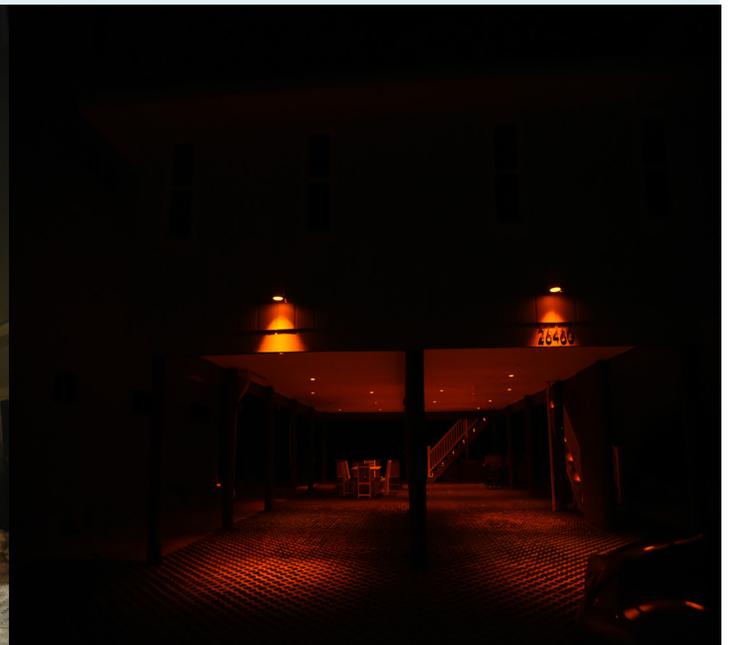


VELADOR

Science-Based Sea Turtle Conservation Since 1959

Issue 3, 2024

Help us Raise Funds for STC's Lighting Program this Giving Tuesday



STC recently retrofitted this single-family beachfront home in Bonita Springs, Lee County, Florida.

Sea Turtle Conservancy (STC) is hoping all of its supporters will participate in this year's Giving Tuesday Campaign, which seeks to raise funds for the critical work we are doing as part of our Beachfront Lighting Program in Florida. Giving Tuesday, which occurs the Tuesday after Thanksgiving (December 3 this year), is one day when everyone can join together to make a huge difference!

For Giving Tuesday last year, STC supporters raised \$61,000 for STC's in-water research work in the Gulf of Mexico. STC has set its sights even higher this year, with a goal of raising \$62,000 for our Beachfront Lighting Program, which we are confident we can reach thanks to generous pledges from STC's Board of Directors to match up to \$33,000 for every dollar donated.

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Inside: In-Water Update



Holiday Gift Guide

... from cover

Sea turtles have crawled onto beaches to nest for millions of years. It was once easy for hatchlings to find the ocean after emerging from nests because the brightest horizon was always the ocean, compared to the darkened dune. Now, Florida's coasts are lined with beachfront properties that can emit powerful, white light, which can cause sea turtles to crawl toward those lights (misorient) or crawl in circles on the beach (disorient).

After the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill in 2010, STC has received several grants to retrofit problematic lights with sea turtle friendly alternatives on coastal properties in Florida. STC partners directly with coastal property representatives to manage each lighting retrofit project to completion. Since 2010, STC has worked to eliminate problem beachfront lighting and sea turtle disorientations in Florida, retrofitting lights on nearly 350 beachfront properties and darkening more than 46 miles of beach by retrofitting thousands of bulbs and fixtures.



STC Lighting Project Specialist Casie Hain presents a wildlife lighting workshop for code enforcement and building professionals at the Clearwater Marine Aquarium.

STC is deeply appreciative of all the support received from various foundations for this project. Our current project needs include funding to: host educational workshops, work with local governments in Florida to improve their management strategies for beachfront lighting, and respond to requests from other states and countries to utilize and learn from our 15 years of lighting experience.

We are hopeful that STC's members will support the program this Giving Tuesday, when all donations will be matched 1:1 by the STC Board of Directors. With your support, STC will continue darkening beaches to make them safe for sea turtles, while also educating the public and important stakeholders on the importance of wildlife-friendly lighting.

Help support STC's Giving Tuesday Fundraiser by donating:

1. Online at conserveturtles.org/GivingTuesday
2. Call the STC office at 352-373-6441 with your credit card info
3. Mail a check with "Giving Tuesday" in the subject line. All checks received with "Giving Tuesday" in the subject line will count towards the campaign if received by December 31. 🐢

VELADOR {bel.a.dor}

In Caribbean cultures, **Velador** translates as "one who stands vigil" —referring to turtle hunters who waited at night for turtles to come ashore. STC claims this title for its newsletter, and around the world STC's researchers and volunteers are replacing poachers as the new veladors. The **Velador** is published for Members and supporters of the nonprofit **Sea Turtle Conservancy (STC)**. STC is dedicated to the conservation of sea turtles through research, advocacy, education and protection of the habitats upon which they depend.

