



## NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Aug. 12, 2019

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### **Nesting sea turtles break record**

Long after the sunbathers and surfers have gone for the day, solitary beachgoers slowly emerge onto the sandy beaches of Volusia County. Most of them wait until night so they can lumber out of the ocean and complete their mission under the cover of darkness. They're the precious sea turtles that return to Volusia County year after year to lay their eggs in the soft sands of the familiar and beckoning beaches.

They're breaking records this year. With nearly two months of nesting season to go, county staff and volunteers have already marked 922 nests, breaking the previous high nest count of 919 set in 2012.

"Sea turtles are nesting in record numbers throughout the Southeast, with Florida populations in the lead," said Jennifer Winters, Volusia County's sea turtle habitat conservation plan manager.

On the beaches managed by Volusia County, 849 loggerheads, 66 green sea turtles, four leatherbacks and three Kemp's ridleys have laid eggs on the county's appealing sands since May. Each nest contains about 100 soft-shelled eggs the size of Ping-Pong balls.

"This is so exciting!" Winters said. "Nesting season lasts through September, so I am optimistic that we could break the 1,000 mark. This is truly an exceptional year, and we think it's because of the long-term conservation efforts that are in place to protect these threatened and endangered species."

Winters and her staff thank all the volunteers who spend countless hours on the beaches each day marking new nests and checking each nest daily. They're also grateful for the beachgoers who help keep the beaches safe for sea turtles by picking up litter, reducing light pollution and removing beach furniture each day.

"The sea turtles don't stay with their nests, but they take great care to protect their eggs," Winters explained. "They dig an egg chamber and cover the nest using their hind flippers. This protects the eggs from surface predators, helps keep the egg shells moist, and helps the eggs maintain proper temperature. But the turtles need our help too."

With nests hatching every day, residents and visitors are asked to follow these steps to help ensure the hatchlings a safe trip from their nest to the ocean:

- Do not touch or disturb turtles or their nests. This is against the law.
- Remove beach furniture, fill in holes, and flatten sandcastles when you leave the beach.
- Dispose of trash properly.
- If you live on beachfront property, you are required to turn off, shield or redirect lights so they don't shine on the beach.
- Do not use flash photography or cellphones to light your way at night.
- Use only red LED flashlights; they are less visible to turtles.

[www.volusia.org](http://www.volusia.org)

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- If you see a nesting sea turtle or hatchlings making their way to the ocean, admire them from a distance. If a turtle appears to be in immediate danger, notify a lifeguard or call the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission at 888-404-3922.

To learn more about sea turtle nesting season, visit [www.volusia.org/seaturtles](http://www.volusia.org/seaturtles). For questions about lighting, call 386-238-4773.

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*Photo of tracks left by a nesting green sea turtle in New Smyrna Beach. Photo provided by Volusia County.*



*A marked sea turtle nest in New Smyrna Beach. Beachgoers may not enter the marked area or disturb eggs or hatchlings. Photo provided by Volusia County.*



*A rare Kemp's ridley nests on Volusia County's beach. Photo credit: Mindy Whitmore.*



*Nesting green sea turtle (Shutterstock)*