

## Readers are curious about paint on turtles

■ A master's student tracked their movement down the Santa Fe River.

By AMY REININK

Sun staff writer

Yurii Kornilev spent the summer of 2007 painting numbers on the backs of turtles, then tracking their movement up and down the Santa Fe River.

Ed and Patty Prestemon also spent the summer watching the numbered turtles, growing increasingly curious about the purpose of the numbers during their frequent kayaking trips.

"Assuming this is not a rare species of numbered turtles, we would like to know who is numbering the turtles and

why," they wrote to Since You Asked.

Kornilev was, in a way, studying not only the turtles, but Ed and Patty Prestemon.

Kornilev, 25, a master's student in the University of Florida's School of Natural Resources and the Environment, has spent the past year researching the effect of human disturbance on Suwannee Cooters, large river-dwelling turtles common in the Santa Fe River. Like alligators, the turtles bask

**SINCE YOU ASKED**

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### Who wants to know?

■ **Name:** Patty and Ed Prestemon

■ **Age:** 51 and 58, respectively

■ **Occupation:** Nurse and engineer, respectively

■ **Residence:** Gainesville

in the sun to heat their bodies, and Kornilev wondered whether recreational activities like boating were disturbing the turtles from their spots in the sun.

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Sun file photo

Paddling quietly and carefully, Joe Jackson maneuvers his kayak toward a trio of Suwannee Cooters gathered on a nearby rock in the Santa Fe River in this file photo.

## ASKED: 89 turtles were numbered

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Kornilev hoped the project would have important implications for conversation by raising awareness about how human recreation affects turtles.

He started in May 2007 by painting numbers on the backs of 89 turtles so he could track their movement in the river.

Then, Kornilev watched to see what they did.

The process took all summer, and involved kayaking, canoeing, swimming and snorkeling.

"It was splendid," Kornilev said. "Paddling up and down the river all day was tough

research."

The conclusion: During the period of time Kornilev studied, there weren't enough boats to disturb the turtles' basking habits. It's a finding that pleased Kornilev, even as it proved his hypothesis was incorrect.

"It contradicted my prediction, but it's better for the turtles and better for the boaters," Kornilev said. "Everyone's happier this way."

Last week, Kornilev turned in his master's thesis, which is based on the research he did last summer. He plans to defend his thesis in a few weeks, graduate in August, then return to his home country

of Bulgaria to ponder his next step.

His only regret about the project: Not taking advantage of curious boaters like the Prestemons by recruiting them to help track the turtles.

"If I did similar research again, I would definitely involve the public," Kornilev said. "It's an easy, fun way to get people excited about the river in general, and to educate them about turtles' problems and what they can do to help."

To submit a question to Since You Asked, contact Amy Reinink at 352-374-5088 or reinina@gvillesun.com.