



# Turtle Times

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April 2026

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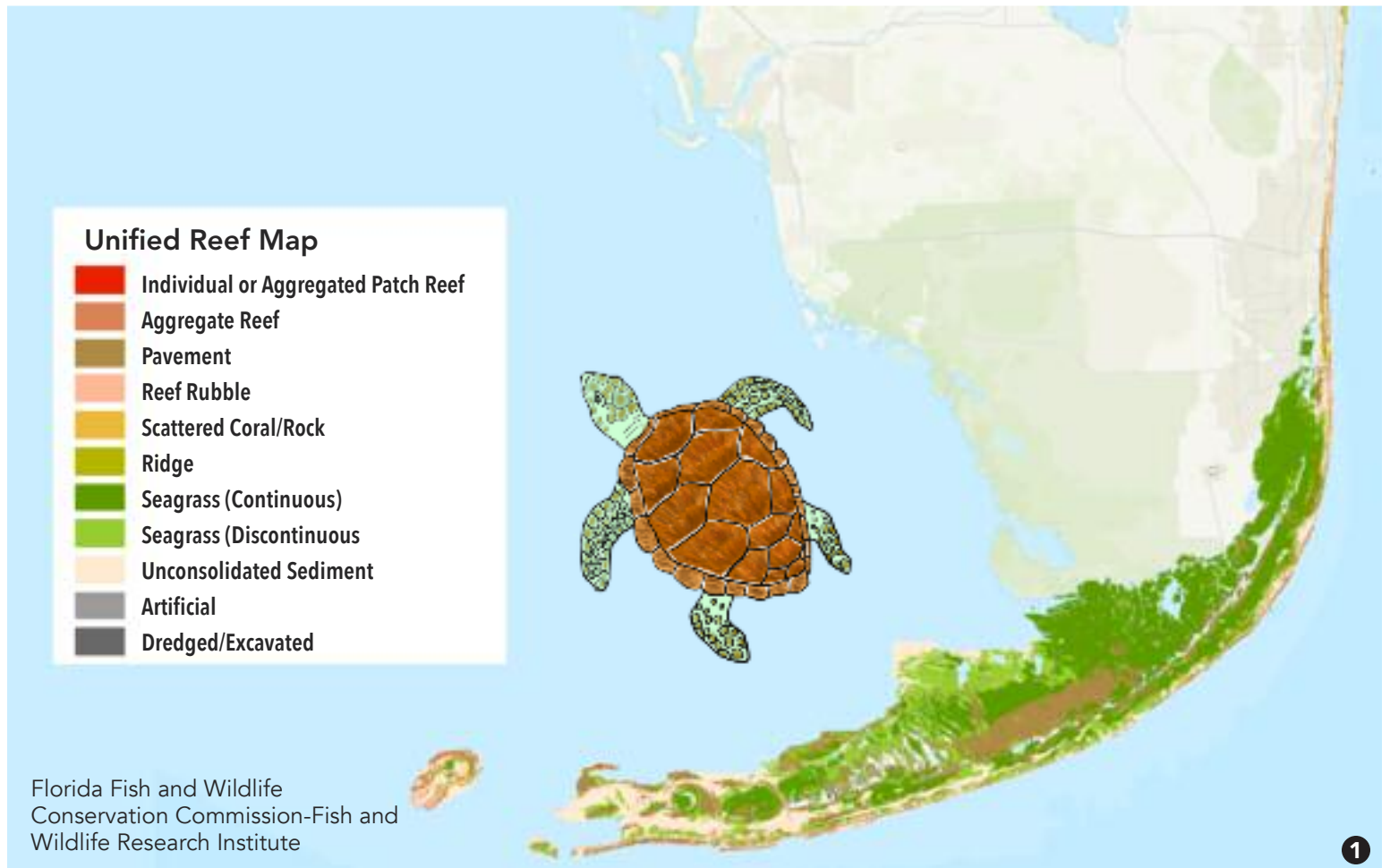
## Our History is a Treasure: Chapter Forty *By Jan Otten*

**FLORIDA** – the very word conjures up all kinds of thoughts and pictures. This southernmost U.S. state is in a truly unique geographical position on the map! What is it that makes Florida such an extraordinary place to live – to vacation and certainly become the “go to” place for retirement?

