

TURTLE ATTACK IS REPORTED

By BOB T. EPSTEIN, Outdoor Editor

AMOROUS LOGGERHEAD MOLESTS DIVERS

While diving at Channel 2 Bridge Bruce Gernon, an Islamorada real estate agent on a diving holiday was mounted and pushed to the bottom by a large loggerhead turtle. The turtle attempted to mate with the diver, who said at first he was frightened nearly out of his wits. He further stated, "I shoved a lobster at the turtle who inhaled the crustacean and then I spun out of its grasp. I felt I was not free of the encounter, but then the turtle, with renewed interest, grasped me again with its front flippers from the back and around my shoulders. Once again it attempted to pin me to the bottom. All the while the stupid turtle probed me, in my backside. Being a strong swimmer and determined not to be molested any further by this deluded loggerhead, I twisted out of its grasp and made for the surface and my boat."

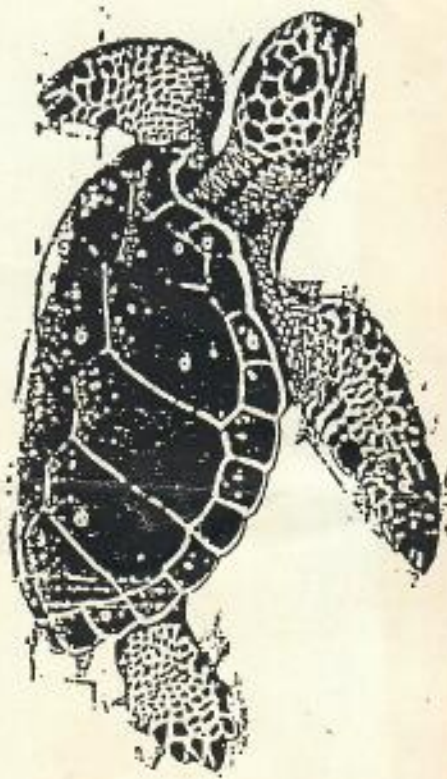
Gernon's wife claimed that, "When my husband came up, he wasted no time in the water and came aboard white as a sheet from fright. I thought he had to be kidding when he told me what happened, but I knew he couldn't have made up that story."

Another diver who wishes to remain anonymous, wasn't so fortunate. This diver, a professional procurer of saltwater aquarium fish, was pinned by a large loggerhead, perhaps the same oversexed turtle that attacked and made advances on Gernon. This time, the turtle made good its mating attack on this luckless individual. Totally shook up by the experience, and frightened to the extreme, this diver, who was attacked twice and pinned to the bottom, left catch gear, fish and all the rest of his equipment, for a mad dash to the safety of his boat.

Sue Johnson, of the World Down Under dive shop in Islamorada, who relayed this information to me about the fish collector, told of how the incident was not an amusing one to the diver. She said, "He felt as if he would be seriously harmed by the large amphibian. He very nearly was. I will try and have him call and talk to you, but I am sure he does not want his name connected with this incident." (He didn't call, perhaps he was out of town.) Both divers who were involved in these alleged turtle rape cases, were reportedly wearing brightly colored swim trunks, pink colors were mentioned in the reports.

Vice President and Director of Research for the Audubon Society Sandy Sprunt said that, "Turtles are known to be very amorous but of course with other turtles. This is the first time I ever heard of turtles being attracted to people. Turtles eat Man-of-wars and perhaps the stings of these jellyfish tentacles, especially in the turtle's eyes, cloud these large amphibian's vision. They don't see that well anyway." In the Caribbean, turtle hunters fashioned crude, carved wooden turtle decoys, which were used to attract turtles that mounted these decoys. Then while these male turtles were preoccupied with these dummy turtles, they were captured. Turtles are not very bright; I suppose one could get into trouble, mistakenly identifying the object of their urges in a rare situation, according to Mr. Sprunt. "One thing I can't understand is that usually sea turtles mate on the surface of the water, not down below, but who knows, this is a wild situation," he laughingly stated. Also Mr. Sprunt mentioned that it may be possible that when female turtles are ready to mate, they show a pink spot on their posterior, but this is just conjecture on his part. "I am not a turtle expert," he said.

Whatever anyone claimed, what appears to be true is that somewhere down at the Channel 2 Bridge in the Upper Florida Keys, a "buck" loggerhead has found that people somehow look good as a sexual object, when they root around on the bottom, legs up, feet covered by flippers, arms outstretched, digging around on the bottom, and blowing bubbles. Perhaps these people look like a slimmed down version of a female loggerhead turtle feeding and just waiting to be mounted, in the current, below the bridge on U.S. 1, in the Keys.



KEYS REPORTER 10/89