

Spring 2026
NEWSLETTER

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Adopt A Sea Turtle Nest 2026

FOR MANY OF US, MEMORIAL DAY marks the beginning of summer. During the month of May, we start to see more people enjoying our Outer Banks beaches and national parks. But people aren't the only visitors who started making their way to the Outer Banks in May — May is also the beginning of sea turtle nesting season at Cape Hatteras National Seashore!

The Seashore extends more than 70 miles and covers more than 30,000 acres, from South Nags Head to Ocracoke Inlet. Five species of sea turtles typically nest on the Seashore: Leatherback, Hawksbill (rare), Kemp's Ridley (also rare), Loggerhead, and Green. Last year, Seashore staff discovered 218 nests, which resulted in 10,190 hatchlings making their way to the sea!

Through our Adopt A Sea Turtle Nest program, you can symbolically adopt an active sea turtle nest on the Seashore for a gift of \$100 or more. Nests are monitored by National Park Service staff, and you will receive an official adoption certificate (paper or digital) and information about your specific nest when it becomes available.

Please note: To protect the sea turtles and per National Park Service guidance, your assigned nest's specific location is not shared until after it hatches.



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There are a limited number of nests available to adopt each year, and they are assigned on a first-come, first-served basis, so adopt yours today! Learn more by visiting our website (www.obxforever.org/adoptaseaturtlenest) or by scanning the QR code with your smartphone!



HERE'S HOW IT WORKS:

Donate! Give a tax-deductible donation of \$100 or more to adopt your 2026 sea turtle nest. Your gift will help us fund important projects that protect and enhance Cape Hatteras National Seashore and the vital sea turtle habitat it preserves.

Get your nest! As nests on the Seashore become available for adoption, you will be assigned a nest and will receive an adoption certificate by mail or email with initial information about your nest. Nest assignments begin in early June and will be assigned on a first-come, first-served basis.

Wait patiently for your nest to hatch! When your nest hatches later this summer or fall (average incubation time for our nests is 61 days), you will receive a personalized update in the mail with information National Park Service staff collects about your nest, including the number of hatchlings that made their way out to sea.



Outer Banks Forever is the official nonprofit partner of our Outer Banks national parks, helping you protect and enhance these special places. Outer Banks Forever has helped support projects like the multi-use pathway in Buxton at the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse and Old Lighthouse Beach, programs like Adopt a Pony and Adopt a Sea Turtle Nest, virtual experiences that help keep visitors connected to our parks year-round, and more. To learn more, please visit www.OBXForever.org.

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Director's Letter



Dear Friend of our Parks,

Every day, we are inspired by the landscapes, history, and stories that make our Outer Banks national parks so extraordinary. From the windswept dunes to the places where innovation first took flight, these parks connect us to nature, to our shared heritage, and to one another.

At Outer Banks Forever, our mission is to ensure these special places are protected and enhanced for generations to come. Achieving that mission requires more than passion; it requires a strong, steady foundation.

That foundation is our Parks Forever Fund.

This fund allows us to respond quickly when opportunities arise, to support critical projects, and to ensure that our work continues without interruption. It gives us the flexibility to invest where the need is greatest, and the impact is most meaningful. Simply put, it makes everything else we do possible.

When you give a gift to our Parks Forever Fund, you are not just supporting a single park project – you are strengthening our entire organization! You are helping us remain nimble, effective, and ready to meet the evolving needs of the parks we all love.

I invite you to join us in this vital effort. Your support ensures that we can continue to care for these treasured places today and safeguard them for tomorrow.

Thank you for being part of this important work!

With gratitude,

Bryan Burhans
DIRECTOR, OUTER BANKS FOREVER

Love the Beach, Respect the Ocean

As we enter another busy summer season, we want to share a few important beach and ocean safety reminders with you!

BEACH SAFETY

Pack it in, pack it out: Make sure to take all trash, fishing equipment, beach chairs, towels, umbrellas, and tents with you when you leave the beach.

Discard fishing line in designated recycling receptacles.

Digging in the sand and building sandcastles is fun, but if you dig a hole, please fill it in. Holes along the beach pose hazards to beachgoers, ocean rescue personnel, lifeguards who need to be able to drive along the beach, park rangers on patrol, and nesting sea turtles.



The best way to avoid sunburn is to wear sunscreen and UV-protective clothing and to limit outside time during peak UV light hours of 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

OCEAN SAFETY

A perfect day on the beach doesn't always mean it's a perfect day in the ocean:

If in doubt, don't go out!

Visit www.LoveTheBeachRespectTheOcean.com for a daily report on ocean and weather conditions. You can also sign up for OBX Text Alerts for beach and ocean conditions by texting OBXBeachConditions to 77295. Message and data rates may apply.

Always enter the ocean with something that floats, like a boogie/body board, inner tube, or life jacket.



Be aware that the waters of the Outer Banks are known for being extremely rough and present hazards like shore break, high surf, and longshore currents. Never turn your back on the ocean! Stay vigilant, even if you are

walking, running, building a sandcastle, or fishing.



Ensure that all children are supervised by an adult.

Never swim alone, no matter your age or ability.

It is unlawful to enter the ocean if red "No Swimming" flags are posted on the beach.

If you are caught in a rip current, remember: Float, don't fight. If you can, swim parallel to shore and yell for help.

LIFEGUARDED BEACHES

For your safety, we recommend that you swim at lifeguarded beaches. At Cape Hatteras National Seashore, these include:



- Coquina Beach
- Frisco Beach
- Ocracoke Beach
- Rodanthe Beach Access

These beaches will be lifeguarded from 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. daily from Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day.



