found some nesting areas producing overwhelmingly female hatchlings due to warmer sand temperatures.

Extra Care for Keystone Species

We care about a lot about sea turtles because they are considered a “keystone” species which help to maintain the underlying health of the oceans and, in turn, the beaches. Sea turtles have been the ocean’s ultimate builders and helpers for more than 100 million years! If they disappeared, it would cause a giant, scary domino effect that would be felt in the ocean and on land.

Their jobs include keeping sea grass short and healthy, protecting coral reefs by consuming sponges that can destroy habitats, and by controlling the jellyfish population. Their unhatched eggs and shells in the sand can provide essential nutrients for the vegetation which will help to prevent erosion. These are just a few of the reasons we want to do all we can to encourage the sea turtles to keep coming back to Edisto.

Edisto’s Horseshoe Crabs State and Federal Wildlife Services Monitor The Unusual Arachnid

If you explore Edisto Beach during the spring or early summer, you may get lucky enough to see one of Edisto’s most fascinating animals, the horseshoe crab. They may look a little scary, but they are quite harmless. While they have the word “crab” in their name, they are actually arachnids, like a spider. Their body is protected by a hard exoskeleton and is divided into three parts; a carapace, an abdomen and a tail. Interestingly, the horseshoe crab has ten eyes and twelve appendages, two of which are solely for eating and the others are for moving around the ocean floor and also for gathering food. While the tail looks dangerous, it is harmless and is used to help flip it back over if a wave or the current turns it upside down. You may find horseshoe crab shells on the beach in various sizes because as it grows, this very unusual arachnid sheds its exoskeleton, and a bigger one will harden in its place.

The adult horseshoe crab will migrate on shore during the spring to spawn and lay eggs. They come ashore in huge groups and dig holes to lay their eggs and then cover them up for protection similar to a turtle. After a few weeks the eggs will hatch, and the baby horseshoe crabs will spend a little time in the intertidal flats before moving to deeper water.

Horseshoe crabs are monitored by the SCDNR (South Carolina Department of Natural Resources) and the US Fish and Wildlife Services. Some of them have tracking tags. If you see one with a tag, take a picture and submit your finding to www.fws.gov/crabtag.

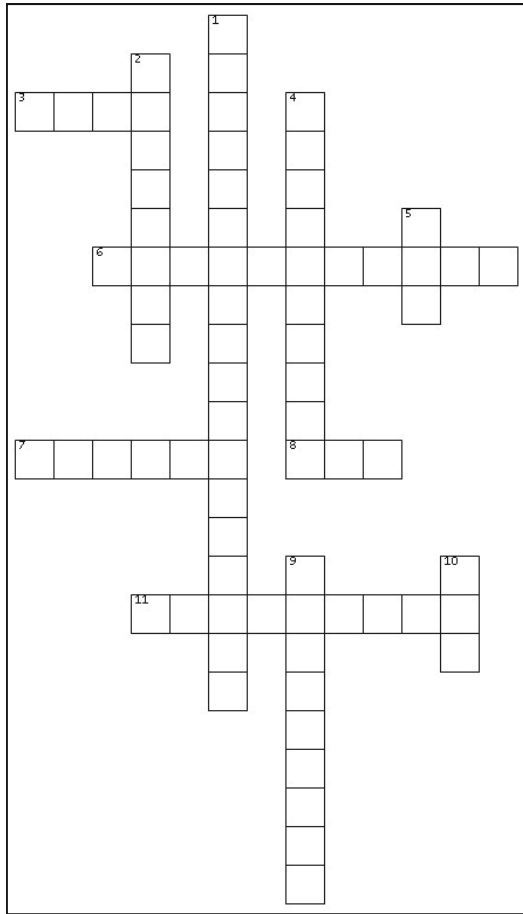
These amazing ancient marine arachnids play an important role in the ocean and shore ecosystem, similar to sea turtles. They have a symbiotic relationship with several different species who make the horseshoe crab shell their home. On shore, some of their eggs provide food for migratory birds that come to Edisto on their way to South America.



