

10A Pelican Press ▼ May 21, 1998

# Is it a marker for fishermen – or a warning for

So who's the comedian? We've got one on Sarasota Bay, and a pretty good one too.

A week ago Sunday night, as far as anyone can figure out, somebody who is probably as frustrated as the local guides at the slow start of the tarpon season, had some fun. As you can see from the picture, the unknown party lashed a tarpon mount to the marker at the Pop Jantzen reef in the bay.

That's a pretty good spot to find tarpon locally. Most of them jump about that high too. But this one had obviously been caught before.

Mike Solum, of the county's Natural Resources Department, spotted the joke Monday while repairing a nearby marker and took the picture. By the way, Mike's the same guy who was recently named County Employee of the Month, an honor he richly deserves.

Anglers especially should be thankful for a quality guy like Solum. He's spearheaded the local reef program and worked closely with groups like the Sarasota Sportfishing Anglers Club building and maintaining local fishing reefs and even introduced the use of reefballs bereabouts.

## BEACH WALKING

If you've been doing any beach walking lately, marveling at the crystal clear water right now in both gulf and bay, you've probably noticed a couple of things. First is that plovers and terns are busy nesting on local beaches.

Most the nesting areas are marked by signs, but keep an eye out anyway, and please don't stroll into the nesting areas. The nests, eggs and hatchlings are almost invisible in the sand – for good reasons obviously – and are certainly destroyed if you walk on them.

Sure, terns especially will try to drive you away from the nesting areas should you wander too close, but it's amazing how many folks let their dogs and children "go play with the birds" anyway. The lives of these critters are difficult enough as we humans destroy more and more of their habitat, so please watch them from a distance.

## BOB ARDREN Sarasota Waters



### TURTLE NESTING BEGINS

The first loggerhead turtle nest of the season has appeared on Siesta Key, this one at 6000 Midnight Pass Rd.

Jerris Foote, head of Mote's Sea Turtle Program says there was also a false crawl – that's when a turtle comes ashore, looks around and decides for some reason not to lay her eggs there – about 100 yards north of the first nest.

Who knows, it might have been the same turtle deciding on the second site.

Anyway, there are about 10 nests already on Casey Key, three on Manasota and one on Longboat. We can expect a lot more in coming weeks.

Again, please don't disturb nesting turtles, their eggs or the hatchlings should you come upon them. It's a federal offense, in case you need something besides a moral reason.

By the way, I understand the county's new lighting ordinance designed to protect turtle hatchlings is being complied with, by and large. Thank you beach dwellers.

### 'LIVERS' ON THE BEACH

Lastly, if you've been beach walking recently you've probably noticed the sea hares washing ashore. They're what some folks call "livers on the beach" because they look and feel a lot like the liver of something. Soft, squishy and when you pick them up, they often release a purple dye leaving a stain on your hands.

But they're not livers, they're harmless sea hares, and a close relative of the snails most of us love with garlic butter. In fact, they actually look a lot like a big snail if you pick one up and unfold it's "wings." If you run your finger down its back you'll even feel a small bump that's the remnant

of its residual shell

Curious creatures, I've long picked them up and pitched them back into the Gulf. Only to watch them slowly swim ashore again. So I asked Debra Ingrao at Mote why they do that. "To die," she said simply.

Smooth sea hares, the ones washing up now, live about a year, and after maturing, mating and laying their eggs, they die. Sea hares of one type or another occur worldwide in tropical and subtropical seas.

Because of one characteristic – they have very large nerve cells – they're commercially raised and there have been many studies of their physiology. Those studies are directly related to understanding the function of the human nervous system.

Prior to coming to Mote, Ingrao grew sea hares at the University of Miami Aplysia Resource Facility where they raise and ship more than 25,000 of the creatures for medical research every year. In case you're interested, a mature sea hare with a pedigree from the University of Miami is available for \$20. I checked the price list.

By the way, a trip on the Internet to learn more about the critters leads to some strange places. I ended up on a web page named "The Slug Forum" and reading a newsletter called "Slime Lines," produced at the U of M. And it was interesting too.

The Internet being the Internet, the next most interesting sea hare site was a newsletter called "Western Fisheries." That's produced by the Western Australian Museum and gives a fairly graphic description of the sea hare's sex life. It seems they have a propensity to form "daisy chains," of a dozen or more individuals during mating. Yes, "daisy chains," was exactly the term the Western Australian Museum used.

And here we thought they were some kind of liver on the beach. I can't help but wonder how they'd taste with garlic butter.

### FISHING REPORT

Blue whales, brook trout and Pacific salmon. Ok, there's the list of what you



A mounted tarpon fish on a reef marker.