It begins with its apt nickname, the sunshine state, with warm weather year-round, averaging 250 days of sunshine, and temperatures that rarely fall below freezing. Florida offers a year-round abundance of outdoor activities, featuring golfing, boating, fishing, diving, and beach activities. In addition, there is an extraordinary wealth of beautiful flora and a diverse range of wildlife that is found nowhere else in the United States, and in some cases, the world.

This very unique peninsula is surrounded on three sides by the Gulf of Mexico on the west, the mighty Atlantic on the east, and the Straits of Florida to the south. Its coastline measures approximately 1,305 statute miles with about 825 miles of sandy beaches. At no point in Florida is one more than 60 miles from saltwater. Add to that more than 7,700 lakes that are over 10 acres in size; 33 natural springs; and about 4,500 islands greater than 10 acres. A few miles off the Florida Keys is the Florida Reef; the only living coral barrier reef in the United States. It is the third largest coral barrier in the world. Only the Great Barrier Reef and the Belize Barrier Reef are larger.

In addition to all of the recreational opportunities, Florida has no income tax, so it is financially attractive to residents,



retirees, and businesses. There is a wide range of lifestyle options from quiet coastal towns to luxury communities, and bustling cities like Miami. And let us not forget the major attractions such as Disney World and Universal Studios, to name just a couple.

Are there any natural risks to living in the sunshine state? Well, hurricanes of course. From June 1 through November 30 Florida is potentially in the path for tropical storms and hurricanes. Some of these storms can cause significant damage to property and infrastructure. Residents prepare in advance for these possible occurrences and are advised to heed the warnings and evacuation notices. And Central Florida is known as the lightning capital of the United States because it experiences more lightning strikes than anywhere else in the country. Interestingly, earthquakes are not a threat and very rare because Florida is not located near any tectonic plate boundaries.

It is very important to note that because of its abundance of extraordinary beaches and waterways, Florida's natural environment is very much in need of protection. The coastlines and waterways are critical to the economy of the state, but even more importantly, because so much of the flora and fauna are truly unique, it is vitally important to take measures to care for the fragile ecosystems that abound here.

The majority of Florida's universities and colleges offer studies relating to the environment, and there are many organizations within the state and nationally, that are devoted to the protection, rehabilitation and education of these fragile ecosystems.

The National Save the Sea Turtle Foundation, a non-profit, now in its 39th year, is one such organization that does a phenomenal job of protecting the marine environment. Frank

Wojcik created the organization in 1987 based on his deep concern for protecting the marine environment at his home in the Florida Keys. He began supporting environmental education programs and public awareness events across the state. Eventually he developed a Gift Program enabling the Foundation to assist dozens of worthwhile charitable organizations with their sea turtle conservation programs in Florida and abroad. From sea turtle rescue efforts to innovative public education programs, the National Save the Sea Turtle Foundation is here to help.

The Foundation's Scholarship Program provides tuition stipends at multiple universities across Florida and including the University of the Virgin Islands. Along with their academic advisors, the future scientists they support are all contributing to sea turtle biology and conservation through their thesis and dissertation research.

*Continued on page 6.*



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*(Occasionally the date changes due to specific events)*

We gather to complete an outreach project as well as to support and pray for each other.

Some of the projects that we have been involved in thus far are:

- Honoring firefighters, helping the homeless, single pregnant women, those in addiction recovery, prison ministry, foster children, animal rescue, Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes for Samaritan's Purse,

If you are interested in joining or supporting Contagious Compassion, please call or text Terry Andrus at **561-676-4291** or [savedbygodagain@gmail.com](mailto:savedbygodagain@gmail.com)

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That legacy began in 1904 with O'Connor Construction in Boston, founded by Richard O'Connell's great-grandfather, Thomas O'Connor. Built on discipline, craftsmanship, and enduring quality, the company helped shape generations of builders, including Richard, who entered the field early, working as a union laborer while earning his degree in Civil Engineering.

