

Green Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) Nesting on Sanibel Island, Florida: Historical Insights and Unpublished Research Findings

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I present herein unpublished information on *Chelonia mydas* nesting in Southwest Florida—particularly on Sanibel Island in Lee County—and relate these findings to a ten year study of sea turtle nesting activity on Florida’s Atlantic coast in Brevard and Indian River counties. Additional evidence is provided on natal beach fidelity among head-started juveniles and among hatchlings originating from translocated clutches of *C. mydas*. Taken together, these lines of evidence allow reconstruction and interpretation of a conservation proposal formulated—but ultimately denied—fifty years ago. The rationale offered by others at the time for its rejection is evaluated. Additionally, the biological outcomes observed when the proposal was later implemented in limited form are assessed. The available data indicate that, had the proposal been adopted, it would have represented a constructive and forward looking approach to marine turtle conservation.

The earliest published reference to sea turtles in Florida waters originates from a Castilian chronicle. Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas (1601) drew upon the fragmentary documentary trail left by Juan Ponce de León following his 1513 discovery of La Florida. In this retrospective account—composed 88 years after the voyage—Herrera records that the crews of Juan Ponce’s three caravels harvested 160 “tortoises” (sea turtles) upon reaching the islands now known as the Dry Tortugas. The capture of so many turtles in mid June 1513 corresponds directly with the peak

nesting season of Florida’s marine turtles. During this period, both *Caretta caretta* and *Chelonia mydas* would have been abundant in the waters adjacent to the Tortugas and thus were the species most likely taken alive by the Castilian sailors.

Thereafter, the literature contains few references to sea turtles in Southwest Florida. Carr (1940) lists *Chelonia mydas*, *Caretta caretta*, and *Lepidochelys kempii* as species recorded from counties within the region where Sanibel Island is situated. His inclusion of these three taxa was almost certainly based on in-water occurrences rather than his personal observations of nesting individuals. Nearly two decades later, Duellman and Schwartz (1958) provide only minimal information on these species, as sea turtles fell outside the scope of their study.

Adult *Chelonia mydas* were being harvested commercially in Monroe County, in the first half of the 20th century (Cruz, 1985). “Blackie” Cruz wrote that during his 50-year career as a commercial fisherman, with netting green and loggerhead sea turtles his specialty, he never observed a green turtle nest on the beaches of Marquesas Keys and Dry Tortugas or elsewhere in the Florida Keys.

My earliest conversations in 1959 with pioneer elders of Sanibel Island—particularly Clarence Rutland (1890–1982; pers. comm.)—indicated that the only sea turtle species known to nest there was *Caretta caretta*. Rutland recalled that, in his youth, he was told that green turtles were taken occasionally

from the beach on nearby Fort Myers Beach (Estero Island). Such early anecdotal reports suggest that only a limited body of local knowledge regarding green turtle nesting persisted in Southwest Florida during the 20th century. By that time, any nesting individuals among the species must have had already been driven to a regional extirpation by unknown but evidently substantial levels of historical sea turtle fisheries and on-beach take.

The first scientific evidence that female *Chelonia mydas* were using Florida's beaches for reproduction emerged through a coordinated effort that culminated in the documentation published by Carr and Ingle (1959). At the time, Robert Ingle, director of the Florida State Board of Conservation's Marine Laboratory, communicated with the agency's field-based law enforcement officers. He requested they remain alert for green turtle nesting activity along the beaches they patrolled and to report any observations directly to his office. The directive quickly proved effective. In 1957, Florida's first validated green turtle nesting emergence was recorded when an officer encountered a female *C. mydas* nesting on a beach just north of Vero Beach. The following summer, another female emerged to nest farther south on Hutchinson Island, again under the observation of another Florida conservation officer who photographed the event.

Several hours after sunrise in October 1959, a beachcomber collecting seashells encountered an adult *Chelonia mydas* on the upper dry and partly vegetated beach near Point Ybel on the eastern end of Sanibel Island (Fig. 1). At the time, the site was within the boundary of Sanibel National Wildlife Refuge (renamed J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge in 1967). I was contacted and subsequently I identified the animal as a green sea turtle. The individual measured 99.1 cm CCL, slightly below the typical 100–110 cm range re-

ported for *C. mydas* occurring in Florida, suggesting a young or neophyte female. She had not initiated excavation of a body pit, and the absence of digging behavior is consistent with an exploratory emergence (LeBuff and Lechowicz, 2013).

