



## SCCF MEMBER UPDATE



### Printed Newsletter is Taking a Break... minus COVID

Get the latest on what's happening at SCCF during these challenging times with our weekly eblast.

Go to [sccf.org](http://sccf.org).

Click on Weekly Wednesday Updates under Resources.

Scroll down to Newsletter Sign-up box at the bottom of the page.



We're sending weekly updates to your inbox every Wednesday afternoon to brighten your week and to remind you that nature goes on in all its beautiful brilliance. At SCCF, our work carries forth to ensure the conservation of coastal habitats and aquatic resources on Sanibel and Captiva and in the surrounding watershed. We encourage you to spend time outdoors exploring your own backyard while staying safer at home!

Thanks to Dan Wilhelm for submitting this week's photo of a bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) taken from the Blind Pass bridge.

Please send your wildlife photos to [info@sccf.org](mailto:info@sccf.org).

**Leatherback Nests on Captiva; Total Count Now 13 Nests!**

We now have a total of 13 sea turtle nests on our beaches, with 11 leatherback.

### Leatherback on Sanibel: False Crawl April 1 and a Nest on April 17!



In the photo above of the April 1 leatherback false crawl, the yellow sea turtle stake is 4 feet long.

This year's sea turtle nesting season is off to a great start — on April 1, Sanibel had its first sea turtle crawl, a leatherback false crawl — but on April 17 there was a leatherback *nest* on Sanibel's West End!

Leatherbacks are the largest of all the sea turtles - they can be over six feet in length and weigh 500-1,500 pounds. This species is not common on Florida's west coast and finding their crawls — and nests! — is extremely rare on Sanibel, with similar events only being documented in 2009 and 2015.

- Kelly Sloan

## Crafting Policy: The Art of the Possible

By Rae Ann Wessel, Natural Resource Policy Director

As you may have learned from earlier announcements, I will be retiring on May 15. That date will mark the end of 14 years crafting policy for SCCF, our island community, southwest Florida and the greater Everglades region.

It's been the unexpected highlight of my career to have been invited to serve as SCCF's first Policy Director following two years as a Trustee. In retrospect it came about quite organically. The establishment of the Marine

Lab in 2001 engaged SCCF in much-needed science and research monitoring and evaluating the condition of our region's largest natural feature: the Caloosahatchee, estuary and coastal waters. Together with decades of research on wildlife and land management from the Wildlife & Habitat Management department, SCCF's science credentials were secured. Unfortunately that good science was not informing rule-making, legislation or the growth

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## Crafting Policy — Continued from Page 1

management challenges of this region.

In creating the Natural Resource Policy Director position, the Board of Trustees envisioned a path to both communicate SCCF's solid scientific findings to a wider audience and provide scientific grounding for natural resources policy decision-making at the local, regional, statewide and federal levels. Our work plan focused on water and Everglades restoration, beaches and wildlife protection and growth management through rulemaking, legislation at all levels and litigation as needed. SCCF's regional monitoring and the City of Sanibel's focus on island-based pollution sources made it apparent that the greatest threats to the quality of the barrier island environment and economy were originating beyond and upstream of our island borders.

Over the past 14 years our advocacy efforts have been wide-ranging and achieved that vision with an added bonus, the dramatic effect that an educated, engaged and vocal community has had in advocating for our environment, economy and quality of life!

Of all the issues on which we have engaged, water quality, water deliveries and restoration of the estuary and greater Everglades have been and will remain the most far-reaching and immediate. Early success included the 2006-08 revision and implementation of a new Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule. Using our monitoring data and conditions in the river, estuary and coastal waters we supported an alternative that reduced harm to Lake Okeechobee, the Caloosahatchee and our estuary and coastline. Today we are once again in the forefront of providing science and water quality data from our regional network together with lessons learned to demonstrate and support changes to the next lake regulation schedule, the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM) currently under review.

