

Biologists Seek Public's Help For Horseshoe Crab Research

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Wednesday March 11th, 2009

Biologists at the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) Fish and Wildlife Research Institute need help from the public in identifying horseshoe crabs spawning on beaches throughout the state.

The best time to find horseshoe crabs spawning is around high tide, right before or just after a full or new moon. The full moon on March 12 and similar conditions on March 13 will create good conditions for viewing the crabs. The next full moon will occur on April 10.

Observant beachgoers can report the time, date and location of horseshoe-crab sightings through one of several convenient options. Go to http://research.MyFWC.com/horseshoe_crab and fill out an online survey; e-mail findings to horseshoe@MyFWC.com; or call the FWC at 866-252-9326.

Biologists also want to know the number of horseshoe crabs seen by observers and whether the horseshoe crabs are mating. They also want to know the date, time, location and habitat conditions. If possible, specify roughly how many are coupled and how many are juveniles (4 inches wide or smaller).

Horseshoe crabs benefit humans in several ways. For instance, research on the compound eyes of horseshoe crabs led to better understanding of the human vision system, and horseshoe crab blood is useful in the biomedical industry. In addition, manufacturers use the material of a horseshoe crab's shell (chitin) to make contact lenses, skin creams and hair sprays.