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A fitting tribute

Thirty-five years ago, Archie Carr, the world-renowned naturalist at the University of Florida, wrote "The Windward Road." It was a landmark book about the diminishing number of great green sea turtles that migrated back and forth across the Caribbean.

His work tagging, tracing and counting the green turtles helped foster an international movement to save the species from extinction.

For Archie Carr

"All of us concerned with the conservation of sea turtles owe much to Dr. Carr," said

James W. Pullman Jr., regional director of the U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service. "His contributions as a researcher, writer and teacher have fostered a groundswell of support and activity on behalf of sea turtles."

Efforts to save the seagoing turtles continue. In Tortuguero, Costa Rica, a jungle coast where Dr. Carr spent seasons on end tagging turtles before they began their cross-sea migration, the Caribbean Conservation Corporation — the sea turtle conservation group founded by Dr. Carr — continues its efforts to protect and preserve the species.

Ironically, the growing environmental awareness among Americans has helped spark a new, and not altogether benign, tourism boom in Tortuguero, where amateur naturalists now crowd the beaches in the night to observe nesting female turtles. Sometimes, their flashlight beams distract and frighten the turtles, causing them to abandon their nests.

In Tortuguero, the CCC's new challenge is to seek ways to help foster what has been called "natural history tourism" in that impoverished area without having a negative impact on the nesting turtles.

"Our objective is to support development of Tortuguero for natural history tourism to the exclusion of other incompatible development," writes David Carr, executive director of the organization his father founded, in a recent newsletter. "We also intend to insure that tourism is controlled and carefully managed to minimize its impact on the turtle rookery and other fragile natural features of the area."

Ironically, while the CCC struggles to preserve the largest green turtle rookery in the Caribbean in the face of growing pressure from developers and tourists, a somewhat parallel struggle is going on much closer to home.

An endangered kin to the green turtle is the loggerhead turtle, and the second largest nesting population of loggerheads in the world can be found along a 20-mile stretch of mostly undeveloped beach in Brevard and Indian River counties.

Needless to say, there are very few stretches of beach along coastal Florida that remain safe from

development pressure, barring those that are already in public ownership.

Last February, Gov. Bob Martinez and the Florida Cabinet approved the expenditure of \$2.6 million for 14.5 acres of that beachfront area which begins south of Melbourne Beach.

The state's commitment, however, represents only a small portion of what's needed to acquire and protect those vital loggerhead nesting grounds.

For some years now, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed the establishment of the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge, to consist of some 600 acres of beachfront property, or about half of the 20 mile stretch.

It has been estimated that it would cost between \$50 million to \$80 million to acquire the necessary land for the refuge. Unfortunately, for each year that acquisition is delayed, the estimated cost will rise, given the escalating value of beachfront property in Florida.



Carr

Each season, upwards of 12,000 loggerheads return to this deserted stretch of beach to establish nests. In addition to the loggerheads, the area provides shelter for numerous other species of marine and wildlife, including the green turtle, indigo snake, gopher tortoise and scrub jay. And the undisturbed dunes along the beach contain many varieties of federally and state protected plants.

"These species, rare and endangered elsewhere in the state, are still hanging on as remnant populations in this fragmented and increasingly threatened habitat," states a recent edition of the Monitor, the newsletter of the Gainesville-based Florida Defenders of the Environment. "The state of Florida and the U.S. Congress are presently faced with a formidable task: to protect the last stretch of unprotected and undeveloped beach on Florida's east coast."

In 1989, the U.S. House voted to allocate \$3 million to begin acquisition of the refuge, but the Senate failed to approve any money at all. Likewise, no federal funds were allocated for the current fiscal year.

It is time for Congress to join with the state of Florida in establishing the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge. Every year that passes without action results in more development activity along that stretch of beach, and higher prices for acquisition.

"Dr. Carr's legacy is great," Pullman, of the Interior Department, has observed, "and his namesake will do much to galvanize the needed public support to ensure the success of this large undertaking."

It would be a fitting memorial for a scientist who did so much to alert the world to the plight of the great, seagoing turtles.