Bodie Island Double Keepers' Quarters *Restoration*

Our newest park project is the restoration of the historic Double Keepers' Quarters (DKQ) at the Bodie Island Light Station on Cape Hatteras National Seashore!

Last January, the interior of the DKQ was damaged by an electrical fire, and the building has been closed to the public since.



Thanks to generous support from Eastern National, the National Park Foundation, the Outer Banks Visitors Bureau, and our donors, we have the funds to repair this important piece of Cape Hatteras National Seashore history! The total cost for this project is just under \$500,000.



Work on the DKQ began the week of March 3 and is expected to last seven months. So far, crews from Renaissance Construction, Inc., based in Manteo, North Carolina, and their contractors have removed charred wood, treated the interior of the building to remove the lingering

smoke smell, and begun installing electrical wiring and HVAC. Once the damages are repaired, our partners at the Seashore have plans to install new educational exhibits so park visitors can learn about the lightkeepers and families who kept the light burning.

While construction is ongoing, Bodie Island Lighthouse climbs and seasonal ranger programs will continue to be offered (ranger programs will be outdoors). Stay tuned for more updates on this exciting project, and what comes next!



Ask A BioTech: *Flippers or Feet?*

BY ASH KEIPER-KINTZ, Biological Science Technician at Cape Hatteras National Seashore

So, you've come across a turtle while visiting the beach; that means it's a sea turtle, right? Not necessarily! Sea turtles aren't the only turtles that enjoy the beach; they just get the best publicity!

One of the easiest ways to tell the difference between a sea turtle and other types of land or freshwater turtle is to look at the feet. Turtle species that spend some time on land, like sliders or snappers, and turtle species that are fully terrestrial, like box turtles, all have something in common that sea turtles don't: feet!

Sea turtles have long paddle-like flippers, without separate toes. They do still have nails, but the toes that very early prehistoric species may have had are now fused into one powerful limb. Box turtles, snapping turtles, and all other varieties of non-sea turtles still have distinct and separate toes with a claw on each, although semi-aquatic species do have webbing between them.

Diamondback terrapins are commonly mistaken for sea turtles when visitors see them climb out of the ocean or sound to nest in sandy areas. These turtles, however, don't spend most of their lives at sea. Instead, they both thrive in and require brackish water. Diamondback terrapins have a variety of adaptations that allow them to survive in the brackish water of bays, coastal wetlands, and estuaries like the Pamlico Sound. With skin that is almost impermeable to salt, and special glands like tear ducts that allow them to excrete salt in the same way as sea turtles, these little turtles are an evolutionary marvel! They can even sense minute differences in salinity and will drink rain as it falls and from water surfaces before it mixes with the saltwater.

If you happen to see one of these turtles attempting to cross the road, like all other non-snapping and non-sea turtles, you should gently grasp them like a hamburger, supporting both the upper shell and lower shell. The turtle should be placed just off the road in the same direction they were originally headed. If you see a non-sea turtle nesting on the side of the road, leave her be! Though this



may be a higher risk area, it most likely won't be her only nest of the year, and it is better to leave both the nest and the turtle undisturbed.

Another species commonly mistaken for a sea turtle on the Seashore is the common snapping turtle. As for identifying these turtles, their tail is usually one of their most distinctive features, being particularly long, thick, and almost crocodilian in appearance. They are also one of the bulkiest turtles, particularly fleshy and unable to retract very much into their

shells, instead of relying on their beak to defend them. They are naturally brown in color but are often tinted green by the algae that tends to grow over their shells. They rely mostly on crustaceans and fish as a food source but have also been known to take unsuspecting birds from below the water's surface. Common snapping turtles have impressively long and powerful legs that allow them to lift their entire body off the ground, normally used to pull them through debris and tangled plants in the water but also very useful for traveling miles during nesting season to find the perfect spot.

For a snapping turtle larger than a dinner plate, your best bet for helping it safely cross the road is simply stopping traffic at a distance and allowing it to continue on its own. If a snapping turtle does need to be moved manually, there are a few precautions you should take.

Snapping turtles can reach their neck back over their shell to bite anywhere from their rear legs forward. There is a myth that holding these turtles by the tail is the safest way, but this can actually cause great harm to the turtle as this tail is an extension of their spine. Instead, the safest place to grasp a snapper is by the upper shell behind the back legs. If the turtle happens to be a larger one, the best way is to throw a towel over it. This way you can keep the neck immobilized while still holding from the rear and keeping the claws away from your hands.

Now you know about the two turtle species most likely to be mistaken for sea turtles and how to safely transport them across a road during nesting season!



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PARKS FOREVER FUND

Our Outer Banks national parks need your support now more than ever! One of the ways we support our parks' greatest needs is through our Parks Forever Fund, which allows us to pool funds from supporters like you, as well as our local business partners, to be able to adapt to immediate needs as they arise and create a sustainable way to address longer-term challenges.



We know how much you love the Outer Banks and that you have special memories of your time here. We hope you will continue your impact on these special places and leave your legacy in the Outer Banks by making a gift to our Parks Forever Fund.



SCAN ME

Here's what's inside:

Adopt A Sea Turtle Nest 2026



Bodie Island Double Keepers' Quarters Restoration

Ask a BioTech: Flippers or Feet?



Plus: LOVE THE BEACH, RESPECT THE OCEAN