

# Saving Our Sea Turtles

Egmont Key National Wildlife Refuge is privileged to be a nesting site for one of five species of sea turtles that inhabit the Gulf of Mexico – the loggerhead.

## The Lone Loggerhead

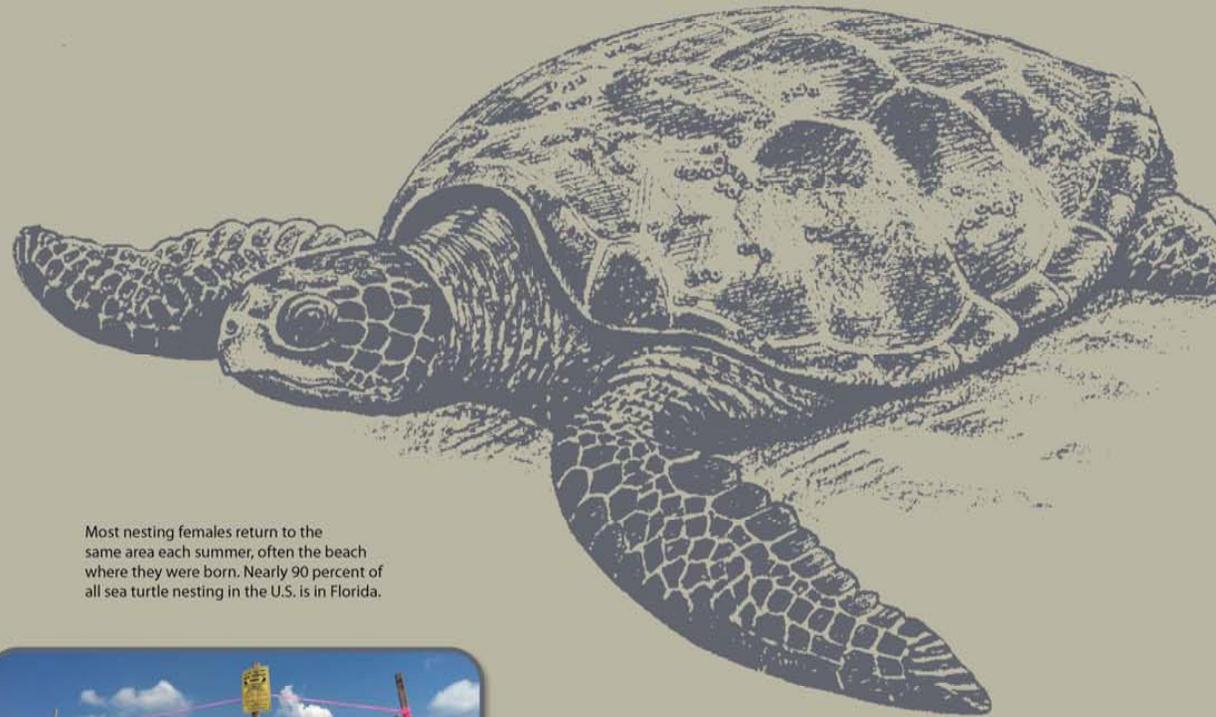
Generally solitary, this reddish-brown turtle weighs 300 to 400 pounds and measures 2 to 3 feet in length. Named for its large head and powerful jaws, the loggerhead crushes clams and crabs for its meals. With populations dwindling, it is now an endangered species.



Photo by Ryan Maki

## Under Cover of Night

Loggerhead turtles come together only during mating. Several weeks later, the female lumbers ashore at night. She digs a deep hole and lays about 100 round, rubbery eggs. She covers the nest with sand and returns to the sea. About two months later, the baby turtles hatch. After days of digging, they emerge at night and head toward the brightest horizon and the safety of the sea.



Most nesting females return to the same area each summer, often the beach where they were born. Nearly 90 percent of all sea turtle nesting in the U.S. is in Florida.



## Providing Prime Habitat

With coastal development on the rise, Egmont Key provides critical nesting areas and protection for the endangered loggerhead. The lack of disorienting artificial lighting and few natural predators make for excellent nesting habitat. Refuge management includes controlling predators, preventing egg poaching, removing barriers, and monitoring beach erosion. Nesting surveys and other research help in the long-term recovery of this special species.



Egmont Key is an "index nesting beach" – a site for measuring the status and trends of loggerhead populations to determine progress towards recovery.



Each year, 30 to 70 loggerhead sea turtles nest on Egmont Key.