

FLORIDA TURTLE

Florida Turtle Conservation Trust

Working to Conserve Florida's Rich Turtle Diversity

Update 2020

CONSERVATION TRUST



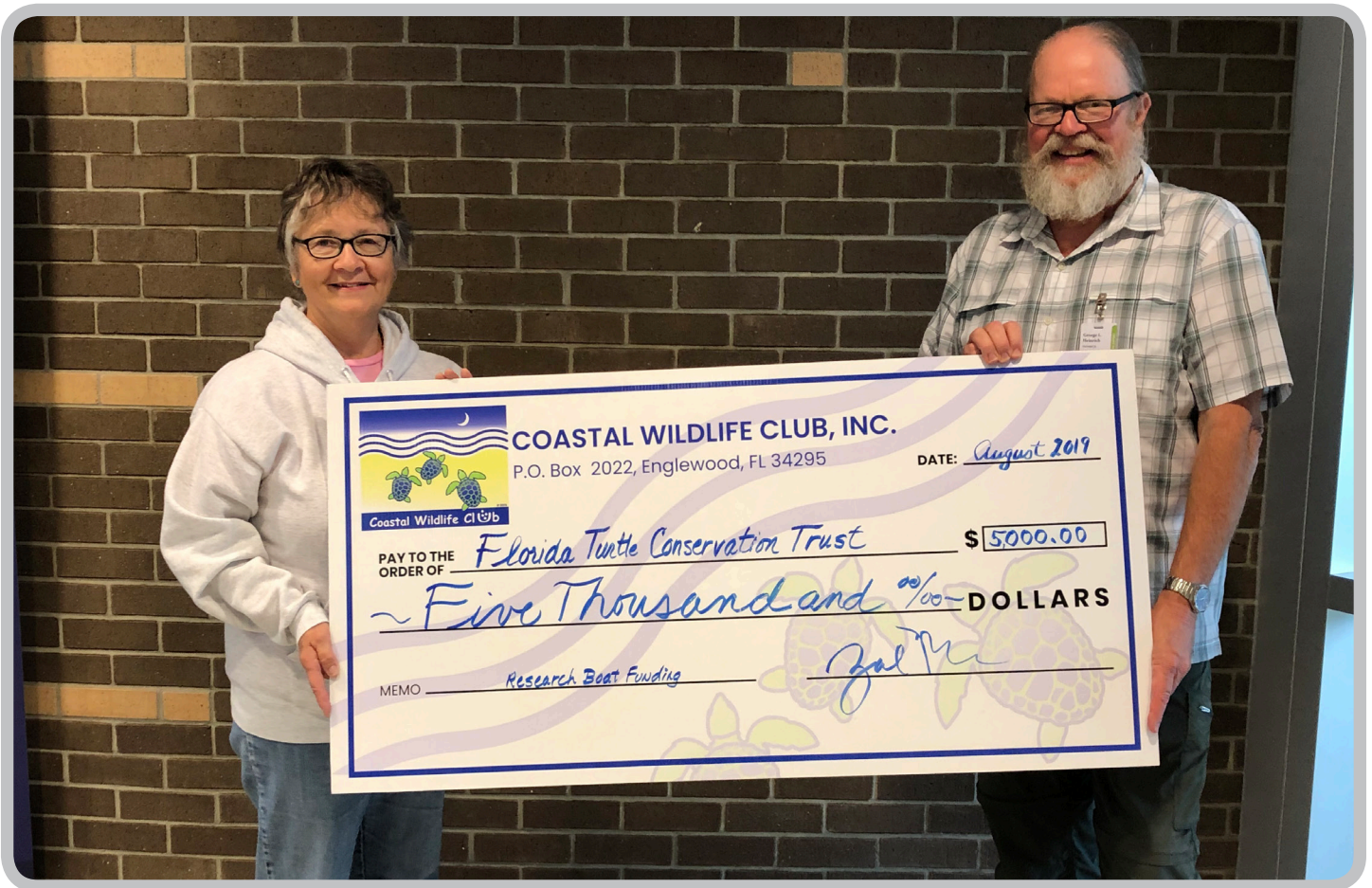
This year has been challenging to say the least, yet we remain optimistic about opportunities to continue working to conserve Florida's rich turtle diversity. We are pleased to provide you with this summary of our recent activity.

Thank you for your continued support of the Florida Turtle Conservation Trust (FTCT). Your financial contributions have enabled us to complete a long list of conservation education programs and field projects since our formation in 1999. As a reminder, the FTCT is a tax-exempt organization under Internal Revenue Code 501(c)(3), so all donations and gifts are tax deductible as allowable by law. As you know, all of our projects and programs are solely funded by grants and private contributions. We are most grateful to our generous donors who make this important conservation work possible.

