

Loggerhead turtle nests lag, green and leatherbacks are up

Florida

TAMPA (AP) — Florida's beaches lost a substantial amount of loggerhead sea turtle nests in 2007, giving the state its lowest nest count in 17 years, wildlife officials reported.

Researchers found 45,084 nests for the threatened turtles, down more than 4,600 nests from 2006, according to newly released statistics from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Florida accounts for 90 percent of the nation's loggerhead nests, which have decreased by nearly half since 1998, when the state reported 85,988 nests.

Loggerhead sea turtle deaths in Florida have more than doubled during the past decade, statistics show.

"Data collected during the 2007 season indicate the lowest nesting levels in Florida" in the history of the monitoring program, said a report on the commission's Web site.

While the number of loggerhead nests has been shrinking, green and leatherback turtle nests are showing an increase, in many cases at the same beaches. There's no simple answer for this disparity, said Anne Meylan, who coordinates the statewide



File photo
A loggerhead turtle: Researchers found 45,084 nests for the threatened loggerhead turtles, Florida's lowest nest count in 17 years.

shrimp boat nets and long-line fishing hooks. Loggerheads eat shrimp and other hard-shelled invertebrates, whereas other sea turtles do not.

A rule was passed several years ago requiring shrimp fisheries to use nets with turtle excluder devices, Meylan said. But because loggerheads take up to 30 years to begin reproducing, it could be decades before the effect of that rule is observed in nesting numbers, she said.

Of the 196 beaches surveyed last year, some had no nests for the first time. Nesting begins in April, peaks in June and July, and ends in September.

Because of their migratory existence, Loggerhead turtles are protected by various international treaties and agreements. Nearly 90 percent of the world's population is believed to nest on the beaches of Florida and the nation of Oman, on the Arabian Peninsula.

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nesting beach survey program. Disease, oil spills, red tide and boat collisions kill many sea turtles, and beach development can disturb all wildlife, she said.

One factor that could be affecting loggerheads more than other sea turtles is

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FWC's loggerhead turtle nest reports:

http://research.myfwc.com/features/view_article.asp?id=27537;

http://research.myfwc.com/features/view_article.asp?id=2411

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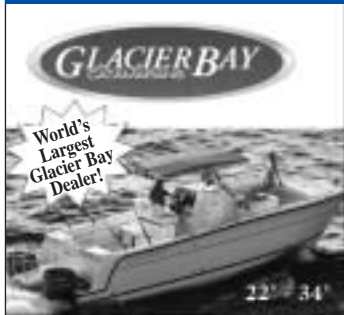
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