

Angels for the Environment

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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 nest in the spring. 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.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Lew Ehrhart

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 to 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 and Rehabilitation Center on Topsail Island is committed



Photo courtesy of The Karen Beasley Sea Turtle Rescue and Rehabilitation Center

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 turtle 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

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
- (A) 1 of 5, Threatened or Endangered
- (A) 3 of 5, Threatened or Endangered
- (A) 5 of 5, Threatened or Endangered



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

Posted by: Office of Admissions
760-8581



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: Ursula Keuper Bennett/Paul Bennet