We created a weekly Caloosahatchee Condition Report to share our monitoring and observations of system conditions with water managers to inform their decision-making. The report, issued in conjunction with the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge, City and County resource managers allows us to share unified west coast stakeholders recommendations with those agencies located in Jacksonville and West Palm Beach. I'm proud that these efforts have raised awareness of the Caloosahatchee, its ecological niche, functions, services and restoration needs. That was no small feat when 25 years ago, after making public comment in support of the Caloosahatchee, I was asked if I represented the Calusa tribe! While it is impressive that someone recognized the river was named by the



Creek Indians for their predecessors, the Calusa — who disappeared from the region in the 1700s — it belied the fact that the river's significant role in the greater Everglades was unrecognized as was its influence downstream.

Addressing a variety of water, wildlife and habitat issues through science-based policy efforts has successfully represented and engaged our community in rulemaking and legislation. Nonprofits and a community of our size don't traditionally have the power to wield that degree of influence.

Our efforts to protect wetlands and habitat have the added benefit of supporting wildlife, biodiversity, abundance and water quality. The successful preservation and protection of coastal mangrove forests and wetlands throughout our region likely would not have been successful without our efforts. In part because the role of providing a scientifically based backstop for protection of wetlands and wildlife has been significantly abdicated by agencies, causing nonprofits to pick up that role. And it has been successful because of community support and engagement.

I leave feeling good about the progress we have been able to make and the incredible relationships and connections we have forged to good result. The past 14 years in policy have been full of challenges, an engaging, enlightening, exciting, exasperating, experience which I have fully enjoyed and from which I have learned much. I have been so honored to serve this organization with these colleagues for this community. I cannot imagine a better ending to my 42-year career.

I'm confident that this is a good time to hand off the policy baton to the next generation to carry our progress forward. SCCF's policy work is respected widely and has earned high credibility for our science-based advocacy, our reliability, respectful engagement, relationship building and for working with all sectors.

One thing is certain, we have not seen the last of the challenges to our regional subtropical paradise. Climate change is having and will continue to play a larger role worldwide as well as on our islands. Simultaneously the influx of new residents wanting to share this region made special by all of our conservation efforts, will continue to need active vigilance and advocacy to protect critical resources and our wild neighbors.

Looking ahead, whether it's a toxic algae catastrophe like 2018, harm from massive volumes of harmful discharges, lack of needed dry season freshwater to balance salinity or public health issues from toxic blooms or a pandemic like the COVID-19 crisis, I encourage you to:

## Fundraising Update from CEO Ryan Orgera

This is an excerpt from a letter recently sent to members who have not yet contributed to the Annual Fund Drive for the current fiscal year ending June 30. All our members might appreciate this summary of our current operating health. Perhaps it will inspire you to make a new tax-deductible contribution through [www.sccf.org](http://www.sccf.org). Please email me at [rorgera@sccf.org](mailto:rorgera@sccf.org) if you have any questions I can answer before you do.



### Land. Water. Wildlife.

These are three inextricably interwoven elements that demand our attention and guide our mission-driven work. In these uncertain times, the land, water, and wildlife on which SCCF focuses have two things in common.

The first is that they can bring us great solace. The Great Pause, as some have described this period where officials encourage all of us to be “safer at home” to slow the coronavirus from spreading, has forced us to see, hear, and embrace nature in ways our normally quicker pace might have caused us to miss. Despite all that preoccupies and causes concerns in these trying times, I hope you will find your own moments to appreciate the natural world.

The second is that the land, water, and wildlife that deserve our vigilant attention have no idea about the challenges brought to bear by this pandemic. Turtles and shorebirds are laying eggs that need our help to be protected from predators. The wildlife habitat on our preserves need to be managed to make it hospitable for many species and prepared to guard against wildfires. The monitoring of water quality and aquatic species must go on, with new socially distant protocols put in place when fieldwork is essential. When it is not, the staff continues to tele-work from home, taking full advantage of technology so we don't skip a beat.