In 2000, Richard founded Primus as President and majority shareholder, while simultaneously leading East Coast operations for Subzero Constructors, a specialized West Coast firm. Over the next two decades, he grew Primus into a nationally and internationally recognized leader—delivering complex projects across the United States, Canada, and Mexico, and earning consistent recognition among top contractors and best places to work.

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Presentations begin at 7 p.m. at the  
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9141 SE Apollo St., Hobe Sound, FL 33455

Tickets are \$15 at the door. Reserve your seat in advance at [apolloschoolfoundation@aol.com](mailto:apolloschoolfoundation@aol.com) or buy at Eventbrite for \$17.85 through our website, [www.apolloschool.org](http://www.apolloschool.org).

### House of Refuge: Place of Hope

Thursday, April 16, 2026 – Catherine Larsen

Ms. Larsen, Keeper of the House of Refuge, will share stories of this historic 150-year-old structure, the oldest building in Martin County. Built as a sanctuary for shipwrecked mariners and travelers at a time when access to our area could be accomplished only by sea, this is the last of 10 such facilities that were once active along the Atlantic Coast.

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**Some Sea Turtle Trivia**

- Globally there are 7 species of sea turtles (Hawksbill, Loggerhead, Leatherback, Olive ridley, Green, Flatback, and Kemp's ridley) — all are listed as threatened or in danger of extinction (mostly due to human activities.)
- Over 1,000 die annually from plastic entanglement, with over half having ingested debris, mistaking plastic for food.
- Only 1 in 1,000 hatchlings reach adulthood.
- Rising temperatures are feminizing populations, with warmer sand creating almost exclusively female hatchlings. Warm sand produces females; cool sand produces males.
- Other dangers include natural predators like tiger sharks (which can bite through shells) and killer whales; hatchlings are heavily preyed on by birds, crabs, and fish.
- Sea turtles cannot retract their heads and flippers like land turtles.
- Sea turtles have been around for about 100 million years. They existed along with dinosaurs.
- Never touch, chase, feed, or attempt to ride turtles. It is illegal and harmful – per the U.S. Endangered Species Act.
- Sea turtles do not have teeth. They have sharp, powerful beaks and jaws specially adapted to their diet.
- Sea turtles breathe air, but also have the ability, to remain submerged for hours. They can even sleep underwater and most spend their entire life at sea, only returning to nesting beaches to lay eggs.

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# One Big Fish - One Brotherhood

Fishing the Bisbee's East Cape Tournament is always intense with a potential million-dollar 1st place prize, but this past year felt very different from the start. The moment that fish hit, everything else faded away. "Fish on", the crew yelled! Captain Eddy got the boat and team ready to haul in whatever type of aquatic beast was on the other end of the line.

After an amazing fight with a black Marlin, it was clear. We were boating this fish and taking it to the scales. When we finally got this monstrous marlin into the boat, it was one of those moments you wish you could freeze time. Not because we thought we had won, but because we knew we had done something special together that we were never able to pull off in any other tournament.

Out there during the Bisbees, it felt like all those years growing up as brothers came full circle. We began to celebrate on the ride into the marina, knowing right away there was a strong chance of winning the whole darn thing.

When we got back to the dock, we felt on top of the world. We got the marlin onto the scale and it weighed in at a 394lb Black Marlin - and we were sitting in first place with almost no time to spare. However, with just ten minutes left in the tournament, another team hauled in a 404-pound marlin and narrowly pushed us into 2nd.

You could feel the energy shift—but honestly, there wasn't much disappointment. Sure, first place would've been incredible, but standing there next to Rich knowing what we had just accomplished, felt priceless. Second place netted us \$353,890 and was an experience I'll never forget.

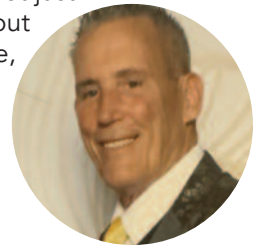
What makes it even more special is that this was our 15th time fishing this tournament—and the first time we've ever won money. After years of showing up, putting in the effort, and coming up short, the winnings may have brought us back to breakeven. This past year was different, not just because we went to the scales and came in 2nd place, but because being out there on the Suerchingo with my older brother, Rich—just like we've done so many times before—reminded me why we keep coming back.