A second, more consequential event occurred in 1967, when a nesting *Chelonia mydas* was killed and field dressed for human consumption on Bonita Beach, a Gulf of Mexico-facing shoreline in southern Lee County (C. D. Williams, pers. comm.). This incident predates the initiation of systematic sea turtle monitoring on Bonita Beach by Caretta Research, Inc., which began circa 1974 and is continued today by the since organized Turtle Time, Inc.

In the 1950s Ross Witham was selected to develop and head a marine turtle rescue effort. This was sponsored by the Martin County Historical Society (MCHS). In 1961, Witham launched one of Florida's earliest green turtle head-start programs at the House of Refuge Museum, operated by the MCHS. Thereafter, into the mid-1980s whenever green sea turtle nests were found within a reasonable distance the eggs were carefully excavated and moved to the Florida Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Stuart Field Station located on Hutchinson Island (near Jensen Beach) for protection during incubation.

Witham became the Florida Department of Natural Resources' Marine Turtle Coordinator in 1963 and continued head-starting work throughout his tenure. Over the course of the program, approximately 18,000 young green turtles were fostered at the House of Refuge facility and released into the Atlantic Ocean (Huff, 1989). A small percentage of these were transferred to and head-started on Sanibel Island. They were later released into the Gulf of Mexico. At the time, a prevailing view among sea turtle biologists was that natal beach fidelity was established when a hatchling first entered the surf, imprinting on

the sensory cues encountered at the land–sea boundary.

Head-starting hatchling sea turtles as a conservation strategy has largely been discontinued, yet evidence suggests that these early efforts were not entirely in vain. Shaver, Donna J., et al. (2016) documented a critically endangered Kemp’s ridley, *Lepidochelys kempii*, that was head-started in Texas and survived to nest on a Florida beach in 2015. The authors propose that some head-started Kemp’s ridleys may become waifs—turtles that recruit to non-natal beaches—and that this phenomenon could help explain recent nesting landings of this species in Florida, including Sanibel Island, (Johnson, et al., 1999). Rare nestings by *L. kempii* were reported from as far away as South Carolina (South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, 1992).

Additionally, the possibility that head-started and locally released *Chelonia mydas* might imprint on the magnetic signature of a foster natal beach—and subsequently return there upon reaching sexual maturity—is consistent with the geomagnetic imprinting hypothesis advanced by Lohmann, et al., (2008), who demonstrated that sea turtles possess the sensory capacity to detect and later navigate using regional magnetic signatures.

Scores of *Chelonia mydas* hatchlings were pen reared on Sanibel Island during the 1970s under Florida DNR oversight and released after nearly a year into local waters. Given the species’ well documented natal homing behavior and the prolonged exposure of these juveniles to Sanibel’s nearshore geomagnetic and chemical environment, it is plausible that some females imprinted to the area. Their return at maturity may account for the sudden onset of green turtle nesting on Sanibel and adjacent barrier islands beginning in the 1990s.

In May 1959, I began what would become a 33 year study of the marine turtles of Sanibel and Captiva islands. My early field work was carried out in conjunction with my regular federal and state law enforcement duties on Sanibel Island, which included protecting nesting sea turtles and their eggs during the summer months. My involvement with sea turtles, combined with a growing interest in the emerging concept of head-starting hatchling loggerheads (*Caretta caretta*), led me to correspond with Ross Witham. Later that same year, in 1959, Witham traveled to Sanibel Island to meet with me—an early connection that helped shape the direction of sea turtle conservation efforts on Florida’s coasts.

In 1968 I founded a non-profit foundation that, five years later, was formally incorporated as a 501(c)(3) organization under the name Caretta Research, Inc. By 1974 the scope of the program had expanded considerably. That year the organization sponsored 14 active chapters in coastal communities along Florida’s west coast, where volunteers monitored nesting activity and applied identification tags to the turtles. This network of community based units reflected a rapidly broadening public commitment to sea turtle conservation across the state. In 1992 I transferred the sea turtle program to the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation (SCCF), whose dedicated team has continued and expanded the work to this day.