I think we are doing a superb job of adapting during the crisis. SCCF was among the first in our region to apply for and secure Paycheck Protection Program funding. On July 1, once that federal payroll assistance has been exhausted, our entire staff will be taking pay cuts, with the lower-salaried among our colleagues taking a smaller 6.75% cut that rises from there to 10.75% for me and some members of the senior staff. All other expenses have been cut wherever possible. We are committed to avoiding layoffs as we work our way through the challenges we are facing together.

Those who also support Sanibel Sea School, part of the SCCF Family since January, already know the cancellation of its Octifest fundraiser earlier this month has left a net loss exceeding \$150,000. As we seek contributions to cover that loss, it also seems we will not be able to open the Sea School's summer camp on June 8 as planned. We anticipate losing at least a month of tuition revenues, depending on how the public health guidance informs our prudent re-opening.

All the SCCF staffers, including those at the Sea School, have been incredible in working together and adapting positively. With our 100 sea turtle volunteers unable to join Coastal Wildlife staffers on the beach patrols, Sea School educators and other SCCF colleagues have immersed themselves in state-mandated training so they can help monitor and protect nesting activity. The Wildlife & Habitat Management team, like the scientists in SCCF's Marine Lab, have developed social distancing protocols for working alone in the field.

We have enthusiastically jumped into remote learning and information sharing for our members. Examples include the Sea School's new thrice-weekly Nature Near You e-blast, the well-received Wednesday Weekly Update online newsletter chock full of information across all our program areas, the conversion of large gathering programs like the Everglades Update to multiple remote platforms, and the commencement of a podcast – a first for SCCF. We will continue to find ways to be together virtually, since we cannot gather in the ways we treasured not so long ago.

This time will pass, and lessons will be learned. For now, though, we need your help to balance SCCF's operating budget before June 30. Please know that while the way we work has been altered to conform with our currently reality, it is no less effective, and no less worthy of your philanthropic investment.

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### Crafting Policy -- Continued from left

- Remember my favorite saying, "Never let a good disaster go to waste;" and that
- During times of great challenges, remember to stay informed, ask questions, read widely but scrutinize information sources and don't be fooled by opinions masquerading as facts.

My deep appreciation and thanks to all of you who

have attended programs, science forums, joined us for an Oxbow & Riverlore Cruise in the past 25 years and participated in taking action as critical issues needed our unified engagement. The SCCF family and this community have made all the difference and I am richer for your friendship and encouragement.

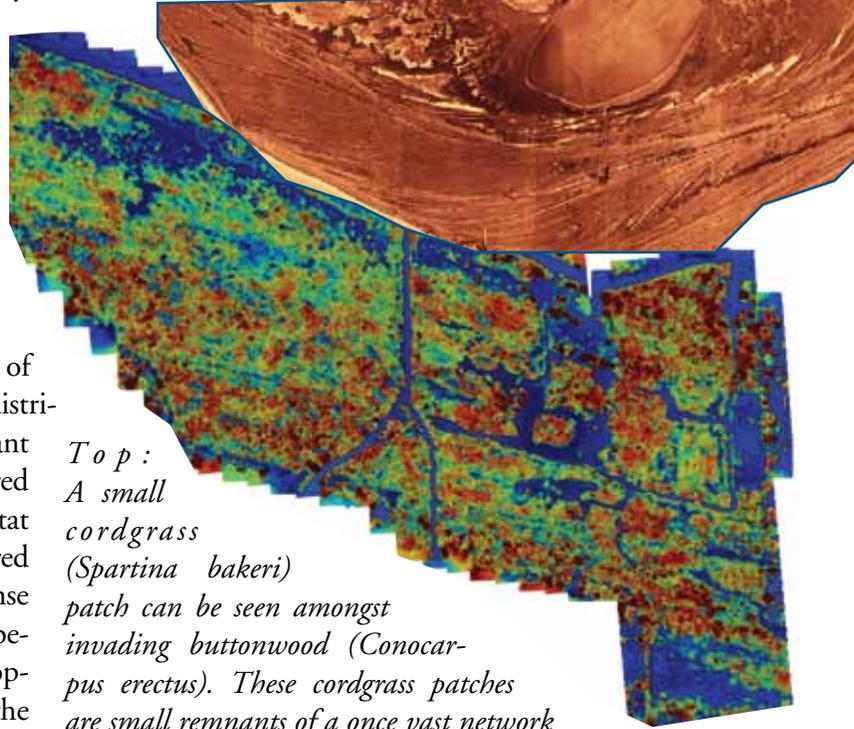
# Drone Mapping of West Sanibel River Preserve

