

# World's Largest Sea Turtle Nests on BHI, Report by BHI Conservancy Sea Turtle Biologist, Brett DeGregorio

June, 2010

Leatherback Sea Turtle  
Photo by Andrew Niccum



## *The Leatherback*

The night of June 12<sup>th</sup> was a memorable one for Bald Head Island. Sea turtle patrol started off with a Loggerhead nesting at 9:55. Not soon after she finished nesting, two more Loggerheads came ashore and began nesting. After tagging the turtles, I asked the interns to remain with their turtles. In the meantime, I rode up the beach to continue patrolling. I travelled about 5 miles up East Beach with no sign of more turtles when all of a sudden my red headlights illuminated a set of turtle tracks. I killed the engine and hopped out to investigate. It was immediately obvious that these were not Loggerhead tracks as they were enormous and symmetrical in design. I suddenly got nervous because I knew what these tracks were....

I followed the tracks up the beach where an enormous leatherback was perched atop a massive egg chamber. She had her rear flippers held in front of her tail, hiding the egg chamber and her cloaca, this is how Leatherbacks lay their eggs. After a frantic, incoherent call to the dorms the rest of the interns began a seemingly endless drive up the beach. Shortly after I encountered her, she began covering the nest. She spent 50 minutes covering the nest, creating 3 massive body pits perfectly hiding the location of the actual egg chamber. As she began covering, I slipped a long rope into

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### Quick Leatherback Facts

- Largest Turtle on Earth
- Up to Seven Feet Long
- Exceeding 2,000 pounds
- Can dive to depths of 4,200 feet (deeper than any other turtle)
- Can stay submerged for up to 85 minutes
- Found in tropical and temperate waters off

her egg chamber. We never would have been able to find the nest had we not placed the rope to mark its location. Her lumbering walk back to the water lasted almost 10 minutes, as the poor girl must have been exhausted from her long nesting ordeal. As far as I'm aware, this is the first Leatherback ever documented nesting on Bald Head. Each year North Carolina gets 2 or 3 nests, its excellent news that we have finally gotten our nest. I look forward to seeing the hatchlings in 60 days.

the Atlantic, Pacific, & Indian Oceans & Mediterranean Sea

- Average migration between breeding & feeding area = 3,700 miles (longest migration of any sea turtle)
- Usually deposit around 80 eggs per nest
- Endangered under U.S. Endangered Species Act

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