Caretta Research, Inc. also funded a dedicated tagging operation on the Atlantic coast. That program, supervised by Edward Phillips, began at Sebastian Inlet State Park in 1974. This study later shifted north to Melbourne Beach, where it continued until its termination in the early 1980s. Most tagging work occurred in Brevard County, where volunteer teams frequently encountered nesting *Chelonia mydas* on the beaches being monitored. Each *C. mydas* nest lo-

cation was documented, and Ross Witham was notified the following morning. He would then excavate the nests and transport the eggs to his Jensen Beach facility. The resulting hatchlings were incorporated into his head-starting program at the House of Refuge and at other sites on the Florida peninsula and Keys.

In 1973 the State of Florida revised its permitting system for individuals and institutions engaged in marine turtle research. Instead of issuing general marine permits with a sea turtle endorsement, the state created a dedicated authorization identified explicitly as a Sea Turtle Permit. I was issued Sea Turtle Permit 001 (STP-001), which I renewed annually and held for the next forty years.

As mentioned above, during the 1970s, Ross Witham transported several groups of live *Chelonia mydas* hatchlings to Sanibel Island (Keske et al., 2016). These hatchlings were maintained under the general provisions of STP 001 and entrusted to the care of the late Esperanza Woodring and her adult son, Ralph. Few people possessed a deeper, more practical understanding of local sea turtles than the Woodrings. They were well aware that juvenile *C. mydas* occurred seasonally in Tarpon Bay and Pine Island Sound, yet they also knew of no records—nor even local folklore—suggesting green turtle nesting anywhere along the adjacent barrier island chain during the 20th century—until 1998. (Ralph Woodring, pers. comm.)

With the success of head-starting and releasing juvenile *Chelonia mydas* on Sanibel Island with the Woodrings' assistance, I began to consider how the work could be expanded in a more systematic way. In 1974 Edward Phillips and I refined a concept we had under consideration—a structured study that would test the feasibility of establishing a green turtle nesting population on the Gulf Coast of Florida. After ex-

tensive discussion and revision, the idea was formalized into a written proposal and submitted to Edwin Joyce, director of the Florida DNR Marine Laboratory in St. Petersburg. Joyce's office oversaw all state sea turtle permits, making him the essential authority for advancing the project.

Our proposal requested an amendment to STP-001 authorizing the collection of up to ten *Chelonia mydas* egg complements per nesting season, for three consecutive seasons, exclusively from nests that were unquestionably and imminently jeopardized. Eligible clutches would originate from nests deposited on our established study beaches in Brevard and Indian River counties. Sections of these beaches were experiencing chronic erosional pressures, and each summer our team members were routinely relocating clutches of both loggerhead and green turtle eggs landward to prevent washout.

The proposed action would involve translocation of fresh but doomed *Chelonia* egg clutches by aircraft across the Florida peninsula, with reburial on the Sanibel Island beach. Our team had extensive experience in sea turtle egg relocation, supported by long term loggerhead relocation practices on Sanibel Island (LeBuff, 2018).

This amendment sought only to salvage nests that would otherwise have produced zero hatchlings. The intent was not to manipulate recruitment, but to prevent the complete loss of clutches already compromised by erosion, while maintaining natural incubation, emergence, and imprinting processes.

Upon receiving our proposal, Joyce replied and said that he felt our proposal should be circulated among the limited circle of sea turtle biologists active in Florida at the time. Because the approach we were proposing represented a departure from established conservation practice, Joyce wanted to gather the opinions of others before making a decision. We had

no objection to peer review, but I asked that he provide me with copies of any evaluations should the proposal be declined. Joyce replied by return mail and agreed to furnish the reviewers' comments.

His response was a formal letter rejecting the proposal—two reviewers had recommended that the egg translocation study not be approved, and copies of their letters were enclosed. I knew both reviewers, and although Phillips and I found their objections unrealistic, we accepted the decision and moved on. Yet in the years that followed, he and I both remained convinced that if the study had been allowed to proceed, Florida's *Chelonia mydas* would have benefited. For Phillips the idea never truly disappeared; it simply waited for its time.

