

# Rare leatherback sea turtles hatch on Sanibel

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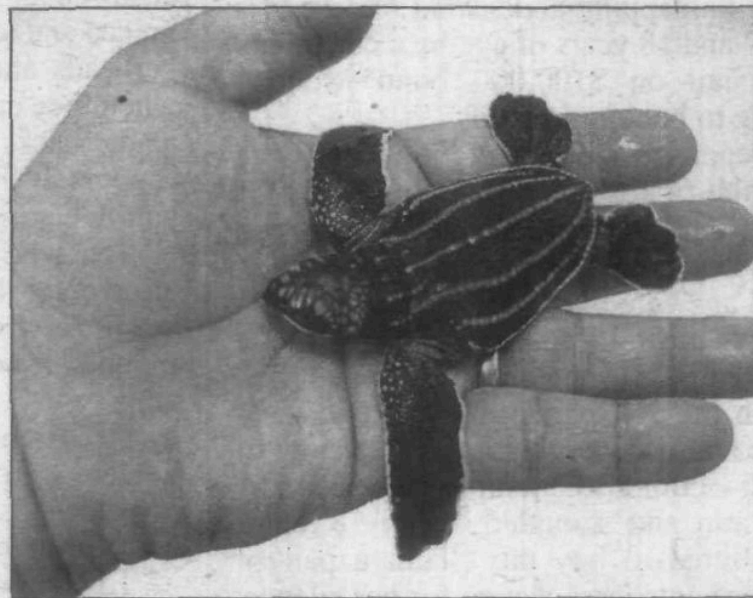
On the night of Aug. 2, a nest of leatherback sea turtles hatched on Sanibel's East End, the first known documented leatherback nest in Lee and Collier counties.

Volunteer Linda Gornick, a walker in SCCF's Sea Turtle Research & Monitoring Program, found the nest on June 3. Gornick notified permittee Tom Krekel, who quickly determined that it was not a loggerhead crawl.

It was identified as a probable green sea turtle nest, but the very large crawl and body pit raised the possibility that it was a leatherback nest. Photos of both the nest and crawl were provided to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and confirmation was received that it was probably a green.

SCCF Sea Turtle Coordinator Amanda Bryant with Herpetologist Chris Lechowicz dug the nest on Monday morning.

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**One of the rare leatherback sea turtles that hatched on Aug. 2, near the Tarpon Bay Road beach access on Sanibel.**

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## Hatchlings from page 1

There were 90 empty eggshells and four live leatherback hatchlings were recovered.

The hatchlings were released that same night. Hatched nests are normally dug after three days but the nest was dug early because it was in immediate danger of predation (a ghost crab was already digging in the nest when Bryant arrived).

Leatherbacks very rarely nest in Southwest Florida; one leatherback nest was documented in Sarasota County. Leatherbacks do nest along the Florida panhandle and the east coast. Back in the 1970s, a few leatherback hatchlings from the east coast were released on Sanibel as part of an experiment.

The crawls of loggerheads are easily distinguished from those of greens and leatherbacks because loggerheads alternate the front flippers when they crawl on land. Greens and leatherbacks use both left and right flippers at the same time, creating a parallel crawl.

The June 3 crawl was wider than an average loggerhead crawl. There was a very large body pit and a large mound of sand camouflaging the nest area.

SCCF coordinates over 100 volunteers who monitor sea turtle nesting on the islands each season, from May through October.

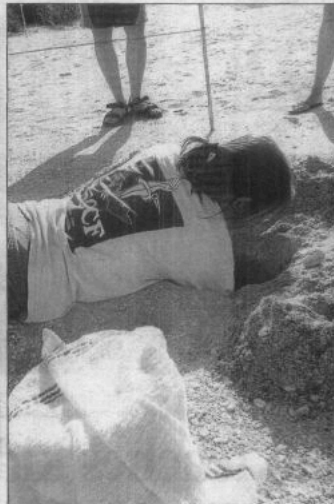
To learn more about the leatherback nest, visit [www.sccf.org/content/171/Green-Sea-Turtle-Nest.aspx](http://www.sccf.org/content/171/Green-Sea-Turtle-Nest.aspx) or come to a Turtle Tracks program at SCCF, offered every Thursday at 9 a.m. Call 472-2329 for more information.



Amanda Bryant with a leatherback hatchling at the dig.



Four live hatchlings, including the one pictured here, were found in the nest when it was dug on Aug. 3.



The nest cavity for a loggerhead is about 18 inches deep; this nest was 29.5 inches deep.



SCCF Herpetologist Chris Lechowicz with Amanda Bryant and empty eggshells (the live hatchlings are in the covered bucket).