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Volunteers play role in saving endangered turtles

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San Antonio Express-News

Sea turtle patrol volunteers must commit one day a week from April through July, so it's hard for San Antonians to participate. But more than half the nests are spotted not by volunteers but by casual beach visitors, making it important for those who frequent these beaches to train themselves on what to look for and what to do if they find a nest.

For descriptions and photos of nesting sites and tracks, contact information and more, check the Padre Island National Seashore Web site (www.nps.gov/pais). For a wealth of information about the sea turtles, including webcams that track their progress, see seaturtle.org.

Here are a few pointers on what to do if you find a sea turtle, its nest or tracks, taken from the National Park Service Web site:

From April through mid-July, keep an eye out for sets of Kemp's ridley tracks, which are about two feet wide.

From late May through August, look for hatchlings — about two inches long — emerging from their nests and crawling toward the sea.

If you find a nesting sea turtle, sea turtle tracks, or hatchlings, please IMMEDIATELY report them by flagging down a passing turtle patroller or law enforcement officer, or by calling the appropriate area coordinator. If you do not recall the number for the area coordinator, call (866) TURTLE5 and a recorded message will give you that number.

Do not rush up to the nesting turtle while she is crawling up the beach to select a nest site or you may frighten her back into the water.

Protect the nesting turtle and hatchlings from passing traffic. If necessary, ask

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motorists to take another route to avoid damage to the turtles or nests.

Allow the turtle to nest undisturbed.

After the nesting turtle has started to lay the eggs or when she is returning to the water, photograph or video her and examine her for tags. Photograph or video hatchlings as they are emerging from the nest or crawling toward the water.

Mark where the turtle nested or where the hatchlings emerged from.

Let the turtles enter the surf if they are crawling toward it, but do not place them in the water or touch them.

If possible, stay at the site until an official arrives.

Source: Padre Island National Seashore

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