Noni Sallenger

The Puzzle Page

SEA TURTLES



Sea Turtles

Y Z F L I P P E R T V C Z E I B J Z A B
 L R L X T C T V C V U X L E A P R D N A
 Z E O Z W M I T O N I J S T H Z N F A B
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 Q D S N Z P K S D G M D M N A E E L C X
 W H F V D C X Y B N W N W E X D R C Y D

ACROSS

- 3. Moment when lots of hatchlings emerge from a nest
- 6. Largest sea turtle visitor to visit Edisto Beach.
- 7. Who you should call if you see someone disturbing a turtle, hatchling, or nest.
- 8. Unique Genetic Code
- 11. crab, Arachnid that is being tagged for study on Edisto Beach

DOWN

- 1. Edisto Beach program to get kids involved in helping the sea turtles
- 2. What sea turtles use to dig the hole for their nest
- 4. Most common type of sea turtle on Edisto Beach
- 5. Month "turtle season" begins
- 9. Food for Sea Turtles
- 10. Color of light that is less bothersome to sea turtles

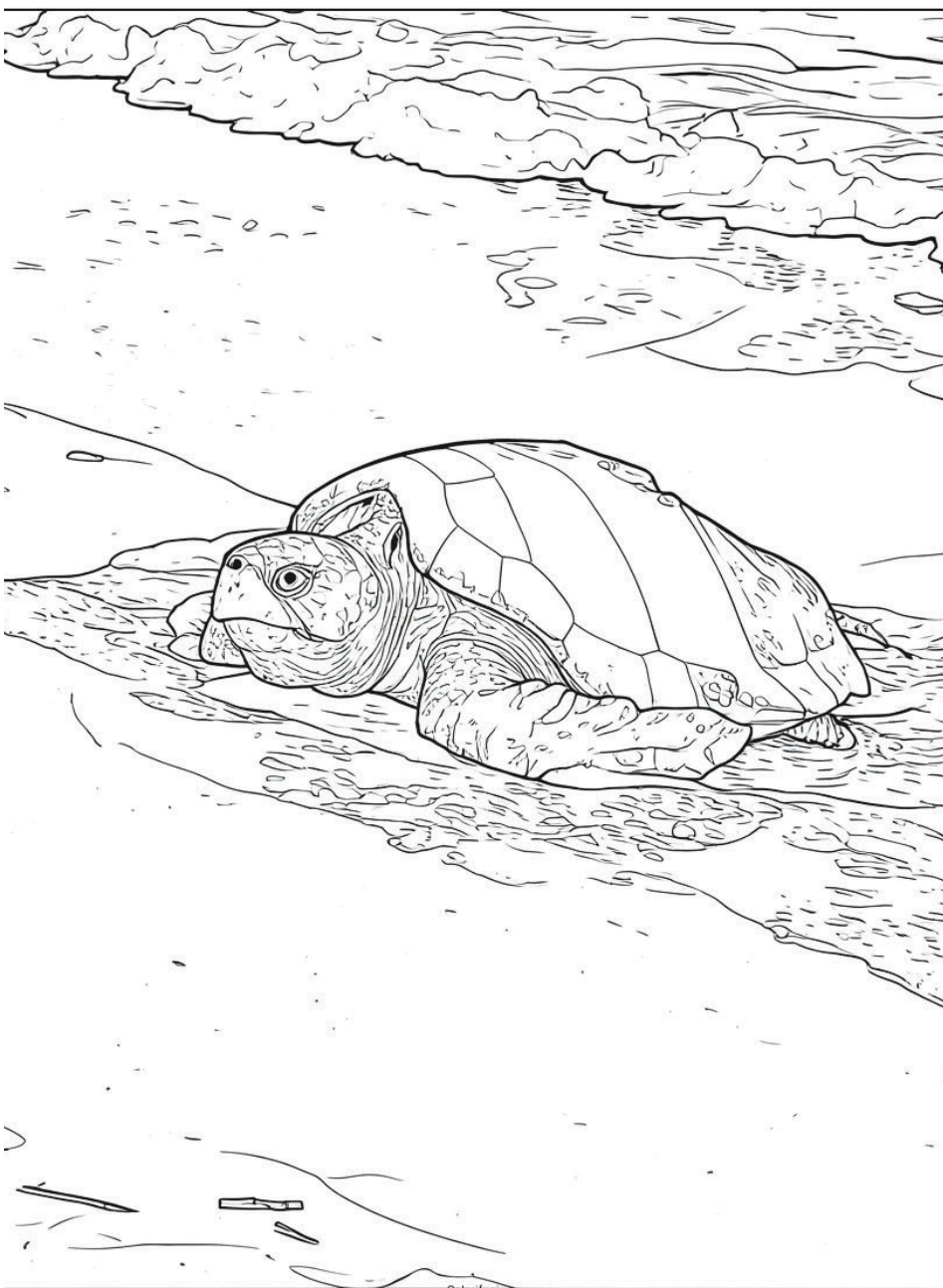
- | | | |
|-----------|--------------|------------|
| BEAK | DOLPHINS | LOGGERHEAD |
| BE CLEAN | EDISTO BEACH | MAY |
| BE FLAT | EGGS | MIGRATION |
| BE UNSEEN | FLIPPER | NEST |
| CLUTCH | HORSESHOE | PREDATOR |
| DIG | CRAB | RED LIGHT |
| DNA | INCUBATE | STATE PARK |
| | | TRACKS |

