LET'S TALK TURTLES



GUARDING BHI'S TURTLES, FROM NEST TO SEA.

PAUL HILLBRAND



For many of us, sea turtles are a symbol of summertime magic, but for Paul Hillbrand, Sea Turtle Biologist at the Bald Head Island Conservancy, they're a lifelong passion with a dash of destiny.

"I actually wanted to study whales and dolphins," Paul laughs. "But along the way, I took a part-time job at a sea turtle hospital... and that was it. I was hooked!" Fast forward a few years (and conferences where the Conservancy kept popping up), and in 2019 Paul landed the BHI job of his dreams.





SATELLITE SIGNALS & SEA TURTLE SCIENCE

Since then, Paul's had more than a few turtle triumphs like the time a mentor from the Florida Fish & Wildlife Commission entrusted him with the delicate and technical task of satellite tagging a nesting sea turtle on her behalf. Satellite tagging a nesting sea turtle takes patience, a delicate touch, and remembering to turn it on!

"No pressure, right?" Paul jokes. "But I pulled it off, and that tag transmitted data for two years, which is pretty rare!" He's now tagged nine more turtles, working with organizations like the National Aquarium and launching his own research through the Conservancy.

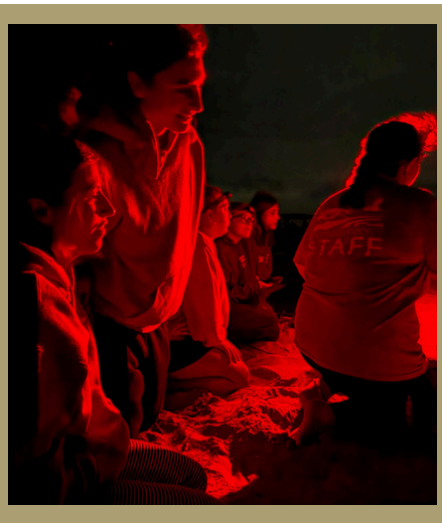
Email Paul at seaturtle@bhic.com

A NIGHT IN THE LIFE OF SEA TURTLE PATROL

So what's a typical night in turtle season like? Think: beach rides under the stars, turtle tracks, and the thrill of finding a nesting mom. Starting at 8:30 PM, Paul and his team gear up for patrol. From Sunday to Tuesday it's just the crew, but Wednesday through Saturday, the Beach Patrol Ride Along program lets guests hop in for the ride and witness sea turtle conservation in action.

While on patrol, the team removes beach hazards, checks for nest disturbances, chats with beachgoers about turtle-friendly practices (hint: red lights good, white lights bad), and—if they're lucky—gets to meet a nesting mother. That's when the science kicks in: tagging, measuring, and taking samples before carefully securing the nest for protection.

Looking ahead, Paul has his eyes on the horizon - literally. He's excited to analyze satellite tag data this fall to see where BHI's nesting moms go in the off-season and how they might be affected by proposed offshore wind farms. He's also part of a new multi-state study to uncover more about one of the biggest mysteries in turtle science: the elusive male sea turtle.





HOW TO HELP

Protecting sea turtles goes far beyond preserving a well-loved species. These animals play a vital role in maintaining healthy oceans, resilient shorelines, and balanced ecosystems. And whether you live here or are just visiting, you can make a real difference in their future.

- Use Turtle-Friendly Lighting
- Use Red Lights Only On The Beach
- Close blinds & turn off outdoor lights
- Leave No Trash Behind
- Fill In Sand Holes
- Remove Beach Furniture At Night
- Volunteer As Nest Monitor

A LITTLE THING LIKE CLOSING CURTAINS OR TURNING OFF PORCH LIGHTS CAN LITERALLY SAVE A TURTLE'S LIFE.

Visit BHI Conservancy website: bhic.com

WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT SATELLITE TAGGING?

"Satellite tags monitor the individual turtles location in almost real time. We are able to track their whereabouts as they migrate to their summer foraging grounds post nesting and hopefully the tag stays attached so that we can track their movements across winter as well. This allows us to better understand their migration patterns, pathways, foraging grounds and more. The tags we deployed this year also track their diving behavior. So we can tell how deep they dive and for how long. This addition could give vital information on their behavior below the surface. Are they resting, feeding or just moving about? The data from this will be used in a project to hopefully allow us to better understand how our nesting mothers are using the proposed and already leased wind farm properties along the eastern seaboard."

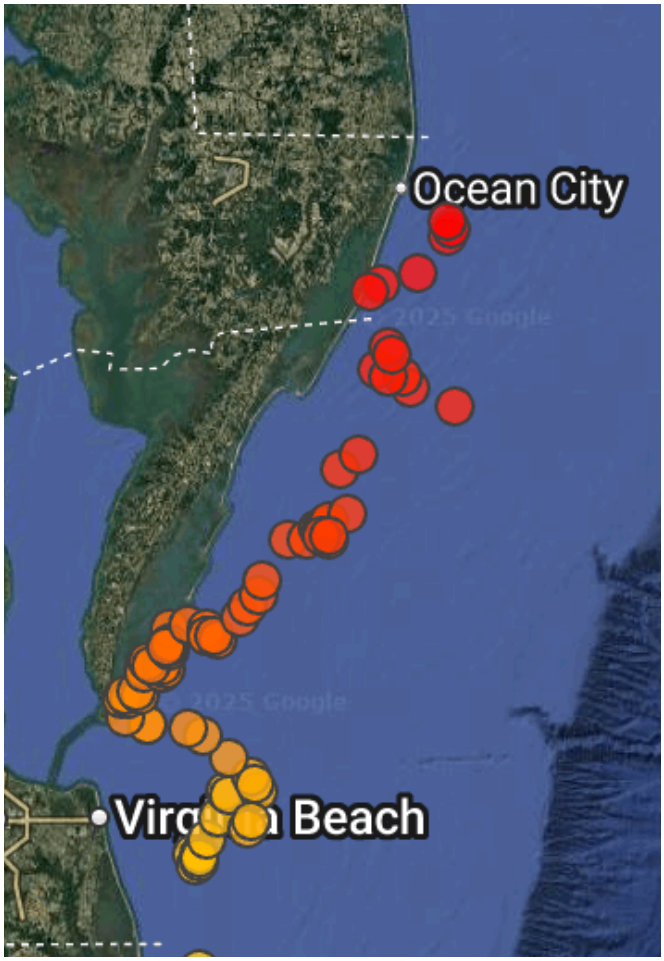
Paul Hillbrand, Sea Turtle Biologist



Turtle-tagging team



Turtle with satellite tag attached



A SATELLITE TAG TRACK

Visit BHI Conservancy website: bhic.com