

From: ackleybc@aol.com
To: Cyndy_Holda@nps.gov; mike_murray@nps.gov
Cc: Darrell_Echols@nps.gov; Thayer_Broili@nps.gov
Subject: Re: Ramp 34 turtle nest
Date: 01/15/2012 05:15 PM

To those charged with managing the threatened and endangered turtle species on our seashore:

I am disturbed by the response I received from Cyndy regarding the turtle nest north of Ramp 34. I am especially annoyed by the statement near the end of her email:

Unless new information surfaces that would change our management practices, it seems fruitless to continue to entertain discussions that are contrary to how we manage sea turtles, shorebirds, or other natural resources and values

As unbelievable as some may find it, I previously was known as an environmentalist before I became aware of the NPS management of our resources here. I still consider myself an environmentalist and continue to research and observe "the best available science". We have personally researched through written materials available, personal communication, and on site visitations the management of turtles and birds on the East and Gulf Coasts. We first became interested in turtles during our visits to Padre Island National Seashore. We even talked to Mr. Echols, as well as Dr. Donna Shaver, who managed turtles at Padre. We have become enthralled by the progress of bringing a turtle species, the Kemps Ridley, back from the very edge of extinction. Am I to be chastised because I want to see us do the best possible job here? Am I wrong to be horrified that we lose over 40% of the turtle nests deposited here? Am I faulted for wanting all of the hatchlings to complete the traverse to the ocean? Is my interest and concern to be disregarded because I also ride in an ORV and fish? My answer to those questions is: "I care." I see improved management methods and I feel punished by having my enjoyment curtailed without sound scientific justification.

I would appreciate answers to the questions asked at the beginning of this thread if there are any. Dr. Matthew Godfrey has stated in a communication on October 18, 2010:

*It depends if you are talking about constant or fluctuating incubation temperatures. Most data available come from laboratory experiments where the temperature is kept constant during incubation. However, on the nesting beach, nest temperatures rarely remain constant. For constant temperatures, the general rule is that egg development will cease below 25 C (Ackerman RA. 1996. The nest environment and the embryonic development of sea turtles. In: Lutz PL, Musick JA (eds) The Biology of Sea Turtles. CRC Press, Boca Raton, Florida, pp 83-106). However, in the few laboratory experiments that have instituted fluctuating temperatures, development can continue with pulses of cold temperature down to 18-19 C (e.g. Georges A, Limpus CJ, Stoutjesdijk R. 1994. Hatchling sex in the marine turtle *Caretta caretta* is determined by proportion of development at a temperature, not daily duration of exposure. Journal of Experimental Zoology 270: 432-444). Unfortunately, these kinds of experiments are difficult to compare to natural incubation, because the laboratory incubation usually have both cold and hot pulses, so disentangling the impacts of cold vs. hot on things like hatching success is near impossible.*

That being said, in general we know from experience in NC that clutches of eggs laid late in the nesting season can and do survive bouts of cold weather (for example, hatchlings came out of an incubating nest on Bald Head Island on Friday and from a nest north of Oregon Inlet on Saturday, despite the cold temperatures). Often, sand temperatures at nest depth will be warmer than air temperatures, and thus are buffered from brief periods of cold, such as this weekend.

Matthew

Cyndy has said that you consult with the state and follow the North Carolina policies. I feel my questions about sand temperature are relevant and hopefully we will learn from this situation. In the past, Cyndy has instructed us to give all our questions to her and she will forward them to the appropriate people for answers. Do we have someone qualified on Hatteras Island who is in charge of turtles? I have heard that there is a new Resource staff member but he is not working with birds or turtles. We had three people working with turtles last year, then we understand that Doug McGee who was in charge has left. Who will be writing the annual turtle report this year?

Hopefully the 2011 Annual Sea Turtle Report will contain a complete lost nest report. In the past NPS has not exposed that information. It is important to have the official report of percentage of lost nests. Even more important are counts of those hatchlings who reach the ocean. In the cooler time of year the temperature of the water before reaching the Gulf Stream is important. This is the only way to get the best scientific knowledge of the success of our turtle program in order to address any shortcomings. Our figures, which we have shared with you in the past, show that the turtle losses on our beaches far exceed those of any other area on the Atlantic or Gulf Coasts.

Dialogue on these issues is important.

Sincerely,
Barbara Ackley

-----Original Message-----

From: Cyndy_Holda <Cyndy_Holda@nps.gov>

To: ackleybc <ackleybc@aol.com>

Cc: Darrell_Echols <Darrell_Echols@nps.gov>; Thayer_Broili <Thayer_Broili@nps.gov>

Sent: Fri, Jan 13, 2012 10:11 am

Subject: Re: Ramp 34 turtle nest

Good Morning Barbara,
I've been in and out of the office quite a bit this week and therefore my delayed response. First, let me acknowledge that there are sometimes philosophical differences between how stakeholders want the National Park Service (NPS) to manage park resources and how the NPS actually manages the resources in accordance with the agency's mission and policy requirements.