The more prominent of the two reviewers was Archie Carr. His letter recommending denial was a philosophical masterpiece. Carr failed to engage with the practical merits of the proposal or the straightforward question before him. His reasoning appeared influenced by a shift in his own academic perspective—one that no longer aligned with the applied, experimental approaches he had once advocated. In his joint paper with Ingle (1957, page 318) they wrote: "Possibly, once enough people who recognize green turtles start systematically searching Florida beaches, nesting will prove frequent enough to furnish all the eggs needed for a pilot nursery. It would seem sensible to use Florida eggs insofar as possible, simply because they might conceivably hatch out turtles with a genetic inclination to return to Florida when they reach breeding age."

Our idea was about moving Florida green turtle eggs, and it was now under state consideration only 20 years after he and Ingle published the above words. During those two decades Carr's "Operation Green Turtle" project was developed with the intent to restore Florida and Caribbean green turtle stocks—

for human consumption—not exactly an environmental purist's conservation step. Carr's operation relocated thousands of hatchlings of *Chelonia mydas* as well as their unhatched eggs from Tortuguero, Costa Rica, to points all around the Caribbean Basin and extending to Florida.



Fig. 1. Florida's sea turtle biologists together in 1972. Left to right: Charles LeBuff, Frank Lund*, Archie Carr*, Ross Witham, and Peter Pritchard. Individuals marked with an asterisk (*) later served as reviewers of our 1976 proposal to translocate imperiled nests of *Chelonia mydas* from Brevard and Indian River counties to Sanibel Island in Lee County. (Image from a damaged 35mm slide in the author's collection).

The second reviewer of our proposal was Frank Lund. Lund once had a sea turtle tagging operation on Jupiter Island, in Martin County, from 1969 until 1981 (Lund, 1986, unpub. thesis). Carr and I had last met in the mid-sixties when we both served as members of the American Alligator Council. Frank Lund and I first met in 1972 when Caretta Research, Inc. hosted a small meeting in Orlando, Florida. This was aimed at brainstorming ways to improve protection for *Caretta caretta* on a national level. Carr was present at the same meeting as were Ross Witham, Peter Pritchard, and LeBuff. (See Fig. 1.)

Lund's objection to our proposal rested on his assumption that Sanibel's beach elevations were categorically unsuitable for *Chelonia mydas* nesting. That

claim is inconsistent with global nesting patterns, regional historical records, and the physical characteristics of Sanibel's own beach system. Green turtles routinely nest on beaches of equal or lower elevation throughout the Caribbean, along the Gulf, and Atlantic, and nothing in Sanibel's geomorphology precludes successful incubation. The denial of our proposal appears to have relied heavily on this erroneous interpretation, rather than on the established ecological flexibility of the species or the documented suitability of Sanibel's mid-energy beach profiles.

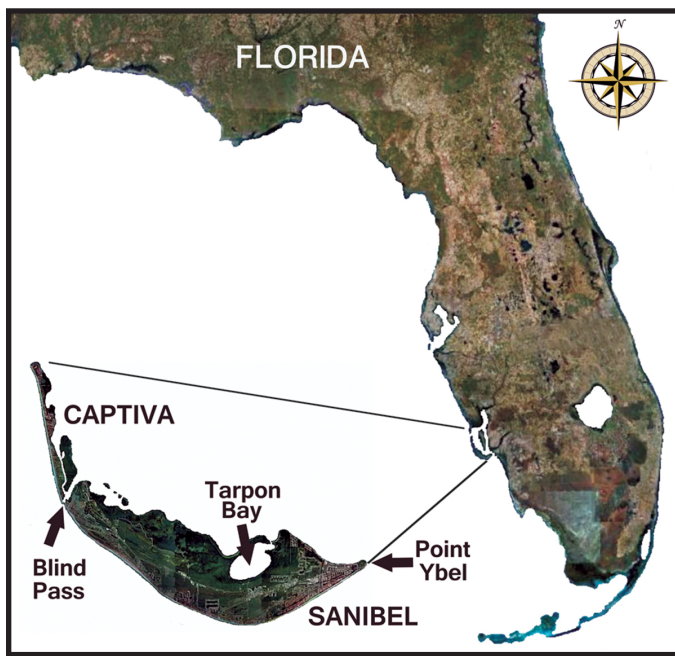


Fig. 2. This regional map, based on Google Earth, places Sanibel Island within the broader Southwest Florida coastline and highlights its unusual east–west orientation. This atypical configuration distinguishes Sanibel from the more common north–south barrier islands of the Florida peninsula. (Adapted from LeBuff and Lechowicz, 2013.)