By Victor Young, Land Conservation Steward

Staff from the Lee County Hyacinth Control District (LCHCD, Colin Lewis and Jason Cull) reached out to SCCF's Wildlife and Habitat Management program regarding their aerial mapping program using drones with Wifi-linked control systems. This action was preceded by a presentation Chris Lechowicz (SCCF Wildlife & Habitat Management Director) gave at the CISMA Invasive Species Symposium on Sanibel's issues with buttonwood (*Conocarpus erectus*) trees overtaking open canopy wetlands therefore reducing the habitat of the endemic and state-listed Sanibel rice rat (*Oryzomys palustris sanibeli*) and many other species. They offered to map a tract of SCCF's land to show us the capabilities of using drones for habitat management.

The West Sanibel River Preserve, a 150-acre tract of land, was chosen to be mapped. Due to the geographic distribution of the endemic Sanibel rice rat and pending grant funding, portions of this preserve are slated to be restored back to open cordgrass marshland (the preferred habitat of the Sanibel rice rat). Overtime, lack of fire and altered hydrology has rapidly propelled these marshes into dense hardwood canopy. The West Sanibel River Preserve sits between two preserves with recent documented rice rat populations; the Botanical Preserve to the southeast and the Legion Curve portion of the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge to the north. Once restored, the West Sanibel River Preserve will create a wildlife corridor, linking the three preserves and expanding wildlife habitat for rice rats and the numerous species that rely on these wetlands.

The drone is preprogrammed to stay within the boundary of the preserve for its flight. After launch, it flies in a grid pattern without operator assistance taking large numbers of pictures before it lands itself at the location of the launch. Later, the files are uploaded to a program that builds the high-resolution aerial map from the pictures taken. This map will allow strategic targeting of critical areas, using a variety of restoration methods. This precise imagery is also instrumental in observing shifts in vegetation patterns, monitoring restoration projects, surveying post-burn success and herbicide treatments.



*Top : A small cordgrass (Spartina bakeri) patch can be seen amongst invading buttonwood (Conocarpus erectus). These cordgrass patches are small remnants of a once vast network of open canopy marshes , seen in middle sepia photo, a 1944 aerial. Above: A color-coded map of West Sanibel River Preserve by the "s" curve on San-Cap Road designates contrasting colors for particular canopy heights. The dark and light blue areas identify locations of no hardwood canopy and limited canopy respectively, while the yellow, orange and red colors distinguish ascending crown height with red being the top of the crown.*

## Help Protect Nesting Sea Turtles

The beginning of sea turtle nesting season in Southwest Florida is upon us once again. April 15th was the official start of nesting season. All sea turtle species are listed and protected under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. As nesting season gets underway on the islands, you can help provide a safe beach for nesting and hatching sea turtles. A false crawl, likely caused by the beach furniture blocking the turtle's path.