Our decisions are based on law, policy, scientific knowledge, professional training, experience, and guidance obtained from consultation with state and federal sea turtle scientists. A primary management objective for the National Park Service is to help ensure that natural processes such as sea turtle nesting continue. Our procedures conform to state and federal guidance on sea turtle nest management. In brief, the NPS resource management staff follows scientifically established procedures. When they encounter a non-routine situation, such as a late season turtle nest, they consult with and follow expert advice for how to address the situation in a way that is consistent with existing guidance. This year's Ramp 34 nest was indeed an anomaly, but it is those types of situations that help us better understand the species that we, as federal land managers, are legally responsible for and tasked with managing.

We received several inquiries expressing interest in the late season turtle nest and therefore Superintendent Murray has asked staff to include information about the nests in the 2011 annual sea turtle report, which is due for completion by January 31, 2012. As in recent years, once we have submitted the report as required by the Consent Decree, we will make it available to the public.

I hope this is helpful information. Unless new information surfaces that would change our management practices, it seems fruitless to continue to entertain discussions that are contrary to how we manage sea turtles, shorebirds, or other natural resources and values. If you have further questions regarding sea turtle management practices at Cape Hatteras National Seashore, please direct them to our Chief of Resource Management, Thayer Broili, or our Deputy Superintendent, Darrell Echols who supervises

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the resource management operations of the Seashore.

Cyndy M. Holda
Public Affairs Specialist
Outer Banks Group
252-473-2111 ext. 148
252-216-6455 cell
cyndy_holda@nps.gov

" ackleybc@aol.com
"
<ackleybc@aol.com> To
> Cyndy_Holda@nps.gov cc
01/04/2012 12:03 PM Subject
Re: Ramp 34 turtle nest

Cyndy,

Who is the person responsible for these decisions? Who is the person who examined the nest last week? What are his qualifications? He reportedly told bystanders that he "felt" movement. How is viability determined? Was a temperature probe used? Do you have sand temperature statistics from the nearby area?

Here is what Matthew Godfrey wrote in 2010, paraphrased: In a mid-October 2010 email from Matthew Godfrey, he stated that egg development will cease below constant 25C (77F) degrees. In a few laboratory experiments of fluctuating temps they survived 18-19C (64-66F). These were brief periods of cold. Temperatures at egg depth in nests is usually warmer this time of year than the surface. In mid October of 2010 hatchlings emerged from a nest north of Oregon Inlet after a cold snap.

This was an excellent opportunity for research on our beaches. It is extremely rare that a nest hatches if laid after beginning of Sept. What do our records show for date of hatching after Nov. 1st?

And even more important to survival of the species is: what is the necessary air temperature for survival to the water and ocean temperature after entering it?

Barbara

-----Original Message-----

From: Cyndy Holda <Cyndy_Holda@nps.gov>
To: ackleybc <ackleybc@aol.com>
Sent: Wed, Jan 4, 2012 8:45 am
Subject: Re: Ramp 34 turtle nest

Barbara,

For the past few months resources management staff have been checking late season turtle nests regularly (approximately weekly) for viable eggs and if viable eggs are found the nest protection is left in place to give the eggs a chance to hatch. As one might expect, hatch success for such nests is often less than 100%, but the hatching results can be better than you might expect. For example, the second-to-last remaining nest of the season, which was located 0.5 miles south of Ramp 38, was excavated on 11/28/2011. Even though no hatchlings had emerged from the nest cavity, 15 live hatchlings were found inside the nest cavity and were released into the water.

The nest 1.4 miles north of Ramp 34 has had viable eggs each time it was checked in December, including as recently as December 27. The nest was checked again yesterday morning (Jan 3), but no longer had viable eggs, so the nest was excavated and the closure removed. The results are not surprising given the late date, but the policy is to give the nest a chance to hatch as long as there are viable eggs present.

The nest was indeed an anomaly and has sparked interest from many folks. I hope this is helpful information for you.

Cyndy M. Holda
Public Affairs Specialist

0032004

Cape Hatteras NS/Fort Raleigh NHS/Wright Brothers NM
252-473-2111 ext. 148
252-216-6455 cell
252-473-2595 fax
Email: cyndy_holda@nps.gov

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" ackleybc@aol.com

" ackleybc@aol.com

>

01/04/2012 08:02
AM

cyndy_holda@nps.gov

Ramp 34 turtle nest

To

cc

Subject

Hi Cyndy,

There has been a lot of concern lately about the turtle nest closure north of Ramp 34. The viability of this nest goes against all "best available science". Why is the beach still closed?

Thank you,
Barbara