

You can distinguish between the arrival and departure crawl by looking for the direction that the sand is pushed in while the turtle was crawling (A and D in the figure). Also, examining the tracks and their relationship to the high tide line (E) can help determine the arrival crawl. Once determined, follow the arrival crawl up to the area where the sand is disturbed.

In the disturbed sand area (B and C in the figure), there may be two “body pits” or differentiated areas of digging. The primary body pit is the larger of the two (C) and usually the turtle makes this just before digging the nest chamber. The smaller chamber (B) is made after nesting, when the turtle covers and camouflages the site. False crawls with disturbed sand usually will not have a well-defined secondary body pit.

Still facing in the direction of the turtle’s approach, begin your search for the egg chamber approximately two feet at the midline into the disturbed area that forms the primary bodypit (i.e. start digging about half-way between B and C in the figure). Expand your search outward from this point until you find the eggs or decide that the crawl was a non-nesting emergence.

To find the eggs, gently and systematically dig by hand; the sand covering the nest will “give way” as you probe with your fingers. **Stop digging as soon as you see or feel the first layer of eggs.** Do not use a probe (a thin, but sturdy rod with a pointed end) to find a nest – it greatly increases the likelihood of accidentally puncturing several eggs. After verifying the presence of eggs, quickly cover up eggs with moist sand (do not allow dry sand to fall in the nest cavity) and replace the layer of dry sand over the nest. **Do not remove any eggs from the chamber, unless it has been determined that the nest must be relocated (see Relocation section below).** Note that for leatherback nests, it is often difficult to locate the egg chamber, due to the depth of the eggs and the large area of sand disturbance associated with the leatherback’s nesting process. In all cases where it is not possible to locate a clutch of eggs laid by a leatherback (or any other species that you suspect successfully made a nest), you should assume that it is a nest and mark off the entire area for protection during incubation. Once the leatherback nest emerges, you should be able to follow the tracks of the hatchlings back to the precise nest location for eventual excavation (see below).

