

FLORIDA COOTER

By John Lampkin

How does she do that?! That is the question that comes to mind when watching a turtle excavate her nest and fill it with eggs. Once she selects a suitable site in open sandy or loose soil free from large roots, she can't see what she is doing because she does all the digging with her hind legs and feet and never turns around to assess her progress. After the eggs are laid, she covers them up, flattens the soil with her bony belly and leaves the site looking much the way she found it. Presumably, she could do it all blindfolded!

Several turtle species populate the SCC Nature Trails particularly along the central canal. Pictured above is a Peninsula Cooter, *Pseudemys peninsularis*, which is

called by other similar names both common and scientific depending on who is doing the calling. She digs one deep central chamber and two or three shallower satellite chambers and fills each with leathery eggs laid one at a time. This may help deter predation by raccoons who are expert sniffers-out and diggers-up. Often, the eggs emerge without a clear unobstructed view so capturing the moment was cause for photographer joy. As she worked away, I could imagine her paraphrasing a Beatles' classic, "I am the Cooter, you are the egg man. Goo goo plop!"

The Nature Trails is an ongoing project of the SCC Audubon Club in cooperation with the SCC CA. The trailhead is located opposite North Lake on Del Webb West between Vincennes and Seton Hall. Join us for interpretive walks and the possibility of becoming an egg person yourself, the first Tuesday of the month at 9 am.



An egg exits the cloaca of a Peninsula Cooter