

53 Sea Turtles on Sandy Neck Shores!!!

Every year in November, Sandy Neck Staff plans on encountering cold stunned sea turtles while patrolling the beach. This year staff found three species of turtles kemp's ridley (*Lepidochelys kempii*), loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*), and green (*Chelonia mydas*) sea turtles. Kemp's ridleys are endangered throughout their range and are the rarest sea turtle in the world. Loggerheads and greens are threatened and very rarely seen in many parts of their range. The turtles found are often juveniles prone to being cold-stunned as ocean temperatures drop. It is thought that Hurricane Sandy had a significant impact on the increase in strandings. The storm arrived just as many turtles begin their migration out of Cape Cod Bay. It is believed that the magnitude and timing of the storm trapped the turtles in the Bay longer than usual exposing them to more storms later in the season. The immobile turtles often die of exposure if not retrieved from the beach and rehabilitated at a proper facility. This year Sandy Neck Staff collected and unprecedented 40 Ridleys, 12 Loggerheads, and 1 Green. All turtles were turned over to the Wellfleet Audubon Society who transported them to the New England Aquariums rehabilitation center in Quincy.

From there the turtles can be transported to other facilities on the Atlantic Coast and when healthy enough they will be released back into the wild.



Sandy Neck Park Manager, Nina Coleman, assists MA Audubon Naturalist, Dennis Murley, with a cold stunned Loggerhead Sea Turtle.

Sandy Neck Stranding Contacts

Sandy Neck Gatehouse
(508) 362-8300
Marine and Environmental Affairs
(508) 790-6272
Seals and Dolphins
IFAW Marine Mammal Rescue
(508) 743-9548
Sea Turtles
Wellfleet Audubon Society
(508) 349-2615
Ocean Sunfish
Coastal Wildlife Alliance
(508) 566-0009

State Biologists Visit Sandy Neck

This fall researchers from the MA Department of Coastal Zone Management (CZM) visited Sandy Neck to determine the health of the Great Marsh. The scientists sampled along transects to determine plant diversity and health they also sampled in the tidal creeks for invertebrates which can be bioindicators of water quality. These tests were done in wetlands and estuaries around the state and are aimed at determining how land-use in coastal and wetland areas is affecting these environments over time. The state is still compiling the results.



PHEASANT HUNTING AT SNK

Hunting pheasant on Sandy Neck continues to be a productive sport for regional hunters. This year pheasants were stocked two days a week throughout the hunting season and approximately two-thirds were taken.

Headstarting Diamondback Terrapins

Diamondback terrapin headstarting continues in 2012/2013. Each year on Sandy Neck Beach Park, a small percentage of diamondback terrapins (*Malaclemys terrapin*), a state-listed threatened species, nest on sandy roads where their eggs are in danger of being crushed by vehicles. Without outside help these eggs are not likely to survive. Sandy Neck Staff carefully remove the eggs from the roads, incubate them until they hatch, and bring them to area schools and community centers to raise the hatchlings over the winter. When the turtles are released into Sandy Neck's Great Marsh in the spring they will have grown the size of a three year old turtle in just nine months. Their larger size will give them a better chance to survive to adulthood since diamondback hatchlings are on the menu of many predators.

Barnstable Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is authorized by the state through a special permit to place these turtles in classrooms and other locations in the Town of Barnstable and Sandwich. Placing the hatchlings in schools, libraries, and community centers provides the necessary care the terrapins need over the winter while simultaneously providing students and the community with the opportunity to learn about turtles, endangered species, and general ecology. Natural Resource Officers provide outreach and education by visiting the facilities to teach about turtle biology and help with questions about animal husbandry.



Rabies Vaccine Distribution

The Town of Barnstable participated in a program aimed at reducing rabies in wild animals. In mid October, Sandy Neck Staff distributed fishy smelling baits that contained the rabies vaccination deep in dunes and forested areas of Sandy Neck. Wild animals that consume the vaccine-baits are vaccinated against rabies. Domestic dogs and cats that eat the bait will not be harmed they just may experience an upset stomach. If you come across one of these baits leave it where it is or pick it up with a gloved hand and throw it into the woods. If no suitable place is available, dispose the bait in the trash. If you have additional questions about this program contact USDA Wildlife Services at (508) 476-2715.

Wetland Preservation

Over the last two decades an invasive reed grass, *Phragmites australis*, has migrated into Sandy Neck's fresh water swale system reducing native vegetation and wildlife habitat value. Like many invasive species this plant is very persistent and difficult to eradicate. Sandy Neck Park Manager, Nina Coleman, has spent ten years eliminating this pesky plant from Sandy Necks wetland areas and cranberry bogs. Without intervention this plant would completely take over these unique habitats and eliminate all native species. In 2012, 67 wetlands were treated to increase biodiversity and restore native vegetation. Sandy Neck staff also removed an invasive *Panicum* grass and spotted knapweed when encountered.

Sandy Neck Beach Park

Park Manager
Nina Coleman

Natural Resource Officer
Christopher Nappi

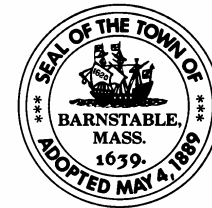
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For the latest Sandy Neck information
visit the Sandy Neck website at:

www.town.barnstable.ma.us
(Click on Sandy Neck Beach Park)



Sandy Neck TRACKS is compiled at the end of
each season by Christopher Nappi

All questions and comments are welcome.
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