

WBSTP

Policies and Procedures for Nest Excavations

Following a nest boil, a nest excavation will be scheduled to occur three days later, during the evening. You, as a volunteer, will be notified of the location, date, and time of the excavation by email. During an excavation, the nest chamber is dug up to inventory the number of empty egg shells, unhatched eggs, deceased hatchlings, and live hatchlings. This is data that we contribute to state-wide records.

Any live hatchlings that are found inside the nest are released and allowed to make their way to the ocean. You may invite friends, neighbors and family members to attend nest excavations.



Highlights/Key things to know:

- Our #1 priority at nest excavations is to be positive ambassadors and a voice for the turtles.
- It is important **not** to touch, handle, pick up, or interact with the hatchlings. Impeding a hatchling's trek to the ocean hurts its chances for survival.
- If you attend an excavation as a volunteer, you must be prepared to interact with community members, answer questions, and represent our organization in a **positive** way. Excavations can be very crowded and it is important to treat all attendees and other volunteers respectfully.
- Sometimes there are no hatchlings remaining inside the nest chamber. This means we have a lot of disappointed attendees. We must do our best to ensure they still have a positive experience and learn something about our native nesting sea turtles.



What to expect:

- Plan to arrive at the excavation site at least 15 minutes prior to its scheduled start time.
- When you arrive, you will see a runway trench that has been dug from the nest to the ocean. This runway will be roped off to allow a safe distance between spectators and hatchlings.
- You should expect a large crowd of spectators.



What to wear:

- Wear your black “Volunteer” shirt.
- If you do not have a Volunteer shirt, please wear dark clothing and ask Nancy for a volunteer identification badge prior to the start of the excavation.
- Do *not* wear any kind of bug spray to a nest excavation. Bug spray is poison and we do not know how this will affect the hatchlings.



What to do:

There are two different very important jobs that need to be fulfilled at nest excavations.

1. Trench Volunteer-

- Volunteers who participated in nest sitting with a specific nest will be designated as trench volunteers.
- As a trench volunteer, you will be stationed inside the roped-off runway area at the nest excavation.
- Please wear latex gloves.
- When you arrive, choose a spot along the side of the trench, inside the roped-off area. Place yourself evenly among the other trench volunteers.
- Please squat or sit down. Do not walk or move along the sides of the runway trench. Do not follow the hatchlings as they progress down the runway.
- As a trench volunteer, photographs are ***not*** permitted. Under no circumstances should your phone or camera be held near or over a hatchling. Feel free to give your camera to someone outside the trench to document the excavation for you.
- If a hatchling starts to walk outside of the trench, place a hand down to redirect the hatchling inside the trench. Let your hand serve as a wall or barrier to get the hatchling to turn around.
- ***Do not, under any circumstances, pick up or carry a hatchling.***
- Do not use flashlights, flashes, or any type of light.
- As a trench volunteer, do not walk in the trench for any reason. Once the hatchlings have traveled down the runway trench, you may move outside the ropes and down towards the ocean to watch the hatchlings enter the water.

(2) Crowd Ambassador-

- The majority of volunteers will serve as crowd ambassadors.
- As a crowd ambassador, you will be stationed outside the roped-off area at the nest excavation. Your job will be to greet crowd members with a smile, answer questions, and serve as a model spectator.
- There will be many more humans than hatchlings at an excavation, and it is important to ensure each guest has a good experience and learns something new about our native nesting sea turtles.
- When you arrive at the nest excavation, please pick up a stack of free postcards and offer them to spectators within the crowd. You may also wish to share informative videos or photos on your phone or tablet.
- You are the voice of the turtles. Please be willing to share information with people who have questions.
- As you move about within the crowd, you will notice many people with cameras and phones. Please **politely** remind people that any sort of flash may not be used, because the hatchlings are emerging from an underground nest, and the bright light will injure their eyes. (Explaining *why* is helpful.)
- Crowd ambassadors can take photographs behind the roped-off runway lines with no flash.
- As the hatchlings travel down the runway, please politely remind people not to use flashes, and to keep their arms and legs outside the roped off runway area.
- Once the hatchlings have traveled down the runway, you may move down toward the ocean to watch the hatchlings enter the water.



Important tips to remember:

- Whether you are a trench volunteer or a crowd ambassador, it is likely that you will receive lots of questions from crowd members. Please be as courteous as possible.
- Photography is **only** permitted without a flash for both spectators and volunteers.
- Photography is **only** permitted outside the roped-off runway for both spectators and volunteers.
- Hatchlings should not be picked up or carried for any reason.
- Hatchlings may not be touched, petted or handled by friends, family or spectators for any reason.



Nest excavation crowd member frequently asked questions:

1. **Q:** What kind of sea turtle nest is this?
A: It is a loggerhead sea turtle nest. Loggerheads are a threatened species.

2. **Q:** How long do the nests take to hatch?
A: Loggerhead sea turtle nests take approximately 60 days to hatch. Some hatch more quickly, as quick as 45 days. We've had some take as long as 70 days. Nests incubate more quickly when the weather is hotter.

3. **Q:** How many hatchlings already came out of the nest?
A: This answer will vary; you can look for the exact number in Nancy's email updates. Generally, a nest contains around 100 eggs.

4. **Q:** Why is it important for the hatchlings to walk to the water by themselves?
A: It is widely believed that during this walk, hatchlings learn the unique qualities of their natal beach so that they can return to it to nest one day. Beach characteristics may include smell, low-frequency sounds, celestial cues, and magnetic fields (which are also used by migratory birds).

5. **Q:** Can you notify me when a nest is about to hatch?
A: No, there is no way for us to know for sure when a nest will hatch, and when it does hatch, it happens very quickly. Our volunteers who witness a nest hatching often sit and wait for hours for several nights in a row before the nest hatches.

6. **Q:** How can I learn more about sea turtles?
A: Please come to one of our free Turtle Talks. They take place every Tuesday evening through the end of August at 7 p.m. at the Coastal Federation's location on West Salisbury Street. You can also "like" our Facebook page for news and updates.

7. **Q:** How can I become a volunteer?
A: At this time, we are not accepting new volunteers. It is a season-long commitment (May through the end of August). If you would like to be notified of next spring's training meeting, which will take place in April, please email wbturtlewatchers@gmail.com

8. **Q:** Do you have special permission to work with the turtles and their nests?
A: Yes. The NC Wildlife Resources Commission issues us a permit each year to carry out our protection and conservation efforts. We follow very specific mandates and guidelines at all times. Sea turtle nests are protected by both state and federal laws.