

SEA TURTLE REPORT

Sargassum Seaweed Blankets Marco Beach

By Maria Lamb

Just twelve weeks into the sea turtle season, Marco has already recorded 162 nests with 32 hatched nests, all of them from loggerhead sea turtles. According to David Godfrey, Director of Sea Turtle Conservancy in Gainesville, “I don’t know that this year is going to be a record year, but it’s certainly going pretty well.”

Godfrey also added, “I do hear that sargassum seaweed floating up on some southern beaches is a little bit of a growing concern because it can deter the female turtles from coming offshore and is certainly challenging for any emerging hatchlings if they happen to encounter large piles of the stuff as they’re trying to reach the sea. But other than that, it seems like a pretty normal year so far.”

On Marco Island, sargassum seaweed has blanketed long stretches of its beaches, posing a smelly and messy inconvenience for beachgoers. According to sea turtle experts, “Sargassum is an important habitat for young sea turtles when it’s out offshore and that’s where the hatchlings swim out to as soon as they get off the beach.” But on land, these piles of sargassum seaweed can hinder a sea turtle hatchling from making it to the open ocean quickly. As more and more sargassum seaweed is washed ashore by the currents and the wind, it can act as barriers to baby sea turtles. Hatchlings can get stuck or entangled in the massive clumps, slow-

ing their journey to the ocean. The more time the hatchlings stay on the beach, the more at risk they become from predators such as the hungry shorebirds feasting on the fresh bounty brought up by the mats of seaweeds. The University of South Florida’s Optical Oceanography Lab, which tracks sargassum by satellite, says 2026 is on pace to be a record year, with the peak typically hitting in June or July. The heaps of seaweeds are also catching many visitors to Marco beaches by surprise as they come ready to enjoy our wide and pristine beaches. As the clumps of brown seaweed bake under the extreme Florida sun, they begin to decay, releasing an unpleasant odor which makes a beach visit less enjoyable.



A brown Willet with its long legs checking for breakfast among the pile of sargassum seaweed. A turtle hatchling can easily get trapped or entangled in the clumps of seaweed, slowing their journey to the water.



Photos by Maria Lamb

Sargassum seaweed has blanketed long stretches of Marco’s beach.

Sea Turtle Activity July 20 - July 26, 2026

Beach	Nests		False Crawls		Hatched Nests		
	This Year	Last Year	This Year	Last Year	This Year	Last Year	Disoriented
Barefoot	239	293	253	269	67	60	7
Delnor Wiggins	60	64	63	99	21	21	0
Vanderbilt	201	273	223	203	51	61	6
Parkshore	234	209	180	266	55	53	10
City of Naples	304	263	280	221	63	48	7
Keewaydin Is.	614	531	827	720	122	107	0
Sea Oat Island	36	18	34	23	3	0	0
Marco Island	162	115	250	310	32	13	3
Kice and Cape Romano	174	185	295	213	25	5	0
10,000 Islands	135	149	166	171	31	26	0
Collier County Totals	2159	2100	2571	2495	470	394	33

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