

2022 Critter-of-the-Year

## Loggerhead Sea Turtle

The sea turtle nests seen on Amelia Island beaches that have been lovingly staked off and marked with yellow tape, by trained volunteers, are most likely loggerhead nests. The loggerhead is Florida's most common sea turtle and the main sea turtle species that nests on Amelia Island. Some green sea turtles usually nest here, as well as rare instances of leatherback sea turtle nests

Named for its massive block-like head, an adult loggerhead weighs 275 pounds, on average, with a shell about one yard long. Its shell, ruddy brown on top and creamy yellow underneath, is very broad near the head and tapers toward the rear. Each flipper has two claws. The diet of the loggerhead sea turtle primarily consists of jellyfish, crabs and a variety of mollusks.

Loggerheads reach sexual maturity at about 35 years old and mate every two to three years. From April to September female loggerheads return to the same beach to lay four to seven nests, each having 100–126 eggs. The leathery golf-ball shaped eggs hatch in roughly 60 days. The hatchlings crawl to the ocean, guided to the sea by the reflection of the moon on the waves.



Loggerhead eggs in nest.



Tracks of female loggerhead coming on to beach to nest, and going back to the sea after laying her eggs.

Artificial light from beach homes, restaurants, parking lots, street lights and flashlights can mean death for hatchlings, directing them away from the ocean. This can be avoided by the use of turtle-safe porch lights, street lights and flashlights. People in beach-front accommodations can help the hatchlings by keeping blinds and drapes closed at night, and by using turtle-safe outdoor lighting.

Photos of loggerhead nest and loggerhead tracks by Susan Ulmer DeWolf.  
Top photo by AdobeStock.