Angels for the Environment

PIPER PETROCELLI

Staff Writer

They were here first. Turtles are the oldest known reptiles, dating back to the Triassic Period 100 million years ago. North Carolina is home to 20 species of turtles that live in our ocean, rivers, ponds, lakes, and bogs, as well as living on land. Our North Carolina coast is the destination for five species of sea turtles returning to in the spring. nest However, Loggerhead nesting numbers have dropped dramatically. Wade Rawlins of the Raleigh News and Observer spoke with several scientists along the coast, but found that the reason for the decline is still a mystery.

This year only 300 nests have been documented so far, compared to a typical year of 750. Larry Crowder, Professor at the Duke University Marine Laboratory in Beaufort, told Rawlins that this number of nests is one of the lowest he has seen in the last 20 years.

Loggerheads at the coast are not the only turtles in trouble. North Carolina is also home to the smallest turtle in the United States. The Bog Turtle is all of 3.5 inches when fully grown. They are found in the western mountain regions of North Carolina, in bogs, marshy meadows, and shallow streams. As a result of habitat destruction and their popularity in the pet trade,

they have been designated as a threatened species by the State of North Carolina.

They have outlived the dinosaurs by 65 million years, but the Leatherback has become the world's most endan-

gered sea turtle. They can measure up to nine feet long by six feet wide, and can weigh a ton. They are often caught by gill nets and long lines at sea. Their eggs are raided on land, and their nesting habitat is being destroyed. The Turtle Excluder Devices, which are proving successful as escape hatches for other sea turtles, are often too small allow the giant Leatherback to get through. Crowder said to the American Association for the Advancement of Science conference in Denver, CO last spring, "They survived over 100 million years, through climate change and asteroid impacts, but they could become extinct in 10 to 20 years unless sufficient international cooperation is mounted to reverse this dramatic decline." Sea turtles get caught on swordfish lines 10 times more often than on hooks baited for tuna. Crowder said, "So simply choosing to consume less swordfish could

reduce market demand and

reduce the impact on critically endangered leatherbacks."

The Karen
Beasley Sea
Turtle Rescue
a n d
Rehabilitation
Center on
Topsail Island
is committed

to bringing up the numbers. Staffed by dedicated volunteers, they rescue and care for sick and injured turtles until they are well enough to be returned to the ocean. Internships, hospital tours, and summer camp programs are offered from February through August. Another way the average human can protect the average sea tur-

tle is by watching what we eat for dinner. The Marine Stewardship Council, a global non-profit organization based out of London, UK, has developed a standard for sustainable and well-managed fisheries. It uses a product

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to courtesy of The Karen Reasley Sea Turtle Rescue and Rehabilitation Center

label to reward environmentally responsible fishery management and practices. Look for the MSC label on seafood sold in places like Whole Foods, across the street from Meredith on the north side of Wade Avenue.

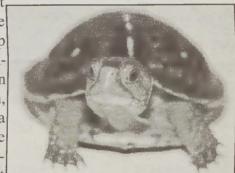


photo courtesy of Shaven Ferret Productions

a4e ENVIRONMENTAL QUESTION OF THE WEEK

5 species of sea turtles nest in North Carolina

How many of the 5 species are protected under US laws as Threatened or Endangered Species?

(A)0 of 5, Threatened or Endangered

Photo courtesy of Dr. Lew Ehrhan

(A)1 of 5, Threatened or Endangered

(A)3of 5, Threatened or Endangered

(A)5 of 5, Threatened or Endangered





Additional Information on all of North Carolina's Turtles can be found by visiting the links below

www.nmfs.noaa.gov

www.bio.davidson.edu

Photo Credit: Ursala Keuper Bennett/Paul Bennet



photo courtesy of Cayman Islands Turtle Farm

Attention: Students, Faculty & Staff

Please welcome prospective students and their families to our campus this Friday, September 17th for "The Big Picture!"

"The Big Picture!"
our Open Day
for High School Seniors
8:15 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Posted by: Office of Admissions 760-8581