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Sea Turtle Lighting Specialist
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Supporters Stand Up for Florida's State Parks

More than 100 miles of Florida's sandy beaches are part of the Florida State Parks system. As Florida's sea turtles face shrinking habitat due to coastal development and impacts from climate change, these undeveloped pockets of beach are more important than ever. In August, STC and its supporters were dismayed to learn that the State of Florida was planning to develop these fragile conservation lands.

On August 19, Florida's Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) announced a new "Great Outdoors Initiative" that proposed to change the management plans of nine State Parks across Florida to allow for the construction of multiple golf courses, lodges with up to 350 rooms, pickleball courts, disc golf courts, and new cabins on State conservation land. Six of the nine parks in the plan featured beaches utilized by sea turtles, including: Anastasia State Park, Topsail Hill Preserve State Park, Grayton Beach State Park, Honeymoon Island State Park, Camp Helen State Park, and Dr. Von D. Mizell-Eula Johnson State Park.

In the short-term, building lodges in coastal protected areas could have resulted in problematic lighting for sea turtles, more visitors to the beach at night, coastal erosion, and degraded water quality. In the long-term, allowing the State to convert protected natural areas to developed spaces in secret would have set a dangerous precedent for the remainder of Florida's parks and undeveloped habitat.

A day after the initiative was announced, FDEP scheduled public meetings at each of the parks where development was proposed for the following week – all of which were taking place at the same exact time, with only one hour allotted. STC and its environmental partners quickly informed our members and followers about this plan and urged them to attend the meetings and contact decisionmakers. During the next few days, coverage of this proposal dominated news cycles in Florida as citizens filled out petitions, demonstrated in person, sent emails, made phone calls, and created social media content about the plan. By the end of

the week, numerous government officials spoke out against the plan and the rushed public commenting process. Amid the widespread outrage, FDEP announced that it was postponing all nine public meetings originally scheduled for August 27 to sometime during the week of September 2.

While the postponement of the meetings was a small success, over the weekend, supporters of our State Parks kept the pressure on by gathering at Jonathan Dickinson, Honeymoon Island, and Anastasia State Parks to protest and voice their concerns about the plan. On Sunday, the Tampa Bay Times reported that a nonprofit veterans group based in Delaware was "withdrawing its plan" to build golf courses in Jonathan Dickinson State Park.



Supporters of Florida's State Parks gather at Anastasia State Park in St. Augustine. Photo credit: Florida Springs Council.

Finally, at a press conference during the week of August 26, Governor DeSantis said that the "Great Outdoors Initiative" was on hold, at least until 2025. This would not have been possible without strong advocacy by the supporters of our State Parks, legislators that spoke out against this proposal, and our partner organizations. In a week's time, decisionmakers in Florida learned that their constituents care deeply about Florida's natural spaces and the wildlife that inhabit them and will fight any proposal to develop them.

Although the temporary defeat of this plan is a conservation win, we cannot let our guard down. STC will continue to monitor this issue and will inform our followers if it comes back in 2025. Florida's sea turtles face a number of threats to their survival, and the protection of their habitat is a top priority for STC.

By Stacey Gallagher
Policy Coordinator

Bridging the Knowledge Gap, One Turtle Capture at a Time

Sea Turtle Conservancy's (STC) In-water Research Project in the Northeastern Gulf of Mexico has recorded thousands of sightings and more than 360 sea turtle captures since 2018. The research team has captured green, Kemp's ridley, and loggerhead sea turtles - each of which have distinct ecological roles and are found at varying life stages in this important nearshore habitat..



STC Executive Director David Godfrey releases a loggerhead turtle from the R/V Lavinia. Photo by Evan Cooper.

Juvenile green sea turtles have been the main focus of the research program. They are largely vegetarians once they recruit to nearshore habitats and are vital to the seagrass they feed on. You can think of green sea turtles as the lawnmowers of the sea. Their grazing helps redistribute nutrients and sustain healthy seagrass beds, which can help reduce the effects of coastal erosion. Healthy seagrass beds are also important to many fish and invertebrates, which use seagrass beds as a nursery and home.

STC recently finished three separate green turtle research studies that estimated their regional abundance, highlighted the importance of the large juvenile life stage, and revealed the mysteries of their overwintering behavior. The research team has also been conducting green turtle health assessments and studying the progression of the tumor-bearing disease, fibropapillomatosis. All of these efforts are allowing us to understand the status and threats to green sea turtles in the

Northeastern Gulf of Mexico and beyond.

In the last year, STC captured Kemp's ridleys to understand their overwintering behavior, sex ratios, and diet. The team placed satellite transmitters on turtles to track their movements and dive behavior over the winter. In the fall of 2023, STC deployed satellite transmitters on four Kemp's ridleys and plans to deploy 10 more this fall/winter.

More than 20 years ago, Kemp's ridleys were tracked over the winter in the same part of Florida's Big Bend. However, habitats and rising ocean temperatures have changed since then and might play a factor in altering Kemp's ridley demographics and behavior. It is crucial to understand these changes so that we can better protect these critically endangered sea turtles.

