

Oct. 2, 2007

County sea turtle team joins European documentary on “The Dark Side of Light”

According to German documentary filmmakers Thomas Uhlmann and Anja Freyhoff, most people are in the dark about light. Although it permeates every facet of civilized society, they maintain that light carries a high price. During the first week of October, members of Sarasota County’s Sea Turtle Protection Program will join the filmmakers’ examination of how light affects local sea turtle populations as part of their newest documentary, *The Dark Side of Light*.

“One of the main topics will be the threat to turtles and their hatchlings caused by light pollution,” said Freyhoff. “We were very much interested in Sarasota County’s work and would like to highlight the Sea Turtle Protection Program as an example in the field of working and protecting the turtles.”

According to Freyhoff, hundreds of reptiles are killed nightly by misdirected light along the world’s coastal shorelines. While some disorientations are the result of negligent property owners, many disorientations on local beaches this year have been the result of urban skyglow, or light pollution, said Project Scientist Kenya Leonard.

“Unshielded lights confuse turtle hatchlings, which head for the brightest horizon,” said Leonard. “Normally that would be the natural glow of the gulf waters. Hatchlings that march toward condo lighting and urban skyglow are at the mercy of predators, vehicle traffic, dehydration and exhaustion.”

But Uhlmann and Freyhoff assert that turtles are not the only victims of the world’s obsession with light. They estimate that 50 percent of people alive today have never seen the Milky Way. They call big cities death traps for the 100 million birds that crash into lit structures every year, and estimate that 150 billion insects are killed annually by their fatal attraction to light, disturbing floral reproduction and endangering the animal food chain.

The German production company arrived in Sarasota Sept. 29 and plan to stay until Oct. 6. Filming will last three days. “The focus of the film is light pollution, and unfortunately, we have some prime examples of poor lighting and see the impacts first hand every year along our beaches. The film crew will be accompanying Environmental Specialist Keri Ferenc on compliance inspections to document lighting that poses a disorientation risk to hatchlings,” said Leonard.

The one-hour documentary is scheduled to air in the summer of 2008. An English language trailer for the film is available now at <http://www.uhlmann-freyhoff.de/Licht.html>.

For more information about Sarasota County’s sea turtle program, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 941-861-5000 and ask for Natural Resources.