# Monitoring Sanibel's Canals: What Was Found During the First Year

By Mark Thompson, Research Associate

Frequent newsletter readers with good memories and an interest in local water quality may recall that SCCF Marine Laboratory has monitored water quality in over 70 Sanibel lakes under a grant awarded by the City of Sanibel. The first two sampling events were completed in 2016 and 2018 and we found over 90% of Sanibel's lakes exceeded Florida state water quality criteria for nitrogen concentrations. In addition, 85% of the lakes exceeded phosphorus criteria and 70% exceeded *chlorophyll a* (algae) criteria. These were not encouraging findings, however they allowed the City and its residents a chance to take a look at water quality in their immediate backyard and start working towards improvement. Knowing what, where and how much of a problem we have was a starting point. The City of Sanibel has now produced an interactive website called Sanibel Communities for Clean Water ([sanibelcleanwater.org](http://sanibelcleanwater.org)) This website allows anyone to access easy-to-understand facts about the water quality of the lake they are interested in and also gives them ideas on how they can improve the water quality in that particular lake with those particular problems.

Well, many of you don't live on a lake but do live on a canal. Canals are connected to the estuary and many were dredged in the 1950s to 1970s and lined with seawalls. You are likely interested in the conditions of that canal and whether there is anything that you can do to address problems in a manner similar to Sanibel's community lakes. Well, you are in luck. The City again picked the SCCF Marine Laboratory to sample and analyze data from 35 canal segments during the wet and dry season of 2019-2020. And now the first year's results are in. Canals are downstream of freshwater lakes and we expect to find lower concentrations of the algae, nitrogen and phosphorus in these canals compared to lakes. There are state water

quality criteria to compare the values we found just like there were with the lakes. Much the same as we found during the lake sampling, over 90% of 35 canal locations exceeded state water quality criteria for total nitrogen. However, only 35% exceeded criteria for *chlorophyll a* (algae) and only 20% for phosphorus. When 20-35% failure sounds good, you know we have some poor water quality in our backyards.

The data showed us that the eastern canals have more phosphorus problems which may be related to the closer vicinity to reclaimed (wastewater) water use for irrigation, while canals in all locations on Sanibel had high nitrogen levels. The poorly flushed canals near Dinkins Bayou had higher levels of *chlorophyll a* (algae) probably due to weak tidal exchange.

In summary, just like Sanibel's lakes, our canals need some attention to improve their capability of supporting healthy aquatic life. The City plans to add this information to its Communities for Clean Water website soon so that folks can look at the data for themselves. They will then have the option to learn about how their community can implement changes specific to their canal to improve its water quality. If you would like more details please contact Mark Thompson ([mthompson@scsf.org](mailto:mthompson@scsf.org)) at the Marine Laboratory.



*Marine Lab Research Associate Mark Thompson (left) and Research Scientist, Dr. Rick Bartleson (right) sampling lakes and canals.*

## ***Help Protect Nesting Sea Turtles and Shorebirds -- continued from left***

turtles by keeping the following tips in mind:

- Keep it dark! Sea turtles are very sensitive to light and can easily be scared away or disoriented
- Use sea turtle friendly lights or shielding (following FWC guidelines) to minimize light pollution
- Take all beach furniture, tents, and umbrellas off the beach with you as they can deter nesting. Sea turtles cannot back up.
- Fill in any holes you dig because even small obstacles can hurt hatchlings
- Do not approach or disturb nesting turtles
- Never take a flash photo of a sea turtle
- Limit your use of flashlights on the beach for emergency use only
- Pick up trash on the beach, especially plastic

*See Sea Turtles/Shorebirds on Page 7*

## 2020 Legislative Session Recap

By Holly Schwartz, Natural Resource Policy Assistant

Roughly 3,500 bills were filed in preparation for the high octane 60-day Florida legislative session but only 200 of those bills will reach the Governor's desk. For the second year in a row the legislature met the Governor's challenge for funding Everglades restoration and water resources. Of the bills and funding projects that SCCF was tracking, the breakdown is as follows:

Budget: The record (pre-line-item veto) \$93.2 billion dollar budget included \$690 million for water quality projects and restoration. For the second year in a row, the Governor's water quality budget initiatives were approved. The budget breakdown includes:

- \$322.6 million for Everglades restoration
- \$236.6 million for septic-to-sewer and wastewater improvement programs
- \$20.8 million to research and combat harmful algal blooms
- \$50 million for springs restoration
- \$100,000 for Sanibel Donax Water Reclamation Facility Process Improvements
- Florida Forever funding: SB 332 and HB 849 sought to secure an annual allocation of \$100 million for the Land Acquisition Trust Fund. SB 332 passed its first two committees but the House version was not considered. Ultimately the budget conference committee agreed to a FY 20-21 allocation of \$100 million dollars for Florida Forever due in part to the numerous supportive public comments they received. While this allocation is an improvement over the \$33 million from last year, it is far from the historic funding of \$300 million per year. Full funding for Florida Forever will remain a priority as more realize the extraordinary ecosystem services value our natural systems play in our economy and in the protection of our public health and safety.
- Coronavirus: Late budget negotiations were heavily influenced by planning for the Coronavirus response for which the legislature set aside \$300 million. At a post-session press conference, House Speaker Oliva and Senate President Galvano discussed the state's healthy reserve fund to assist with revenue losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic but said they would be prepared to come back to Tallahassee for a special session if needed.
- Passed: SB 712 – the Clean Waterways Act was the vehicle for recommendations from the Governor's Blue-Green Algae Task Force. This bill was crafted as a comprehensive approach to target sources of environmental pollution that contaminate our waterways through policies related

to septic tanks, biosolids, wastewater and stormwater infrastructure and agriculture. The bill started out strong but was weakened by several amendments throughout the session. One major disappointment in the bill is its lack of regulatory teeth in addressing agricultural pollution. This bill relies on the ineffective, voluntary program of Best Management Practices (BMP) that have not set nutrient pollution limits and presumes compliance with water quality standards even though they are generally the largest source of excess nitrogen and phosphorus pollution. While the bill fell far short of the task force recommendations and its initial breadth, it does contain numerous improvements that will serve as a starting point for future legislation. The bill takes effect 7/1/2020.

- Passed: SB 680 – Shark Fins prohibits the import/export and sale of shark fins in the State of Florida. 13 other coastal states had previously banned this practice which resulted in Florida ports becoming the center point of this illicit practice. Unfortunately this bill contains an exemption for current Florida shark fisheries permit holders. The bill requires the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission to conduct an impact study on shark fishing to be completed by 12/31/21. This bill will take effect on 10/1/2020.
- Passed: HB 1091 – Environmental Fines and Enforcement raised fines and penalties on environmental violations up to 150% from current levels and establishes an inspection system for residential sewer line leaks. This bill will take effect on 7/1/2020.
- Passed: SB 1414 – Fish and Wildlife Activities, a bill to prohibit harassment of hunters, trappers and fishers on public lands where hunting is permitted. The bill was in part precipitated by complaints from hunting permit holders for being harassed by animal rights activists during the last Florida Black Bear hunt. It isn't unusual for seemingly unrelated issues to be amended on to bills and in this case, SB 1414 absorbed the contents of SB 906 – the Prohibited Reptiles bill that SCCF supported. This bill expands the existing list of prohibited non-native species to include Green Iguanas and Black and White Tegus but contains exemptions for current valid permit holders. This bill takes effect on 7/1/2020.
- Passed: SB 410 – Growth Management is a local control preemption bill that further weakens local land use policies such as requiring county-wide low impact development regulations and requiring "property rights" elements be added to all county comprehensive plans when those protections are already in our state and

## Notes from the (my) Homestead

By Jenny Evans, Native Landscapes & Garden Center Manager

*Author's Note:* Normally, I write about something that has caught my attention from the Bailey Homestead Preserve, the Native Landscapes & Garden Center's home base. Today, I bring you something out of my own backyard, as I've been spending more time there than normal... and thankfully am coming to appreciate it more.

