

FWC, USFWS, Juno Beach Police snag sea turtle egg-poaching suspect

News Release

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Contacts: Gabriella B. Ferraro (FWC), 772-215-9459;

Detective Paul Furtig (Juno Beach Police Dept.), 561-656-0340

A Juno Beach police sergeant's keen sense of observation resulted in the early morning, multi-agency arrest of a suspected sea turtle egg-poacher. With the involvement of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), police took Kenneth C. Coleman (DOB 09/03/62), of Riviera Beach, into custody.

At around 2 a.m. Friday, the police sergeant observed Coleman riding a bicycle and carrying a tote bag on Ocean Drive. Coleman wore an orange t-shirt, but the lights and reflective gear on his bicycle were painted black. As he rode his bike, Coleman almost ran into the sergeant's patrol car head-on.

At first, Coleman resisted arrest and took off. After a foot chase, the sergeant cornered and apprehended Coleman, but his bag was gone. He was booked in the Palm Beach County jail on misdemeanor charges. A background check revealed that Coleman had been arrested for poaching in 2005, when he was charged with a felony for possession of more than 11 sea turtle eggs.

As a result, FWC investigators and K-9 units began searching for the bag and a possible poached sea turtle nest. K-9 Boone tracked the suspect to a poached nest. Officer Cris Douglass located the bag several hours later in the bushes behind a condominium along Juno Dunes Way. Inside the bag were 123 sea turtle eggs.

Coleman faces federal charges: one count of violating the Endangered Species Act (misdemeanor; and one count of violating the Lacey Act (felony), which prohibits the sale, possession or transportation of illegally taken wildlife with a market value exceeding \$350. His first appearance is scheduled for Monday morning, Aug. 30, at the federal courthouse in West Palm Beach.

Sea turtles are protected by state and federal laws. It is against the law to take, possess, disturb, mutilate, destroy, sell, transfer, molest or harass marine turtles, nests or eggs.

(Click on photo for larger image.)



An FWC K-9 unit found the suspect's bag. Inside were 123 sea turtle eggs. (FWC photo)



FWC Officer Cris Douglass and his K-9 partner, Boone on the beach. (FWC photo)