Rich O'Connell and Mark O'Connell with their prize-winning catch, Cabo San Lucas, 2025.

But more importantly, it gave us another story—one we'll be telling forever. At the end of the day, it's not just about the fish or the prize money. Being out there with my brother, doing what we love, and making memories that last a lifetime was the best part of it all.

Mark O'Connell  
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The majority of the Foundation's resources are directed to several organizations, but their in-house programs include the Florida Hawksbill Project and their Reel It In For The Reefs Cleanup. The Hawksbill Project is the first and only long-term research and conservation program primarily focused on this critically endangered species of sea turtle in Florida. The Reel It In For The Reefs annual event brings hundreds of scuba divers together to remove fishing line, plastic, and other harmful debris from Florida's beautiful coral reefs.

If you've been reading the Turtle Times for a while you'll recognize the name Larry Wood, PhD. as one of our contributing writers. Dr. Wood has been working with sea turtles in Florida for over 30 years. He had a lifelong interest in biology, particularly reptiles, which eventually led him to Juno Beach. There he undertook sea turtle nesting beach surveys and helped to develop a sea turtle rehabilitation facility while creating numerous public awareness and marine education programs.

In 2004 Dr. Wood established the Comprehensive Florida Hawksbill Research and Conservation Program. This is the first and only long-term study of hawksbill turtles in Florida. Through the years he has contributed to sea turtle conservation in many ways some of which include articles in several publications, presentations at seminars and conferences, and very importantly his mentorships of students and volunteers. He is currently pursuing his research and public education interests with the National Save The Sea Turtle Foundation, who proudly supports the Florida Hawksbill Project.

In the Hawksbill Project they have to date captured and documented over 300 individual turtles between Jupiter and Key West. Indications are that though this is not a large number compared to other sea turtle species in Florida, their expanding database indicates how supportive the reefs of Florida are for young hawksbill turtles showing an overall regional significance for their recovery. The reefs of Palm Beach County are primarily home to hawksbills during their sub-adult or "teen age" years. Since most sea turtles are found in different geographic locations during different stages of their development, The Hawksbill Project has learned that these youngsters will at some

point leave the reefs of Palm Beach County to spend the rest of their lives elsewhere as adults.

To gain valuable insight on the movement and growth patterns, the captured individual turtles are tagged and released so that when they are encountered repeatedly over time, they can be independently identified and further studied. Some of the hawksbills in the program suggest that the sub-adults may remain in the area for approximately 15 years. Blood samples have estimated the male: female ratio to be about 1:2.5. Dozens of tagged hawksbills have been reported within the study site, some individuals since the inception of the study in 2004, all within close proximity to where they were captured. And through this program so much more has been learned about this particular sea turtle species.

Studies like the Hawksbill Project are just a tiny speck in the scheme of the very fragile environment that is in need of protection and rehabilitation. That being said, its studies and research are a critical part of a much larger overall picture of



*Researchers equip an adult male green sea turtle with a satellite transmitter to help understand his movements. Photo: Dean Bagley*

**Larry Wood and a Hawksbill Turtle**



what is occurring all around the state. In addition to learning about the many endangered species that call Florida home is a very important effort to help clean and maintain the natural world in which they live. It is truly a melding of significant efforts – research, learn, educate and most definitely to preserve the various habitats.

The other part of the National Save the Sea Turtle Foundation is their project, Reel It In For The Reefs Cleanup. This Palm Beach County based nonprofit organization is set for the 3rd year to once again make an impact on the fragile reefs of Florida. Each year, divers, local boat dive operators, and volunteers unite from Stuart to Miami to remove debris and

protect the reefs. Though these underwater habitats might be out of sight, they are essential to marine life, tourism, and coastal communities. Last year they collected 1,200 pounds of trash and 95.5 miles of fishing line. Of course, their goal for 2026 is even higher – they hope to collect 2,000 pounds of trash and 120 miles of fishing line (the length of the coastline the volunteers will cover from Stuart through Miami!)

