

**Saving Sea Turtles**  
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Maybe it's the dinosaur connection, but Floridians and tourists alike have discovered the allure of sea turtles, those marine reptiles whose lifestyles still are largely a mystery to scientists. Florida monitors sea turtle nesting in a quest to ensure their survival, and the state has permitted parks and research centers to conduct educational tours. Securing a reservation is another story.

At John D. MacArthur Beach, a state park near West Palm Beach, tours are limited to 50 people a week when they're conducted in June and July. Reservations are snapped up the first day they're announced in May and people beg to be put on the waiting list — no matter how long it gets. Last week it was at 258. Just north of there at the Juno Beach Marinelife Center, 200 people a week — a total of 1,600 turtle fans — will make the night-trek before July is over. And people get turned away each season.

Larry Wood, director at the Juno Center, watches over those people as well as hundreds more on tours at a nearby resort. Still there's excitement in his voice when he confesses: "I got into turtles through dinosaurs — I never outgrew dinosaurs. I'm a reptile guy, mostly."

The tours are a matter of public education, he adds, and that's the real key to saving the turtles, varieties of which are endangered or threatened. "If human beings as a whole are interested in turtles, that translates into protective measures, legislation and funding," he says.

Today many counties in Florida have ordinances that restrict lighting during the hatching months so the babies don't end up on streets instead of the water. But in counties such as Dade and Broward, where coastal development was already almost complete when turtle awareness came around, such ordinances have so far proven impractical.

Instead, in the Miami area, turtle nests are dug up by specialists with the Florida Department of Environmental Regulation and taken to hatcheries. Here the public has a different chance to commune with turtles: When the baby turtles are released, it's a well-attended public event.

It will be another 10 years, at least, before scientists begin to see the effects on turtle populations of protective measures started 10 years ago.

Layne Bolen, who keeps track of turtle statistics for the DER, says, "It's like watching light from a star that died in the distant past."

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