Sanibel itself is not one of Florida's typical barrier islands. Beginning at its easternmost tip, Point Ybel, the island's 19.31 kilometer Gulf shoreline sweeps westward before curving northward in a broad arc, ultimately aligning with the seaward position of Captiva Island at Blind Pass. (See Fig. 2.) This unusual orientation and morphology create a mosaic of beach-energy regimes—low, moderate, and mod-

erately high—each with distinct sedimentary and geomorphic characteristics.

I am uncertain which section of Sanibel Island's shoreline Lund examined—if he inspected any portion of it at all. If his assessment was based on the island's eastern shoreline, that would readily explain his conclusion. The eastern beaches are classic low-energy environments: broad, gently sloping, and associated with comparatively low dune relief. These features naturally produce a lower overall beach elevation, but they do not represent the island's geomorphic character as a whole.

In contrast, the mid-energy beaches along Sanibel's northwestern and more northerly shoreline present a very different geomorphic character. These stretches receive greater wave exposure, develop more substantial dune ridges, and exhibit beach profiles far more consistent with known green turtle nesting sites elsewhere in Florida and the wider Caribbean. These are precisely the types of beaches where *Chelonia mydas* has historically nested successfully. Evaluating the island's suitability for green turtle nesting based solely on its low energy eastern beaches overlooks this complexity and misrepresents the true range of nesting-appropriate habitat present on Sanibel Island.

Although the three year study we had proposed was not approved, the authority granted under STP-001 permitted us to conduct sea turtle egg translocations. On 23 July 1976, an unusual opportunity arose when two freshly deposited clutches—280 imminently threatened green turtle eggs in total—were collected by Phillips immediately after oviposition. They were removed from the Atlantic shoreline at the John's Island Club (north of Vero Beach) near Indian River Shores in Indian River County, Florida.

The two egg clutches clearly met every common sense criterion for imminent loss. Had they remained

in situ, one or two tidal cycles would have been sufficient to undermine the nests and send the eggs tumbling into the surf. At the John's Island Club beach, females had frequently encountered the experimental sand filled geotextile armoring devices installed along the foredune. Blocked from ascending farther up the beach, some turtles were depositing their eggs at or below the dune toe, placing the clutches directly within the active erosion zone.

As the sun rose that July morning, Phillips—a licensed private pilot—rented a Piper Warrior from the Melbourne Airport and transported the eggs by air to the now closed Casa Ybel Hotel's sod airstrip on Sanibel Island. Soon after arrival, the clutches were quickly reburied three meters apart on a section of beach judged to have a sufficiently elevated profile to ensure safe incubation. The site was selected to lessen the potential effects of tropical storms or hurricanes, none of which developed during the 1976 nesting/incubation season. Before placement in the man-made nest cavity, all visible sand adhering to the moist eggs from the John's Island site was carefully brushed away. This precaution was taken to eliminate any residual chemical cues from the original natal substrate that might influence embryonic imprinting.

Our reasoning was grounded in the assumption—widely accepted at the time—that natal homing is established during embryonic development. If hatchlings imprint on the environmental signature of the incubation site, then removing the original sand and ensuring that the eggs developed entirely within Sanibel's predominantly biogenic substrate was essential. The objective was both simple and urgent: rescue the two clutches from certain loss and give any surviving females the greatest possible chance of one day returning to Sanibel Island to nest. This principle formed the core of our original proposal when we sought state approval. Phillips' decision to translocate