**Mark your calendar**, the date for this most auspicious occasion is **Friday, April 24, 2026**. If you'd like to help by volunteering or making a donation visit their website at **[www.reelitinthereefs.org](http://www.reelitinthereefs.org)**.

They are located at 11911 U.S. Highway 1, Ste. 309, North Palm Beach, FL 33408, Telephone 954-351-9333.



Watch Dr. Wood and team place a transmitter on an 80 pound Hawksbill turtle, named Althea, caught on Breakers Reef off the coast of West Palm Beach. The transmitter will allow the tracking of this turtle's movement over the year by sending daily satellite data on the direction, depth and location of Althea. The long-term goal is to describe foraging patterns and to understand how these sea turtles interact with their environment and utilize the habitat.



[youtube.com/watch?v=vH8Hlg2tF1g&t=13s](https://youtube.com/watch?v=vH8Hlg2tF1g&t=13s)



There are many more hawksbills than were expected! So far, just over 300 individuals have been captured and documented between Jupiter and Key West, and we continue to encounter new ones on a regular basis. Though not abundant compared to other sea turtle species in Florida, this expanding database indicates how supportive the reefs of Florida are for young hawksbill turtles, which has a regional significance for their overall recovery.



## The Tax Watchdog Report You Can't Ignore

Item	Amount	Notes
Administrative Costs	\$85,000	
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Consulting Fees	\$580,000	
New Facilities Project	\$3,750,000	
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## Sea Turtles on the Move

Every few years, adult sea turtles migrate between their feeding grounds and their nesting beaches and offshore mating habitats. Sometimes sea turtles swim across entire oceans for these migrations.

The most impressive sea turtle migrations are those made by leatherback turtles from nesting beaches in West Papua, Indonesia that travel across the entire Pacific Ocean to reach feeding areas off of the West Coast of the United States. One of these leatherbacks holds the record for the longest migration made by any marine vertebrate. A satellite tracked this sea turtle, tagged on Jamursba-Medi beach in Papua, Indonesia, to a foraging area off the coast of Oregon, United States, and back westward. This female leatherback was tracked for 647 days for 12,774 miles before the signal was lost.

When sea turtles hatch from their nests, they learn their home beach's distinctive magnetic signature through a process called geomagnetic imprinting. Even after as many as 30 years, when a sea turtle hatchling becomes a mature adult, it remembers the location from which it was born. The turtle is able to navigate thousands of miles back to the same beach (or nearby beach) to lay its eggs, an extraordinary process called natal homing.

### A little Trivia from Dictionary.com

**caparison:** [kuh-par-uh-suhn] verb. to dress richly – to caparison is to adorn with style

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# Touch Sand Fridays

We started the Beach Volleyball Club at Hobe Sound Beach about a month ago and it's been an awesome way to connect with others, get active, and immediately recharge after a stressful week. Touch sand on Friday!

What started as a casual idea at the Hobe Sound Beach Shop has turned into a weekly rhythm that people genuinely look forward to. From my side of things—it's been incredible to see our community show out, bring their friends, and simply have a good time. There's no pressure, no egos—just good energy, bare feet in the sand, and a shared excuse to stay out for sunset.

The games themselves have taken on a life of their own. Week one was a little chaotic—lots of missed serves and laughter—but by now, you can see the improvement. Teams are growing naturally, people are calling for the ball, and the rallies are getting longer (and way more competitive). The question I keep asking myself is, "When are we going to need a second volleyball net?"

What I love most is the mix of people: locals, total beginners, and a few sneaky-good players who keep things interesting. To the side of where volleyball takes place, there's always some spectators, folks playing cornhole, or my uncle Mark just hanging out nearby for the perfect Hobe Sound sunset.

We've seen families bring their young kids to play on the beach while the adults play volleyball. We've even seen baby

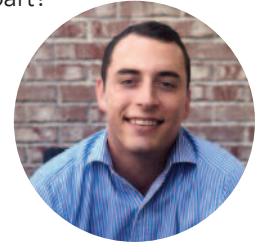


Come join the fun with the Friday Volleyball Club.

