

DON'T GIVE TAG TO BABY

By ARCHIE CARR AND DAVID CALDWELL

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Loggerheads were tagged on beaches from Canaveral to Jupiter Inlet. This big female was found on Hutchinson Island. The eggs are dropped into the nest cavity singly and by two's and three's. They bounce as they hit bottom but the shell is soft and leathery and no harm comes of it.



When the eggs have all been layed and the nest covered the turtle is turned and a pair of holes bored in the back edge of her shell.

DURING the months to come an unpredictable number of seagoing or beachcombing Floridians will meet with tagged sea turtles. Some of these turtles will have been marked right here in Florida, others at various places about the Caribbean. They will include loggerheads, green turtles and ridleys and will be of various sizes, ages and sexes. In some the tag will be wired to the back eaves of the shell and in others clamped to the trailing edge of the front flipper. In any case, if you take it off and mail it to the address engraved on it—the Department of Biology, University of Florida—it will stir up a lot of excitement and you'll be sent a reward by return mail.

Of course the average man goes along year in year out without ever coming upon a sea turtle of any kind—much less a tagged one. But you never can tell what the future will bring. A few years ago you probably never expected to see a flying saucer, and now they're all over the place. We realize that only a small number of people will get a chance to claim the rewards. In fact, the whole budget for the program is based on the low sea turtle expectancy of the average man, and if any appreciable percentage of the population started finding them it would be a financial disaster for us. But that's our headache. The thing for you to do is keep your eyes open.

Back in the days when the Indian River was pretty much like the Indians left it there was a man down at Sebastian name John Peale. The noteworthy thing about Peale was the way he made his living. He was a turtle fisherman. He made a good living at it too. He knew the job and there were, at first, lots of turtles to catch and a steady market in the big cities here and abroad. Wherever people lived high, green turtle soup lent tone to fancy feasting. Any meal that went through Astrakhan caviar and plover's eggs and



The monel metal tag, inscribed in Spanish as well as in English, is fastened to the shell with monel wire which is permanently resistant to salt water. When the measurements are completed the patient turtle drags herself back down to the surf.

truffled grouse was likely to start out with clear green turtle soup. It was a sort of sign of the times. In the banquets of London city politicians it was practically a ceremonial dish.

So for a while this Peale got along fine, and Lord, it was wonderful country down there where he lived. Reading the old books of Florida travel and the old *Forest and Stream* articles on hunting and fishing—it makes you wonder if there ever was a place so blessed as the Indian River country used to be. Man, it just makes you drool.

Down along the Dixie Highway strip where the towns are running together now was pure turkey range in those days. Where the great tourist migrations stream between solid stands of motels and jooks and sucker traps there used to be more deer than people. In the bayheads and cabbage hammocks and out on the long-shore islands there were bears enough to glut Crockett himself, and places where nowadays you couldn't catch a mess of fish with a stopnet you could fill up a boat with a handline.

This was sixty years and more ago we're talking about, when things were like that; when old Peale sent off a thousand green turtles a year, fair years, and Diamond Jim Brady sucked up the soup they made. There were little parrots in the trees then, and the swans came down every year and it was pretty much of a paradise down there, if that was the kind of thing you liked.

For all we know Peale may have kinfolks in and around Sebastian to this day. We're not acquainted with them, but if they're down there you can be sure of one thing—you can be sure they're not fishing turtle for a living. Oh, they may prowl the beaches when June comes, in fat-tired hot-rods, and turn an illegal loggerhead on her back now and then, just for old times' sake. But there's nothing in that. There's no living in turtling in the Indian River any more and there hasn't been since the big greens disappeared.

The big, 200 and 300 pound turtles that the first Peale caught have gone from all up and down the river, just as they've gone from the famous old turtle ground along the Gulf Coast, where a 100-mile strip of prime turtle pasture lies almost fallow between

Deadman's Bay and Anclote Light. Peale saw them go. One year they were there like always before and he caught 1,500 and his family lived well. Five years later he was catching 60 a year and living on credit. Pretty soon after that he changed his line of work.

You can still pick up an eating turtle now and then, in the River and down among the Keys; and there is a feeble industry that still works over a few hundred "chicken" greens a year at Cedar Key and Yankeetown and Crystal River. But these are somebody else's turtles, all little immature ones that clearly wander in from somewhere else. They're not born here and they will never breed here, and nobody even knows where they come from.

The reason we've been tagging turtles is to try to get answers to questions like that—like where these baby turtles come from and where they go, like where the mobs of greens come from when they gang up to nest on the few remaining rookery beaches down in the Caribbean. One of the first things you need to know about a wild thing you want to protect is where it spends its time—whether it stays put or goes barging aimlessly about, or maybe commutes between Canada and Venezuela like pintails do. Managing the affairs of the Florida mallard, which breeds where it spends the winter months, ought to be a lot simpler project than managing the green headed mallard which each year faces predation, competition and No. 5 shot in ten states and three countries. But first of all you have to know what the problem is; and that's not always easy.

In the case of the sea turtles, we are hoping that the 600-odd head now cruising the seas under the University of Florida label, and the others that will be tagged next season, will furnish information on this point and will answer a lot of other questions too. But the program will work only if the tags come in. We don't expect every able-bodied person who reads this to drop what he's doing and go chasing after sea turtles, but if you do come across a tag don't just give it to the baby to play with. He might swallow it. Send it in. It will help strengthen the grip of a vanishing animal on the future. Besides that, you'll make three bucks out of it.

END.



The turtles caught by the Gulf Coast fishermen are mostly little greens and ridleys, like the one here being prepared for tagging by Charlie Crevasse at Cedar Key.



The tag is wired to the underside of the shell of a 20-pound green turtle. While these young turtles were being tagged in Florida the big nesting females of this species were being marked on the rookery beach in Costa Rica.