

# Hammock Happenings

Gumbo Limbo Nature Center's Program Guide & Newsletter

July - August 2021

## Luna's Story Writing Contest - Luna is on Her Way!

What a turbulent year it has been! Now that we are all starting to reopen and explore, we want to hear from your budding writer: Where is Luna off to? Who is she visiting? How is she getting there? What adventures or challenges await her on her journey?

Partnering with our friends at the Boca Raton Public Library, Gumbo Limbo Nature Center is excited to announce the third year of Luna's Story Writing Contest. We invite young authors to write a unique story featuring Luna, our green sea turtle ambassador. Participants will have their stories judged by Gumbo Limbo and Library staff, and one winner from each age group will be selected.

The winning story will be featured in a special story time program at the Boca Raton Public Library, and the winning authors will be awarded a prize package sponsored by the Friends of Gumbo Limbo. Stories must be submitted before end of day Sunday, July 25. Check out our [website](#) for more details about the contest and visit our [YouTube channel](#) to listen to last year's top stories.

*By Cory Keester-O'Mills, Exhibits Coordinator*



## Manager's Corner

As I write this, we are increasing the amount of our onsite and in person programming and we are looking towards a future when we can welcome you all back on site! We are gradually getting back to a somewhat normal schedule and our volunteers are starting to return to their posts. Changes are happening quickly, and most of them will probably become official after this issue of *Hammock Happenings* goes to print. Make sure to bookmark our [website](#) and check our social media channels frequently for the most up to date changes.

Limited guided tours started on June 1 and our first in-person Little Wonders and Nature Detectives was also in June. We have had so much fun being able to share our facility in-person with the small groups. Our fish residents are happy to see people, too – I think they were getting a little bored with no change in scenery or visitors for 15 months! Check back to our [June 2020](#) issue for a story about how much our fish missed our visitors. Also, our Gumbo Limbo Environmental Camp starts this month, and I can't wait to see our campers smiling faces again!

Thank you for all of your support: your calls, your emails, and social media posts. We really do read them all and trust me when I say, we miss you as much as you miss us. Most of us here at Gumbo Limbo got into this field to become better stewards of our ecosystems and to share that spirit with others. When you do come back, we'll have a lot of new and exciting additions for you to see including new exhibits, new fish, an updated FAU visitors' gallery, and a new expanded sterile surgery room in our sea turtle hospital.

I really mean it when I say, "I hope to see you soon!"

~Leanne

## STEAM Grab Bags, Get them While They're Hot!



Less than thirty minutes.

That is how long it took for us to run out of supplies last year when we gave away 200 **STEAM through September** home activity kits.

This year, your partners in Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math are teaming up to make another series of fun and FREE activity kits. Come along and explore the world of STEAM with Gumbo Limbo Nature Center, the Boca Raton Public Library, and the Children's Science Explorium.

We have created another round of our **STEAM through September** tote bags for your family to engage in STEAM-themed programming at home and around the City. 2021 **STEAM through September** totes will be available at [Sugar Sand Park](#) on Saturday, August 28, starting at 10:00 am. They will be available on a first-come-first-served basis, with a limit of one activity tote per family, until supplies run out. So get ready, get set, and STEAM on over! These kits will go fast!

*By Cory Keester-O'Mills, Exhibits Coordinator*



# In Search of the Elusive Eastern Spotted Skunk

When was the last time you took a leisurely early morning or evening stroll along the Gumbo Limbo boardwalk? Maybe you are due for another visit! Our boardwalk is open from 7:30 am until sunset, with parking available at Red Reef Park West. There, among the fallen branches, underbrush, and hollow logs of the tropical hardwood hammock, dwells an intriguing, elusive (and strangely adorable) member of the weasel family, the Eastern spotted skunk.

This smaller relative of the commonly known striped skunk is about the size of a squirrel, weighing only 1-2 pounds. Unlike its heavy-bodied, striped cousin, the eastern spotted skunk has a slender, weasel-like body with a series of broken stripes giving it a spotted appearance. It is the more common of the two species found in our Southeast Florida coastal habitats and it is the only skunk that can climb trees. It is a nocturnal hunter that feeds on rodents, reptiles, birds, eggs, and insects, but it is an omnivore, balancing its diet with plants, seeds, and berries. At dusk you may encounter one or more snuffling among the leaves as they forage for food.

A female spotted skunk, called a sow, usually gives birth to 4-6 young, which she will nurse in their den for about two months. By three months, the kits are almost fully grown, and accompanying their mother on foraging trips. They may stay with the mother until they are ready to mate. In Florida, due to the long warm season, spotted skunks may breed twice per year. So, from mid-summer to late fall, you could catch a glimpse of a cautious female hurrying her family to safety under the boardwalk or into a den in a hollow log.