Tristan Grace's first beach day at this event. It's all ages, all skill levels, and an inclusive event that is designed to generate camaraderie and good times for the Hobe Sound community.


Four weeks in, it's clear this isn't just a pop-up event—it's becoming a staple. And the best part?

We're just getting started!




**Sean O'Connell**  
Director of Operations  
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# The Adventures of Shadow: Beach Patrol Begins

Woof! Hi, I am Shadow, a six-year-old Goldendoodle living the good life in Hobe Sound. My mornings begin whenever the last human decides it's time to get out of bed. Sometimes Liz wakes up early for a workout, which means Sean and I get extra time to sleep in together. Eventually everyone is up, and that means it's time for the most important job of the day: the morning walk at Jupiter Island Beach.

At the beach, I immediately report for sand patrol. There are important smells to investigate and fishermen to greet—especially the ones catching pompano. My other mission is chasing birds. Sometimes I see their shadows flying above me, and I launch like a rocket ship down the shoreline trying to keep up with them. Liz calls my name (or calls a few times if I am really far) and I head back proudly, pretending I almost caught one. The waves occasionally try to sneak up and get my fur wet, but I'm a professional and do my best to stay dry. Anything to prolong going to the groomers am I right!

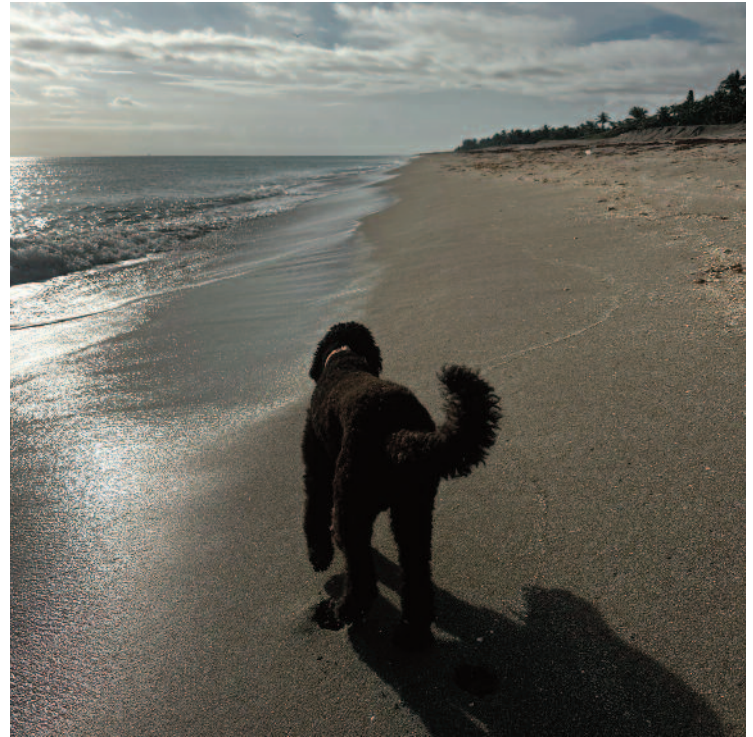
Back at home in Hobe Sound, I wind down from my beach duties by greeting my human friends (usually with a sock in my mouth—it's only polite). If I spot a lizard in the yard, the chase is quick and heroic, though they somehow escape at the last second. The rest of the day is spent napping in the air conditioning on the couch, hardwood floor, or my dog bed. When evening rolls around, I enjoy my favorite treat—ice cubes—and keep a watchful eye out for the freshest sock in the house.

But something unusual happened at the beach today... I discovered a mysterious new scent in the sand near the shoreline. I followed it for a while before Liz called me back,

but I'm not done investigating. Next month in The Shadow Chronicles, I'll report back on whether it belongs to a sneaky crab, a runaway sandwich... or something even more interesting.

Stay tuned. 🐾

By Shadow O'Connell



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## Upcoming Events



### Beach Volleyball Club

Every Friday from 5pm - 7pm  
Starting 2/27 @ Hobe Sound Beach  
- Post-Game at Sound Brewery from 7pm



### Champagne Sundays

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### Bubbles on Bridge Rd

2nd Saturday of every month  
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### Classic Car Show

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