TURTLE

Find the way to the little turtle.



Color the Edisto Sea Turtle



Shore and Sea Birds

Many different kinds of birds call Edisto Island their home. You have probably noticed the most common ones on the beach, pelicans and gulls. But there are several other shore and sea birds that don't live here year round, but that depend on Edisto as a place to rest, eat and nest as they journey and migrate to and from other places. Some of the more endangered and threatened species are the American Oystercatcher, Piping Plover, Least Tern, and Whimbrels. It is important for all of us to share in protecting our birds and ensure that they will have the resources needed to survive. You can help by:

- keeping your distance
- keeping your pets leashed
- picking up trash
- don't feed the birds or other wildlife
- remind fishermen to remove their fishing lines and other equipment from the beach

Remember, people aren't the only ones who enjoy the beach. We call on you to be Stewards of all our wildlife including our glorious birds!

LEARN MORE

Attend **Turtle Talk Storytime** at the Edisto Island Library (1584 HWY 174, Edisto Island) July 16 4PM, August 8 11am

Visit the **Environmental Learning Center** at the Edisto Beach State Park www.southcarolinaparks.com/edisto-beach

Visit **Charleston's Sea Turtle Care Center** www.scaquarium.org/sea-turtle-care-center

Power Your Own Research

Find out about the **Town of Edisto's** other wildlife, visit www.townofedistobeach.com/meet-our-wildlife

Study the DNA research at the **Shamblin Lab:** www.shamblinlab.wixsite.com/genetics

Follow the life of a **tracked turtle** <https://marinelife.mapotic.com/>



Wilson Plover Nesting

Ron Scroggy



American Oystercatcher

Ron Scroggy



REPORT YOUR SEA TURTLE AND MANATEE SIGHTINGS!

Step 1:

Download the ArcGIS Survey123 App to your smart phone.



Step 2:

Scan the QR codes



Select "Open in the Survey123 field app"

The survey will now be downloaded directly onto your phone and ready to use on the water!

**Note: you can continue as a guest without creating a login*

Step 3:

Become a citizen scientist, report your sightings, and spread the word to others in your community!



Horseshoe Crab Tagging



www.fws.gov/crabtag

Leash Season

Dogs must be on leash on the beach



May 1st - October 31st

State Park Beach - All Year



townofedistobeach.com/

southcarolinaparks.com/edisto-beach

EBLTP (Edisto Beach Loggerhead Turtle Project) is the official sea turtle preservation team for endangered sea turtles in the Town of Edisto Beach. Established in 1982, the organization is a registered 501(c)(3) not-for-profit in South Carolina and obtains annual authorization from the SC DNR to perform conservation activities. Volunteers train extensively to professionally assist nesting turtles, stranded turtles, and hatchlings. All beach rules described in this newspaper are sections of ordinances of the Town of Edisto Beach and regulations of South Carolina Department of Natural Resources.

If You See Something, Say Something

- Immediately report anyone disturbing a nest, sea turtle, or hatchling to the **Edisto Beach Police** at **843-549-2211**. Provide photo or video evidence to police when they arrive.
- Call Edisto Beach Police if you see turtles in distress or in need of help.
- If a sea turtle is caught on a fishing line call **South Carolina Department of Natural Resources** at **1-800-922-5431**.
- If you find an injured bird, Call the **Avian Medical Clinic of Center for Birds of Prey** at **843.971.7474** and press option #1 for the Injured Bird Line.



For the most recent information about the 2026 nesting season follow us on Facebook .

www.facebook.com/edistotownbeachturtles



The Turtle Times was partially funded by support from a Community Donation from the Edisto Beach Lions Club.