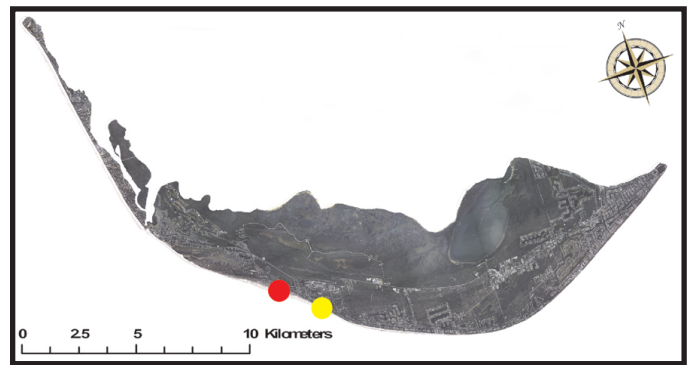


Fig. 3. The spatial juxtaposition in this figure is striking. The red marker denotes the first documented *Chelonia mydas* nest on Sanibel Island in more than a century (19 May 1998). The yellow circle marks the site where two egg clutches from Indian River County were reburied on 23 July 1976. The 22-year interval between these events falls comfortably within the widely cited maturation window for *C. mydas*. (Map from Google Earth and adapted from LeBuff and Lechowicz, 2013).

the eggs to the other side of the Florida peninsula aligned fully with the objectives of our earlier green turtle egg relocation proposal. Shortly after their arrival, we reburied the eggs on a well drained, high profile section of Sanibel Island's western Gulf beach. (See Fig. 3.)

As the anticipated incubation period for our *Chelonia* eggs approached its end, we inspected the beach surface above the egg chambers nightly. We looked for the characteristic signs of impending or completed hatchling emergence. A noticeable drop in the surface level above the eggs would indicate that at least a portion of the hatchlings had already emerged. When this feature was observed I allowed two additional nights to pass before opening and monitoring hatching success. This brief pause was common practice to ensure that any remaining hatchlings had the opportunity to emerge naturally as a secondary cohort. Tracks left by hatchlings on the beach face between the nest and the water were visible on both nights, indicating that the neonates had successfully traversed the sand and reached the Gulf of Mexico without interference. There was no evidence that rac-

coons, ghost crabs, or other resident predators had intercepted them.

On 22 September, the green turtle nest cavities were excavated and their contents examined. A total of 256 hatchlings emerged from the two clutches, yielding a combined hatching success of 91.4%. This result is noteworthy because the two clutches, taken together, exceeded the long term average hatching success documented for thousands of *Caretta* eggs translocated to hatcheries on Sanibel Island from 1969 through the mid 1980s, which was 82.6% (LeBuff, 2018). It is significant that both egg complements were cleaned and reburied on Sanibel Island within five hours of their deposition on the John's Island Club's eroding beach. That rapid transfer preserved embryonic viability, a factor reflected in the 256 hatchlings ultimately produced from the 280 eggs.

Between 1998 and 2025, a total of 115 *Chelonia mydas* nests deposited on Sanibel Island developed under fully natural conditions—that is, they experienced no depredation, washout, or storm related flooding during incubation. The average hatching success for this set of 115 undisturbed nests was 58.16%, a value notably lower than the hatching success achieved by our two translocated clutches. An additional 144 green turtle nests were excluded from this analysis because they were subjected to one or more deleterious impacts during development. (Kelly Sloan, pers. comm.)

Conservation measures implemented over the past four decades—including nest protection, beach-front lighting ordinances, predator control, habitat preservation, and substantial reductions in fisheries bycatch—have unquestionably contributed to the maintenance and expansion of Florida's breeding population of *Chelonia mydas* and related taxa. Yet some sea turtle biologists continue to assert that hat-

chling survivability remains at the historically cited low level. This position is increasingly difficult to reconcile with the demographic reality on Florida's beaches.

The upward trend in mature female sea turtles indicates that today's breeding populations are being joined not only by long protected adults but also by new recruits entering the population at rates higher than previously assumed. The sheer magnitude of nesting activity now observed in Florida implies that early life survival for sea turtles must be higher than the traditional 0.01–0.1% estimate. A more reasonable, evidence aligned survival estimate is needed—one that reflects the success of contemporary conservation practices and the demonstrable growth for the North Atlantic green sea turtle population.

