

the NATURALIST CORNER

Brought to you by Peggy Potts
Coastal Master Naturalist

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As a graduate of the Coastal Master Naturalist Program offered through the Clemson University Cooperative Extension, I would like to share my excitement and enthusiasm about the many wonders of nature that can be enjoyed and experienced in the lowcountry. Through this monthly column, I will share my observations, sightings, and characteristics about a variety of nature topics, such as common insects, migrating birds and butterflies, wildflowers and plants and more. Basically, anything in nature is fair game to learn about and explore.

I also encourage you to share your observations and experiences so that we can learn about our natural world together. Please feel free to send in pictures and/or information of anything you find interesting by emailing me, Peggy Potts, at ppotts@charlestoncounty.org.

Protect the Diamondback Terrapin! By: Peggy Potts



It was about this time last year when our very observant office services specialist, Aaron Norris, noticed a turtle burying eggs in the bed next to the mail box at the PSB building. Public Works was notified and

they kindly roped off the area so no one would step on the eggs by accident. It turned out that it was a Diamondback terrapin.

The Post and Courier recently published an article about a study that the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is conducting regarding the importance of this species to the salt marsh.

The terrapins eat the periwinkle snails which are in abundance in the marsh. The snails destroy the grass and can turn a marsh into a mud flat. At one time the Diamondback terrapins were almost brought to extinction due to the demand for their tasty meat. Laws were put in place to protect it; but, according to DNR, this small terrapin is still a species thought to be in long term decline.

The Diamondback also eats fish, worms, clams, crabs and marsh plants. They are found along the Atlantic Coast of

the eastern United States from Cape Cod to the Florida Keys and west along the Gulf Coast to Texas.

They are believed to be the only turtle in the world that lives exclusively in brackish water; so, they can be found in tidal marshes, estuaries and lagoons. They prefer sandy beaches for the nesting sites and can lay up to 12 eggs with a 60 day gestation period. Threats to the turtles include habitat destruction, road construction and drowning in crab traps.

A DNR wildlife biologist is currently working to refine the excluder devices for crab traps that would keep the turtles out. Until then, keep an eye out for our Diamondback friends. They help keep our marshes intact serving as a filter to keep our water clean.

As was noted in the P&C article, "The marshes are the heart of the estuary, the miles of sweeping grasses vital to its wildlife and water quality, the nursery of countless marine creatures, including shrimp." We never did know if the little hatchlings at the PSB building made it out and back to the water safely. We like to think they are alive and well. We never know what we may discover just going about our daily activities and the significance these discoveries are to our natural world.

Charleston County Greenbelt Program

A place you might spot a Diamondback terrapin, is at the Town of Kiawah Island's Beachwalker Drive fishing pier. The Greenbelt Program provided funding for improvements to this site. For additional information, visit the website for the Town of Kiawah Island at www.kiawahisland.org. Visit the Greenbelt Program website at <http://charlestoncountygreenbelt.org> and follow us on Instagram and the County's Facebook page. Don't forget you can earn "Lifestyle Loot" through the Wellness Program when you visit a Greenbelt site and post pictures using #ccgreenbelt.