Respectfully,

George L. Heinrich, Executive Director

Timothy J. Walsh, Assistant Director



The Big Turtle Year... two more lectures

Three years later and our conservation education initiative, The Big Turtle Year, continues to raise awareness regarding the diversity, status, and conservation needs of this imperiled group of wildlife in the United States (most turtle-rich country in the world). To date, we have presented a total of 33 lectures in nine states on this project. The pandemic prevented us from presenting in person this year, so we went virtual and offered webinars for the Nova Southeastern University - Marine Environmental Education Center (Hollywood, Florida) and Weedon Island Preserve (St. Petersburg, Florida). You can watch the lecture presented for the former at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-HBgD1KVVUM>.

Talking turtles on the radio show “Talking Animals”

Florida turtles and the work of the FTCT were highlighted during the weekly radio show “Talking Animals” on WMNF (88.5 FM), a local NPR affiliate station, in late September. If interested, you can listen to the broadcast here: talkinganimals.net.

Suwannee cooter research

We recently completed fieldwork and a manuscript for our project on the distribution and status of the Suwannee cooter (*Pseudemys concinna suwanniensis*) in the Alafia River (Hillsborough County). This six-year study was supported by a grant from the Tampa Bay Estuary Program (www.tbep.org).

We continue ecological studies of this turtle in the Alafia River. In addition to mark-recapture and reproductive studies (radiographs to determine nesting season and clutch size), we have recently added research on spatial ecology by a University of South Florida graduate student under the direction of Dr. Sean Doody. Thank you to Clearwater Audubon Society, Eagle Audubon Society, Hernando Audubon Society, Lake Region Audubon Society, Peace River Audubon Society, Sarasota Audubon Society, Sun City Center Audubon Club, Tampa Audubon Society, and Venice Area Audubon Society, as well as individual members of those chapters for providing support to cover the student’s travel expenses and other project-related needs.



New FTCT research boat

Here is some exciting news! The purchase of a new 15' jon boat, trailer, and 25 HP motor was made possible by very generous donations received from the Coastal Wildlife Club (CWC; www.coastalwildlifeclub.org) and Elizabeth Wagner/Janet Anschuetz, all long-term supporters of the FTCT. The CWC is an entirely volunteer, non-profit organization dedicated to increasing public awareness about coastal areas and particularly the wildlife species which depend upon beach and dune habitats in southwest Florida. We are most grateful for these contributions which made it possible for us to acquire this essential equipment for FTCT field studies.



Diamondback terrapin conservation efforts

In January 2020, the FTCT joined the Center for Biological Diversity (www.biologicaldiversity.org) and the Diamondback Terrapin Working Group (www.dtwg.org) in a petition submitted to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to protect diamondback terrapins in Florida. Mortality due to bycatch in crab pots is a major threat to diamondback terrapins throughout their range. Regulatory change requiring bycatch reduction devices (BRDs) on commercial and recreational crab pots used in Florida waters would be the greatest immediate conservation action that could be implemented by the state wildlife agency. Led by Elise Bennett (Herpetofauna Staff Attorney, Center for Biological Diversity), this multi-year effort will likely result in positive conservation actions for this imperiled coastal species. On 17 December 2020, FWC staff will present a draft rule to further prohibit take and limit possession, incorporate permit applications for individuals legally possessing diamondback terrapins, and require BRDs in recreational and commercial blue crab traps fished in some areas of the state. You can access more info here: [December 2020 Commission Meeting](#). Please write to george@heinrichecologicalservices.com to request a pdf of the petition.

Donor recognition

Thank you to the following for supporting the FTCT and turtle conservation during 2020: Jim Araiza, Benevity Community Impact Foundation, Christopher Boykin, Alex Cannon and Marina Liem, Clearwater Audubon Society, Coastal Wildlife Club, Eagle Audubon Society, Laszlo Gere, Hernando Audubon Society, Krause Family Charitable Foundation, Lake Region Audubon Society, Network for Good, Peace River Audubon Society, Sarasota Audubon Society, Stephan Starling, Sun City Center Audubon Club, Tampa Audubon Society, Venice Area Audubon Society, and Elizabeth Wagner/Janet Anschuetz.

Cover photo: nesting female ornate diamondback terrapin (*Malaclemys terrapin macrospilota*) at St. Marks NWR by George L. Heinrich.

Page two photo: Carol Leonard (Coastal Wildlife Club) presenting a donation to George L. Heinrich (unknown photographer).

Page three photo: Dr. Sean Doody (University of South Florida) holding an adult female Suwannee cooter (*Pseudemys concinna suwanniensis*) on the Alafia River.

Above photo: new FTCT research boat by George L. Heinrich.