The literature provides a wide spectrum for the age at which *Chelonia mydas* attains sexual maturity, most often cited as between 20 and 40 years. Twenty two years after our translocation of *C. mydas* eggs from Indian River County on Florida's Atlantic coast to Lee County on the Gulf coast—and following the earlier head-starting of this species on Sanibel Island—a sexually mature and gravid green turtle emerged from the Gulf of Mexico and deposited eggs on Sanibel for the first time in likely more than a century (Fig. 3). This event represents a remarkable biological milestone, linking decades of conservation intervention with the long dormant nesting history of the species on the island.

Because no nighttime saturation tagging was being conducted on Sanibel Island in 1998, the female responsible for this landmark nest departed the beach untagged and unidentifiable. The event, while well documented internally by the SCCF staff, was never published in a scientific journal and therefore remained absent from the formal literature.

What is so remarkable is that the two respective nest sites identified in Fig. 3 are approximately only about one kilometer apart. Subsequently *C. mydas* has nested on the island most years since. According to former SCCF Sea Turtle Program Coordinator, Amanda Bryant, (pers. comm.) many of the early green turtle nests on Sanibel Island were concentrated in the same area. The temporal alignment between the 1976 translocation and the reappearance of a nesting *Chelonia mydas* on Sanibel Island falls well within the species' known maturation window, making it a noteworthy correlation in the island's conservation history.

Over several years scores of small *Chelonia mydas* which originated on the Atlantic coast of Florida under Ross Witham's care were raised and released by the Woodrings and Caretta Research, Inc. in Sanibel Island waters. There are no datasets that can tell us anything about the survivability of those particular head-started sea turtles. The same is true for those hatchling *C. mydas* that emerged from the two nests that were translocated from a drastically eroding beach in Indian River County to a suitable site on Sanibel Island in 1976.

Over the last four decades, Florida has experienced an extraordinary surge in nesting green turtles. The most recent statewide survey year with complete data—2025—recorded 66,476 *Chelonia mydas* nests, the second highest total ever documented by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) or their predecessor agencies (FWC, 2026). Such a high nesting count strongly suggests that survival across multiple life stages, including the earliest ones, has improved beyond the traditional estimates.

While definitive attribution is impossible—no tagging, genetic sampling, or long term tracking existed for those 1976 hatchlings—the coincidence invites reflection. One may reasonably speculate about

the origins of the 1998 female. At minimum, this case offers a tantalizing hint, however small, that embryonic or early life imprinting might influence natal homing in marine turtles. The observation does not prove imprinting, but it adds a noteworthy data point to a question that remains unresolved in sea turtle biology.

Acknowledgments.—Foremost, I thank my late wife, Jean. She was a “sea turtle widow” for 33 of the 67 years we were married, yet she remained the greatest supporter, among hundreds, of my sea turtle work. Her patience, encouragement, and unwavering belief in the value of my efforts sustained me through every phase of the program.

I remain deeply grateful to my friend and colleague, the late Edward Phillips. Sadly, Ed did not live long enough to see the publication of this long overdue paper. By choosing to implement a portion of what we both had originally envisioned, he found the opportunity to act—an opportunity I have revisited herein, half a century later.

The dedicated volunteers who staffed the beach community units during the heyday of Caretta Research, Inc. in the 1970s made the program a genuine success. Their commitment built broad public support at a time when sea turtle conservation in Florida was still in its infancy. They transformed a grassroots idea into a coordinated, coast wide effort that helped shape the conservation ethic that endures today.

My thanks are extended to Paul Tritaik, retired Project Leader of the J. N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge and former Refuge Manager of the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge, who connected me with colleagues knowledgeable about the biology of the sea turtles of Brevard and Indian River counties.

I thank Kelly Sloan, the current Sea Turtle Program Coordinator at SCCF, for providing green turtle hatching success data from their database, as referenced herein.

My sincere thanks also go to Sanibel Island author and historian Betty Anholt for proofreading the first draft, and to Jeff Schmid, Senior Biologist with the Conservancy of Southwest Florida, for his technical review of the final manuscript.



Fig. 4. A 2021 *Chelonia mydas* hatchling from Sanibel Island that completed incubation within the island's biogenic sand and successfully traversed the beach to enter the Gulf of Mexico. (Photograph by Cheri Hollis).

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