Not only is this project bridging the knowledge gap in juvenile turtles, but it is also expanding the knowledge of previously understudied sea turtle aggregations. The Big Bend portion of Florida is a large region containing many sea turtles that might be susceptible to future climate change and the development of the coastline. Long-term in-water projects, like this one, are crucial for understanding how sea turtles will respond to these changes and will help drive STC's future conservation efforts.

The In-water Research Project is in collaboration with Dr. Raymond Carthy at the University of Florida and USGS Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit. Permitted under FWC MTP #118 and NMFS # 21327.



Juvenile Kemp's ridley released with satellite transmitter. Photo by Evan Cooper.

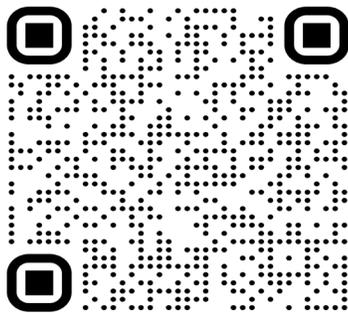
By Evan Cooper & Rick Herren

In-Water Sea Turtle Sighting App

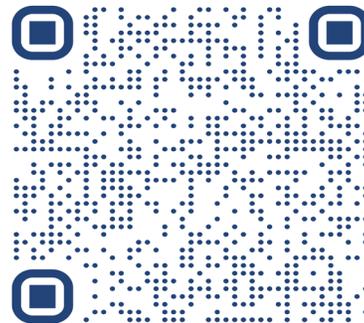
STC is excited to announce that the In-water Sea Turtle Sighting App is now available! This app allows boaters, fishermen and others who spend time on the water to help researchers identify where sea turtles are congregating in the waters along the northern Gulf Coast of Florida and in Bermuda. The app is a citizen science type experience, allowing people to share sea turtle encounter information with STC and to help people identify the species of sea turtle they encountered. Users are able to upload the location, species (if known), behavior, and size of sea turtles they encounter while out on the water. The app includes example photos of the species to help users identify the turtle. If a user is able to get a photo of the turtle (without chasing or harassing the turtle), they can upload a photo.

Users can register in the app, allowing them to receive communications from STC about issues impacting sea turtles or their habitats. STC is working to build a community of engaged turtle advocates along the north Gulf Coast of Florida, and invites users to get engaged with STC through membership or attendance at events. While the app is initially focused on the northern Gulf Coast of Florida and Bermuda, it can be used by anybody anywhere out on the water. Download the app for free using the QR codes below!

Apple



Android



Tour de Turtles

The 17th Annual Tour de Turtles marathon officially ended on November 1. So how did our 18 competitors fare? Read on to find out!

Hardshells:

- 1st – Ebb
- 2nd – Sparkle
- 3rd – Gochujang
- 4th – Twinkle
- 5th – Gili
- 6th – Shelby
- 7th – Flo
- 8th – Grana
- 9th – Henrietta
- 10th – Roseleigh

Leatherbacks:

- 1st – Donna Shello
- 2nd – Seamore
- 3rd – Esperanza
- 4th – Victory
- 5th – Reef Witherspoon
- 6th – Tortellini
- 7th – Eclipse
- 8th – Lady Jayne

Although not our fastest or farthest swimming turtle, leatherback Reef Witherspoon from Panama won over the fans and took the People's Choice Award home to her team at Graft Cider.

Even though the official Tour de Turtles race has ended, you can continue to follow the turtles with our free STC Turtle Tracker App or on our website at: conserveturtles.org/sea-turtle-tracking.

A big thank you to our turtle sponsors for helping make this event possible: Fahlo, Disney's Conservation Fund, Disney Cruise Line, Four

Seasons Resort Nevis, Anna Maria Island Turtle Watch, Hurricane Hanks, Sea Life Aquariums, Sea Life Trust, GILI Sports, Atlantis, Turtle, Florida Leatherbacks, Inc., The Turtle Hospital, Shark Reef, Certina, Gimme Snacks, Graft Cider, and NaVetor. 🐢

Holiday Gift Guide

A.



B.



C.



F

D.



E.



A. 2024 Holiday Ornament - Engraved with the year 2024 on the back. **\$9.95**

B. 2025 Sea Turtle Scenes Calendar - 11" x 17" (open) wall calendar features some of STC's favorite sea turtle scenes taken by talented photographers from around the world. **\$14.95**

C. STC Logo Shirt - Available in Jade with White logo or Black with White Logo. Adult and Youth Sizes. 50% cotton, 50% polyester. **\$19.95**

D. STC Turtle Logo Tote Bag - Show your support for sea turtles and STC while shopping with our reusable tote. Color: Jade with White or Black with White. **\$7.50**

E. 2024 Tour de Turtles Shirt - Vintage Navy. Available in Adult and Youth Sizes. 100% lightweight cotton. **\$24.95**

Visit conserveturtles.org/shop to shop for these items and other great turtle gear!

Cause-Related Partners

These companies give back to STC when you buy their products! View all the companies that STC partners with at www.conserveturtles.org/partners.

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Fax: (352) 375-2449
stc@conserveturtles.org
www.conserveturtles.org

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