The common name, skunk, is derived from a word in the Algonquian dialect meaning “one who squirts”. The Latin name, *Spilogale putorius*, means “stinking spotted weasel”. Early in the morning, in the hammock, you may smell the acrid tell-tale odor left behind from a spotted skunk’s encounter with a predator. Like the striped skunk, the spotted skunk has powerful scent glands below the tail and is not hesitant to use them. However, only the spotted skunk is known for its unusual spraying posture. When threatened, it will first stomp its feet and give a warning hiss or squeal. Then it will stand on its fore legs in a “handstand”, tail extended over the head, trying to look as large and threatening as possible. If these warnings fail to deter the predator, it releases a foul-smelling spray of musk, aimed at the face of the attacker. Skunks can spray accurately up to 10-15 feet, and they usually do not miss!

You never know when nature is going to provide a quick glimpse of the hidden lives of animals in the hammock, so it is always wise to keep your camera ready when you walk on the boardwalk. Seeing spotted skunks in their natural habitat is a rare treat; they are good at blending into their surroundings, and they avoid human contact (after all, to them, am I just another hungry predator?). Should you happen to hear the snuffling and see a flash of black and white, watch quietly from a distance (at least 10-15 feet!) and consider yourself fortunate to have encountered the elusive spotted skunk.

*By Susan Elliot, Environmental Program Coordinator*

## Behind the Scenes: Gel Diet Enrichment

Not all our aquarium inhabitants are carnivores; some consume algae and seagrasses in the natural environment making them herbivores. But how do we replicate this plant matter in our aquarium feedings? We accomplish this in two different ways. The first I'm going to talk about today and the second will be the subject of a future *Hammock Happenings* article.



One way to offer the algae our residents like to graze on is to use a gel food. We order a powdered gel diet from a zoo and aquarium company that makes all different types of gel supplements. For our animals, we use a specific blend called Herbivore Aquatic gel diet to make sure that the diet is mostly made of plant matter for our resident herbivores. We make this gelatin just like you make Jell-O at home! We mix a little hot water with the gel powder to make a paste. We put this paste into various sized silicone ice cube trays and allow it to cool here, and then freeze them. This provides us with convenient blocks that we can then feed to our different aquariums.

But who eats these gel blocks you ask? They are primarily intended for our parrotfish, surgeonfish, angelfish, and urchins, but just about everyone else enjoys some veggies when they get the chance. Often, we will see the Spanish hogfish, the sergeant majors, or even the southern stingrays munching on the gel blocks. We provide several blocks to each aquarium so that all the different fish get a chance to take a few bites each day. To occasionally change it up, we will cool the gel on a silicone baking sheet and use cookie cutters to cut out shapes for the holidays. This provides enrichment for our fish because they get the gel in a different shape than what they are used to, and it even provides some enrichment to our visitors as they watch the fish and urchins graze away on snowmen or jack-o-lanterns!



Stay tuned for a future article on the other way we provide plant food items to our herbivorous residents. And as always, keep your fishy friends close and your anemones closer.

*By: Bryan Danson, Aquarist*

# From Egg to Hatchling, the Odds are Not in Favor for a Baby Sea Turtle

It's that time of year when sea turtle nests are hatching, and baby turtles are scrambling to the ocean. The first few days, weeks, months, and even years are not easy. Even within the safety of the sand and the protective nest perimeter our sea turtle conservation staff puts around the nests, there are no guarantees that all the eggs will hatch, or if a hatchling will make it out of the nest, or to the ocean, alive.

In any given year, we may have a total of one thousand sea turtle nests along our five miles of beach in Boca Raton. Each one of these nests has a clutch of about 100 golf ball sized eggs buried two to three feet deep in the sand. The egg chamber is roundish in shape with a tightly compacted ceiling of sand above it where the female turtle covered and patted it to protect her brood. Beneath this ceiling there is a lot of sand-free space between eggs allowing exchange gasses within the surrounding environment. While being laid, the eggs are rubbery and bounce off one another as they fall into place. They become more paper-like and easily tear when it's time for the hatchlings to break free. The incubation time is about two months and when they are ready, the hatchlings will erupt from the sand all at once under the cover of the darkness of the night.



So, what threats do they encounter? What makes life in an egg and as a hatchling so difficult? For starters, sea turtle nesting season coincides with hurricane season, so there is always a possibility nests will get washed away during episodes of significant beach erosion. But a larger threat comes from predators like foxes and raccoons. They patrol the beach at night sniffing around sea turtle nests. Their keen sense of smell allows them to pinpoint the location of the clutch and they sometimes dig deep enough to reach and feast on the eggs and developing embryos. Ghost crabs and skunks can also have burrows adjacent to nests and take eggs from the clutch. And believe it or not, if a nest is in or near the dunes, roots from vegetation can invade the egg chamber and prevent them from hatching, a phenomenon called root predation.

