

The Problem

Raccoons are usually harmless, interesting neighbors. Under natural conditions they pose little threat to sea turtles. However, because of the availability of food, loss of predators, and other reasons, in urban areas their populations have increased beyond what would be expected in the wild. Each year, raccoons living along Florida's coast destroy tens of thousands of sea turtle eggs and hatchlings. In fact, raccoon predation is one of the greatest causes of sea turtle mortality in Florida! The good news is that a few simple things can help address this growing problem.



The picture is blurry, but the problem is clear. Packs of raccoons often steal turtle eggs before mother turtles even have time to bury their nests. This sight is all too common on many Florida beaches.

Feeding wild animals has become a problem in Florida. In 2002, it became illegal to feed raccoons, bears, and foxes. It was already against the law to feed alligators.

When people feed wild-life, the animals become less cautious of humans. They often become dangerous or cause considerable property damage. Raccoons are particularly

troublesome because they can be found throughout Florida and in most urban areas; they're not fussy about their choice of food; they're clever and persistent at getting to food sources; and they will come back repeatedly, often bringing other raccoons. One person feeding a raccoon is likely to cause problems for everyone in a neighborhood.

Citizens who know, or see, someone feeding raccoons, should report them to the toll free Wildlife Alert Hotline at 1-888-404-FWCC.

When wild animals are brought in close proximity to people, it is easier for them to transmit disease through bites and scratches. Unfortunately, people who feed raccoons are likely killing the critters with kindness.

Because it is illegal to relocate nuisance raccoons in Florida, habituated animals very often end up being euthanized. Armadillos, feral hogs and coyotes also pose significant threat to sea turtle nests and hatchlings.

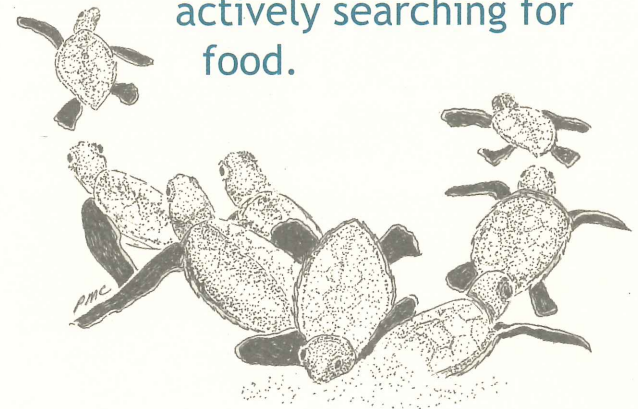
The Solution Is Simple

Florida is one of the most important nesting sites for loggerhead sea turtles nesting and almost all of green and leatherback sea turtle nesting in the

continental U.S. takes place in Florida. Loggerhead sea turtles are classified as threatened under state and federal law. Green and leatherback turtles are endangered. Because some of the beaches along Florida's central Atlantic coast are nationally and internationally important to sea turtles, the Federal Government established the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge in Brevard and Indian River Counties to protect the nesting beaches. These beaches, and others along Florida's Atlantic & Gulf coasts, host high numbers of nesting sea turtles.

There are a few simple things people living on barrier islands and along the coast can do to protect sea turtles:

- Do not feed raccoons. It is illegal!
- Keep garbage cans covered and secured. Keep them in the garage or build a bin with a latchable lid.
- Do not leave pet food outside at night, when raccoons are actively searching for food.



Things To Remember

Nesting season is from March through October on the Atlantic coast, and from May through October on the Gulf coast. While visiting the beach during the nesting season, please remember a few simple things:

- It is against the law to touch or disturb nesting sea turtles, hatchlings, or their nests. Sea turtles are protected by both Federal and State laws.
- Do not walk on the beach with a flashlight or shine lights at sea turtles. The light can cause females to abandon the nesting process and discourage other turtles from coming ashore to nest.
- Do not take pictures at night using a flash. This high-intensity light can be even more disturbing than flashlights.
- Turn off outside patio lights and shield indoor lights from shining directly onto the beach by closing the drapes at night. Lights disturb nesting sea turtles and disorient hatchlings.
- Avoid disturbing marked sea turtle nests while enjoying the beaches during the day.
- Dispose of trash when you leave.
- When crossing a dune, please use designated cross overs and walk ways. Do not climb over the dunes or disturb dune vegetation.
- If you see an injured or dead sea turtle, call the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission 1-888-404-FWCC (3922) or *FWC from your cell phone.

How You Can Help

Support Sea Turtle Research,
Education & Conservation:
Buy a Sea Turtle License Plate!

You can directly support sea turtle protection in Florida by purchasing a Sea Turtle Specialty License Plate. It's simple! Go to your local county tag office, turn in your current license plate and request a new Sea Turtle Specialty Plate. You can do it at any time. The tag will cost an additional \$23, all of which goes to support sea turtle conservation in Florida. For more information on the turtle tag, visit:

www.helpingseaturtles.org



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Facts About Sea Turtles & Raccoons



Raccoons destroy thousands of sea turtle eggs each year and are a one of the greatest causes of sea turtle mortality on Florida's beaches. This brochure provides information on how you can help protect Florida's sea turtles.



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