



# Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

## All Things Great And Small

There are very few Florida phenomena as mysterious and exciting as the advent of the majestic loggerheads (caretta caretta). These huge creatures of the sea, whose history extends back far beyond the time of the dinosaurs, are seldom seen by man except at those special times when the female comes ashore to lay her eggs in the sand of our quiet beaches.

Of the 225 living species of turtles, 22 of them are found in Florida. Without doubt, the most impressive is the massive loggerhead. Growing up to four feet in size and weighing as much as 500 pounds, these lumbering creatures present a breathtaking sight as they emerge from the pounding surf on a moonlit night looking like armored tanks invading our shores. Laboriously pulling themselves along by huge flippers, the female loggerheads make their way up the beach to a point far above the high-water mark. There they scoop out huge

holes, lay their eggs, and return to the sea — never again to see, or even check on, the fate of their offspring.

Although the law protects these gentle reptiles, there is no way to pass laws that protect them from nature. Soon after the female returns to the ocean, raccoons emerge from the sand dunes to dig for the small, round, parchment-covered eggs. Long-billed birds wait until the tiny turtles emerge from their shells and dig their way out of the sand, to spear them as a special breakfast treat. Even after they get in the water, fish and sea birds continue to hunt them down. Very few of those hatched ever grow to adulthood.

Last week our family took a few days vacation in a beach house on Hutchinson Island near Stuart. The time was spent napping, reading and walking the sandy beach. Our last morning we had all gotten up for a dawn walk when the children spotted the little fellows emerging from their sand nest and awkwardly

heading for the surf — 60 feet away. There were a dozen or so, bumping into each other, bouncing off rocks and falling into the impressions on the sand — but all heading for the sea. Birds circled hungrily overhead, but since we were close by, they did not attack. We watched until they all made their way into the crashing surf and, with strong little strokes, headed into the deep.

Farther down the beach we found another nest, surrounded by broken egg shells. Some predator, guided by its own instinct, had discovered the hatchlings and was able to satisfy his hunger before they made it to the safety of the sea.

Walking back to the cabin I felt an aura of God's presence. Despite the seeming inequities, we live in a universe that works — that is ordered. Only man off-balances the scales. Yet when man learns to cooperate with God's nature — rather than fight against it — then all things great and small have meaning and purpose.