If a hatchling survives the incubation environment and reaches the surface of the sand after hatching, many more dangers await. Foxes, raccoons, and ghost crabs can pick off hatchlings as they make their way to the sea, and shorebirds wait at the water's edge to do the same. After entering the water, a long swim out to the edge of Gulf Stream current awaits. There, hatchlings will find large patches of sargassum seaweed, a source of food and shelter. If a hatchling reaches these patches of seaweed, its odds become much better as they are then well-camouflaged. They can finally rest, feed, and float with the seaweed in the ocean's current.





In the case of South Florida, however, the swim offshore involves traversing several reefs with hungry fish below, not to mention hungry birds in the sky. Their destination of seaweed also has large fish such as triple tail and mahi taking shelter beneath it, both of which can easily take a hatchling in one gulp. While the mats of seaweed appear as a safe haven, it is often littered with tiny pieces of plastic, Styrofoam, and other marine debris. Hatchlings mistake these foreign objects as food, an unfortunate and lethal circumstance.



Finally, an even more tragic - yet preventable - reason sea turtle hatchlings have such difficult odds, is artificial light pollution. Every year, thousands of hatchlings never even make it from the nest to the water because they become disoriented by lights. For millions of years hatchlings have instinctively crawled towards the brighter horizon of the stars and moon reflecting off the ocean and away from the dark shadows of the dunes. Unfortunately, the brightest horizon today is landward. Hatchlings become easily disoriented by beachfront lighting of hotels, restaurants, and condos, or simply by the bright glow in the sky produced by heavily urbanized areas. Regardless of the source of lighting, the result is the same. Hatchlings can wander around all night and into the next day, succumbing to predators and exhaustion.



It is believed that only one out of every one thousand hatchlings survive to adulthood. Realistically, the odds are probably worse now since humans have an ever-increasing negative impact on our oceans and environment. This is why our sea turtle conservation team at Gumbo Limbo takes so much pride in what we do. This is why we place perimeters around every nest on our beaches and check on each nest every single day until they hatch. Every nest, every egg, and every hatchling is important because the odds are certainly not in their favor.

*By David Anderson, Sea Turtle Conservation Coordinator*

# Programs

When we went into publication of this issue, Gumbo Limbo Nature Center was not open for public visitation but we do have some of our in-person programs available for preregistered guests in limited numbers. We are adding new programs all the time, so please check our [website](#) often. You will also find information on prerecorded tours, activities for children, and updates on opening.

## Guided Tours

Naturalist-guided tours last approximately an hour and a half. Participants will tour the Butterfly Garden on the way to the shaded Ashley Trail loop, with a stop in the authentic Seminole Chiki with breathtaking views of the water. We will see some of our patients in the Sea Turtle Rehabilitation Facility and get an up-close look at the fish, stingrays, and resident sea turtles in our outdoor aquariums. Parts of the walking tour take place on a mulched trail.

- Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays; times vary by day (see website for details)
- Cost per person: Residents/Members \$5; Non-resident/Non-members \$8. Children under 3 are free. Same day registration is \$10 per person at the gate if space is available (credit cards only).
- Advanced reservations are required through Webtrac. See our [website](#) for instructions.

## Little Wonders and Nature Detectives

Welcome back to in-person programs for our youngest naturalists! The children's programs will be held outdoors and will allow you and your child to learn about the wonders of nature together through monthly themed story times, explorations, and crafts.

- Saturdays; July 10, August 14
- 10:00 am - Little Wonders (ages 3-4)  
12:00 pm - Nature Detectives (ages 5-6)
- Cost per child: Resident/Member \$8, Non-resident/Non-member \$10.  
No cost for adult (one adult per family)
- Advanced reservations are required through Webtrac. See our [website](#) for instructions.
- In order to limit group size, we ask that only one adult per family attend, and that no older or younger siblings accompany that adult.



## Intracoastal Adventures: Kayaking

Beautiful scenery, fresh air, and exercise! Explore the Intracoastal shores by kayak while learning about the fascinating mangrove and estuary ecosystems of South Florida. Must have kayaking experience and be able to get in and out of a kayak without assistance. Single/double kayaks will be assigned to couples/groups as available. Advanced reservations required through Webtrac beginning July 5 for residents/members, and July 12 for all others. See our [website](#) for instructions.

- Saturday, August 7 9:00-10:30 am; Sunday, August 8 10:00-11:30 am
- Saturday, August 14 2:00-3:30 pm; Sunday, August 15 12:00-1:30 pm
- Saturday, August 21 9:00-10:30 am; Sunday, August 22 10:00-11:30 am
- Saturday, August 28 2:00-3:30 pm; Sunday, August 29 12:00-1:30 pm
- Ages 7-adult; children under 18 must sign-up and participate with an adult.
- Cost per person: Resident/Member \$20, Non-resident/Non-member \$25
- Programs are subject to cancellation due to inclement weather or minimum registration. Refunds available only if the program is cancelled.