Inspired by a recent activity in Sanibel Sea School's "Nature Near You" series, I trekked out in my yard to take a closer look at what (or who) is living nearby. I didn't expect to find many surprises, as I dug the holes for almost every plant in the yard and regularly spend a good amount of time tending to my garden. Nonetheless, I was instantly reminded how plants become the basis for all living beings in the ecosystem... the mockingbird nest with a newly laid egg, built with Slash Pine needles and other twigs to be almost invisible in the Redberry Stopper; the fluorescent green lichen growing on the trunk of the Red Mulberry tree; the first ever flowers on the young Locustberry; and the enticingly fragrant flowers on the Saw Palmetto that were literally buzzing with honeybees. Any one of these feats of nature was enough to bring a smile to my face, and literally took place within 15 feet of my house, giving great credence to the term "Nature Near You." Learn more at <https://www.sanibelseaschool.org/nature-near-you>.



### Legislative continued from left

federal constitutions and various state laws. This bill is damaging enough alone but together with the multitude of bills that have systematically rolled back growth management the past few years, the state has effectively gutted growth management in Florida, ignoring the link between properly managed growth, water supply and water quality. This bill takes effect on 7/1/2020.

- Failed: SB 7016 – Statewide Office of Resiliency would have created both the Statewide Office of Resiliency and the Sea Level Rise Task Force and although this bill was supported by the Governor and passed in the Senate, it failed to be considered in the House. The State's efforts in this regard will continue under the Department of Environmental Protection's Office of

Resiliency and Coastal Protection.

- Post-Session: As the Governor's focus post-session has been managing the Coronavirus response it is anticipated that many of the bills won't even be presented to his office until May. As a result, veto campaigns for bad bills have been put on hold for now. The Governor and legislative leaders have signaled that a special session on the budget may be needed depending on what happens with COVID-19 response. Their interest is in having as much revenue data as possible before recommending cutting the budgets for Florida Forever or affordable housing funds. SCCF will update the legislative tracker with post session action as it occurs.

### Sea Turtles/Shorebirds -- continued from Page 5

#### *Help Protect Nesting Shorebirds*

Along with sea turtles, Sanibel and Captiva are also home to a number of nesting shorebirds. The nesting season for shorebirds on the islands has already started and will continue well into the summer months. Shorebirds lay vulnerable nests in shallow depressions on the sand and must remain near the nests after the eggs hatch to provide care for the chicks. Some things that you can do to help shorebirds on Sanibel and Captiva are:

- Respect signed nesting areas and enclosures

- Honor the pet leash law as shorebirds view dogs as predators and can be scared off their nests
- Be a respectful photographer and keep your distance
- Don't litter on the beach as this can attract additional predators

For more information on the shorebirds and sea turtles that nest and hatch on our beaches, visit <http://www.sccf.org/our-work/sea-turtles> and <http://www.sccf.org/projects/shorebirds>.



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**Summer 2020 Member Update**



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**SCCF Nature Center**

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Native Landscapes & Garden Center: (239) 472-1932 (at the Bailey Homestead Preserve)

Marine Laboratory: (239) 395-4617

Wildlife & Habitat Management: (239) 472-3984

Nature Center Hours:

*SCCF is dedicated to the conservation of coastal habitats and aquatic resources on Sanibel and Captiva and in the surrounding watershed through:*

- Marine Laboratory
- Natural Resource Policy
- Native Landscapes & Garden Center
- Coastal Wildlife
- Wildlife & Habitat Management
- Land Acquisition & Stewardship
- Environmental Education

Native Landscapes & Garden Center  
at 1300 Periwinkle

**All SCCF buildings are closed due to Coronavirus.**

Find the latest real-time water quality readings from our RECON sensors at [www.recon.sccf.org](http://www.recon.sccf.org)



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