

# What you can do to protect loggerhead sea turtles:

## Remove beach litter

Balloons, plastic bags, foam, fishing gear and other non-degradable litter can cause the deaths of many sea turtles who mistake them for food.

## Observe from a distance

If you encounter a nesting turtle do not shine any lights on or around her - she may abandon her effort to nest. Do not use flash photography. Stay behind the turtle so that she cannot see you.

## Do not harass a turtle

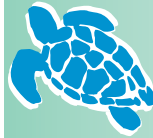
Don't touch or prod her to move. Stay out of the way as she crawls back to the water.

## Leave nest sites alone

If you see a nest don't disturb it. Leave any identification markers in place.

## Report injured turtles

Call to report dead or injured turtles.



## Lights Out!

The most important thing you can do to protect Hilton Head Island's Loggerhead sea turtles is to turn the lights out!

Sea turtle hatchlings usually emerge from the nest at night. They orient themselves toward the brightest horizon and dash towards the sea. Visible lights from buildings or streets near the beach disorient the hatchlings, and they wander inland where they are almost certain to die. If they don't make it to the ocean quickly, hatchlings are likely to die of dehydration in the sun or could be caught by predators like birds or crabs. Artificial lights also discourage females from nesting.



The Town of Hilton Head Island requires that lights on structures visible from the beach be shielded or turned off from dusk to dawn from May 1 to October 31. Any windows facing the beach must also be covered with draperies or shade screens.

Remember, lights out for turtles!

To report a dead or injured Sea Turtle contact:

Sally Krebs	-843-341-4690
Amy Tressler	-843-689-3033 X228
Beach Patrol	-843-785-3494
Sarah Skigen	-843-341-4682

To report light violations contact Hilton Head Island Code Enforcement Officers:

Connie Pratt	-843-341-4642
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To report wildlife offenses contact the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources: -1-800-922-5431

To learn more about the loggerhead sea turtle visit:  
[www.dnr.state.sc.us/marine/turtles](http://www.dnr.state.sc.us/marine/turtles)  
[www.seaturtle.org](http://www.seaturtle.org)

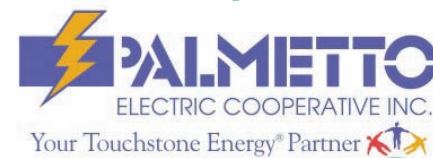
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## Coastal Discovery Museum

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# THE LOGGERHEAD SEA TURTLE

An amazing thing happens every summer on Hilton Head Island's beaches. An ancient mariner, the loggerhead sea turtle, emerges from the shimmering water of the Atlantic, and crawls ashore to lay her eggs in a sandy nest.

It may take her over an hour to excavate a perfect nest with her rear flippers. Then the mother turtle, weighing several hundred pounds, deposits approximately 100 ping-pong sized eggs into the nest, covers them with sand and returns to the sea.

After about 60 days a clutch of tiny hatchlings emerges from the sand and scrambles to the ocean to begin a long dangerous journey.



# All About Loggerheads

## What is a loggerhead sea turtle?

The loggerhead sea turtle (*Caretta caretta*), like all sea turtles, is a reptile and is related to land turtles, lizards, and snakes. Adapted to live in the ocean loggerheads have powerful flippers instead of legs and an aerodynamic body and shell which enables them to move elegantly through the sea. Loggerhead turtles are a federally threatened species.

## What does the loggerhead look like?

The loggerhead has a massive skull and a body weighing 250-400 pounds and reaching up to 4 feet long! Like all sea turtles, loggerheads have front and rear paddle-like flippers that function similar to the wings of an airplane providing propulsion through the ocean. The upper shell of the loggerhead, called the carapace, is usually a reddish brown in color, and the lower shell, called the plastron, is dull brown to yellow. The two shells are composed of horny plates called scutes.

## Where do loggerheads live?

Loggerheads can be found in temperate and subtropical waters throughout most of the world. Adults usually stay close to shore, while juveniles float in the open ocean. Loggerheads prefer to feed in coastal bays and estuaries or in the shallow water along the continental shelves of the Atlantic Ocean. Loggerheads live exclusively in the water, and the females only come on land to lay eggs (males typically don't come ashore).

## What do loggerheads eat?

Loggerhead sea turtles are primarily carnivorous and feed mostly on shellfish that live on the bottom of the ocean. They have powerful jaw muscles and strong beak-like jaws which they use to eat hard shelled animals such as horseshoe crabs, whelks, and clams.

## What about nesting?

Loggerhead sea turtles nest on the beaches of Hilton Head Island and other southeast beaches between May and August. An adult female will nest once every two to four years, coming to shore between 4 and 6 times per season to lay eggs. Nesting typically occurs at night - the female crawls slowly to a dry part of the beach and begins to excavate a pit with her flippers. Once the cavity has been dug she deposits an average of 120 eggs. Using her rear flippers, she then covers the egg cavity and throws sand over the nest to disguise it from predators. When the work is done, the female slowly returns to the sea.



Photo by Matthew Godfrey

## What about hatchlings?

About 60 days after the female lays her eggs, the small turtles begin to hatch. They use a sharp tooth to break open the shell. All of the hatchlings join together to dig out of the nest, a job that can take several days. During the cool night, the 2 inch long hatchlings emerge from their sandy nest and scramble toward the sea. It is during this run to the sea that many hatchlings fall prey to waiting predators. Once in the water, hatchlings swim several miles

off shore where they catch ocean currents. The hatchlings stay in the open water for several years before returning to nearshore waters.

## Why are loggerheads threatened?

The life of a Loggerhead sea turtle is difficult. It is estimated that only 1 out of a few thousand hatchlings survive to adulthood. There are many reasons for this, some natural, some man-made. Each year thousands of turtles become entangled and drown in fishing nets. Thousands of turtles are killed each year when they mistakenly eat trash and debris. By following some of the guidelines in this brochure, we can help ensure that the Loggerhead sea turtle remains an integral part of the ecology of Hilton Head Island.