# Friends of Gumbo Limbo

## Migration Madness - Our First Summer Activity

We are kicking off with a [virtual 10K](#) in partnership with BadAss. But it doesn't have to stop there! You can continue to add up miles all summer long to see how far we can go for Gumbo Limbo. We will continuously add up our miles and compare them to not just the turtles we track, but also sea turtle average migration distances on our social media feeds this summer. [Sign-up here.](#)

## Migration Madness

How far will you go?



## Coastal Stewardship

Help to advocate and advance the conservation of our coastal and marine environment to create a secure future for generations to come. [Become a Coastal Steward](#) and join our special team of supporters dedicated to advancing our mission of protecting nature from the reefs to the mangroves.

## Adopt A Turtle

It can be tough to find the perfect gift... but look no further! Consider giving the gift of charity to those you care about. Hatchling or resident sea turtle "adoptions" available at [GumboLimbo.org/Adopt.](#)

## Pave the Way

An engraved paver at Gumbo Limbo is a personalized way to show your support for our mission. Find out how you can help pave the way at [GumboLimbo.org/Pave-The-Way.](#)

## The Gumbo Limbo Gift Shop

Friends of Gumbo Limbo has worked hard at a complete overhaul of our store, with a strong focus on sustainable and recycled products. We're thrilled to announce our new online store, where you can shop from the safety of your own home while still supporting Gumbo Limbo! [ShopGumboLimbo.org.](#) Once we are able to open again, you'll be welcome in a store that will allow appropriate social distancing measures to ensure your safety.



**SHOP NOW!**

Buy your favorite Gumbo Limbo gear online and support marine and coastal conservation!  
100% of net proceeds go directly to support the operation of Gumbo Limbo Nature Center

[ShopGumboLimbo.org](#) 

## Get Social With Us!

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[Gumbo Limbo Nature Center, Inc](#)



[#LoveBocaRaton](#)

[Boca Raton Recreation](#)  
[City of Boca Raton Government](#)



Instagram

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[Gumbo Limbo Nature Center](#)

# Gumbo Limbo Nature Center

## Hours & Information

We remain closed to the public. Check [gumbolimbo.org](http://gumbolimbo.org) for updates on our opening.  
The Boardwalk is open 7:30 am - sunset with access from the Red Reef Park West parking lot.

General Information (561) 544-8605 · Volunteer (561) 544-8538  
Friends of Gumbo Limbo (561) 544-8608 · Gift Shop (561) 544-8610  
1801 North Ocean Boulevard, Boca Raton, Florida 33431  
[gumbolimbo.org](http://gumbolimbo.org)

Suggested donation of \$5 per person.  
Your donations go to [Gumbo Limbo Nature Center, Inc.](http://Gumbo Limbo Nature Center, Inc.) to support Gumbo Limbo Nature Center, including, but not limited to, feeding the animals, purchasing supplies and services for the Sea Turtle Rehabilitation Program, and creating exhibits.

## City of Boca Raton Recreation Services Staff

### Administration & Operations

Recreation Services Director - Michael Kalvort, CPRE  
Manager - Leanne Welch  
Volunteer Coordinator - Rebecca Germany  
Secretary - Kristin Child

### Aquarium

Senior Aquarist - Keith Herman  
Aquarist - Bryan Danson

### Education

Environmental Program Coordinator - Susan Elliott  
Science Educator - Christie Collins  
Science Educator - Alyssa Saldarriaga  
Environmental Educator - Frankie Gorora  
Environmental Educator - Kassie Rodriguez  
Environmental Camp Counselor - Cori Scanlon

### Exhibits

Exhibits Coordinator - Cory Keester-O'Mills  
Exhibits Intern - Winston Miller

### Facilities Maintenance

Maintenance Supervisor III - Reed Benardo  
Custodian - Kevin Addison  
Groundskeeper - Cary Boudreau

### Sea Turtle Conservation

Sea Turtle Conservation Coordinator - David Anderson  
Marine Turtle Specialists - Adriana Barioli, Lisa Esposito  
Angela Field, Kylea Perrin, Lexie Peterson, Heather Seaman

### Sea Turtle Rehabilitation

Sea Turtle Rehabilitation Coordinator - Whitney Crowder  
Sea Turtle Rehabilitation Assistant - Caitlin Boverly  
Sea Turtle Rehabilitation Assistant - Emily Mirowski  
Sea Turtle Rehabilitation Technician - Andrea Jelaska

## Gumbo Limbo Nature Center, Inc.

### Staff

Executive Director - John Holloway  
Business Manager - Pam Mulcahy  
Operations Coordinator - Lara Howrey  
Retail Operations Coordinator - Jean DeLuca  
Gift Shop Sales Associate - Michelle Dittmeier

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